



Chapter 1

Just The Basics

ANOTHER RULE SYSTEM?

CORE GUIDEBOOK

Virtually Real ("VR") can be used to play all your favorite genres. As such, your game setting is a separate book containing all the equipment, occupations, and technologies specific to that setting. This book focuses on the "core" mechanics only. If you received this book in digital format then the Table of Contents, Index, QR codes, and any references in small-caps are clickable!

A good friend of mine once told me that I should write my own RPG. I immediately replied by saying that wouldn't be possible and gave a whole list of reasons why. I then thought, "If I did write a system, what would be the goals? How would I attain them? Why bother with a whole new system anyway?"

Virtually Real is ...

- ⇒ *Multi-Genre.* The Game Master (GM) is free to create worlds from any genre, mix them up, and convert the settings of other games and systems. Virtually Real is a Meta-RPG, designed to handle the crossing of genres and supplies examples of how to create consistent multigenre settings. You may only need half this book or less!
- ⇒ *Skills have levels, characters don't!* Your character naturally progresses and advances in skills by *using* those skills, without stopping the session to "level up". This reduces the tendency to have advancement as a player goal and stresses in-game goals. The experience system is based on practice, good role-playing, and achieving goals. Each skill advances on its own, increasing it's related attribute.
- ⇒ *Focus On Immersion.* Rich details make the game more realistic and immersive. The mechanics of Virtually

Real are designed to model the narrative. Rather than getting in the way, the mechanics should encourage the players to think like their characters.

- ⇒ *Tactical Combat.* Real world combat tactics actually work! Actions cost time, delaying your next offense. Active defenses and incremental movement keep game-play fast and smooth. Combine styles to create one that is uniquely your own and find counters to your opponent's style. Combat flow is represented as waves of action separated by critical moments of drama.
- ⇒ *Consistency.* On average, you should get an average result! Virtually Real compares training, experience, and various situational modifiers to determine the shape and *feel* of the character's personal skills and attributes. This resolution system is used everywhere in the system.
- ⇒ *Passion & Intimacy.* Characters are more than just stats for bashing heads! Social interactions engage your opponent's intimacies, while passions define how your character's style choices influence various aspects of the character. Unlock heroic acts where you can momentarily defy death when defending an intimacy, mirroring what happens when you get that rush of adrenaline!

WHAT'S THIS BOX?

We'll use a box like this one to add additional notes to experienced players. New players can safely ignore all the shaded boxes. GMs should read them twice! Experienced gamers probably know all of the stuff in the next section, but consider reading through it anyway. Then ask yourself if you are the character or the character's puppet-master?

ROLE-PLAYING 101

1.2.1 A Rose By Any Other Name

So what's a Role Playing Game?

Most people have heard of Role Playing Games and the main take-away is that you have a set of abilities that make up your character and you complete tasks and adventures to "level up" that character to make them more powerful and able to take on bigger bosses. That is where your video game RPG stops, because in those instances the story has been designed for you. In some cases, your decisions make a difference, but its more like those old "Choose Your Own Adventure" novels where you turn to Page 69 if you think the character should fight the bad guy, but the story is already written.

In a Table-Top Role Playing Game, the story unfolds as you play. It's sort of like a theater play where everyone ad-libs everything based on how they understand their character. One player, called the Game Master, will be the narrator of this play. They will describe the settings and set the scenery as well as control all the other characters that don't have players (NPCs). Based on the description from the Game Master, you describe how your character reacts.

The players work together to achieve a common goal, determined during the course of play. When you ask the bartender for a pint, you say it to the Game Master as your character, and they respond as the bartender. And this is a "table top" RPG so we do this sitting around a table. If you want to actually dress up in costume and act this stuff out, you can, but if it means leaving the room and swinging swords at people, you likely want to play something called a LARP (Live Action Role Playing) instead. Most of us generally remain seated!

Sounds boring so far right? Well, if you've ever played make-believe games as a kid, you remember saying "I shot you" and the other kid said "No you didn't!" And guess who has to adjudicate that? Yes, the Game Master is the final judge in *all* things, and to stop from outright playing favorites, we decide on things by rolling *dice*. Instead of 1000 calculus equations with variables about force, angle, and trajectory, we just decide how hard it is, and that determines how high you need to roll. Now we have a challenge! The rest really depends on your character's personal goals and desires and what obstacles have been placed in your way. A good Game Master is ultimately a good story teller, able to adjust the story at your every decision.

It is important to think of this game as being closer to a play or movie than a video game. A good play or movie gets the audience (you) emotionally involved with the characters. You care if they are hurt or killed. This isn't like a video game where the character on your screen is just your puppet

and you are no more attached than a puppet-master pulling it's strings. Decide how your character would react in that situation. When you played those games as a kid, you didn't think about the character you were playing! You *became* the character! You knew that character like you know a best friend or your own child. You were there when they were created! Love your character and remember that their very lives are on the line!

1.2.2 Knowing The Jargon

Let's learn to talk in the jargon of a gamer!

Player One of the people other than the game master that is playing a character in the game.

PC Player Character. One of the characters being played by a player.

NPC Non-Player Character. Any of the millions of people in the game world that the GM must play because they aren't controlled by a player.

Character Sheet A record of a character that breaks it down into game statistics, often on a sheet of paper or tablet.

GM Game Master. The person that is the narrator and judge of the game. The same person is normally the game master for the entire campaign (see below)

Session One night of playing, generally 4-6 hours of time in the real world. Session 0 is the pre-game where players create their characters and discuss what elements they look forward to in a game, and which elements they don't.

Story One complete adventure, like a novel, played by the same characters. The Story will have 3 Acts and multiple Chapters. The amount of time involved isn't relevant.

Scene This is basically an enacted moment in the story. We don't role-play every swallow, snore, or piss. You play out the important scenes of the day and the game moves from scene to scene. A scene can be anywhere from 2 minutes to 2 hours of time in the game world. Every battle is its own scene.

Chapter A chapter in the story is a good stopping point in the tale, often the end of a game session. The end of a chapter may earn practice XP and allows you to distribute any previously earned Bonus XP.

Act The end of a chapter may also be the end of an Act. Like a play, a story is always comprised of 3 Acts.

Passion Passions and Styles are covered in chapter 4. Passions represent something you are good at or passionate about, something you can do just a little bit better than someone else, typically learned from styles.

Style A tree of “Passions” that is attached to a skill that allows for styles. Styles usually have 3 branches and 1 root “passion” learned at level 0 of the skill (when you first gain primary training).

Campaign A series of stories that continue the story line of the same characters in the same world and timeline. Think of it like a book series.

Attributes A number of scores that rate your character’s physical and mental characteristics at their most basic level. Virtually Real has 8 Attributes. You may sometimes hear these called “Ability Scores” for historical reasons.

Capacity How many “dice” you add when making a particular attribute or skill check.

Race See Ancestry & Heritage

Ancestry This is the species that your character descends from. This is the genetic aspect of yourself.

Culture A skill that represents your ability to understand the ways and customs of a culture. Culture is a skill and the “style” of that skill is the same name as your heritage.

Sub-Culture Subcultures are also cultures, just not the culture of your heritage. It represents your status in some faction or organization.

Heritage Your heritage is about where you grew up, listing rites of passage, customs, sacred places, and other narrative elements, but also will list various skills that are common to your heritage. Learning skills listed under your heritage will raise your culture skill.

Racial Discrimination Thinking that your Ancestry or Heritage is better than someone else’s.

Skill Virtually Real defines a skill as anything you can learn. For example, combat ability will simply be a skill with that weapon.

Level A measure of how far advanced something is. In some games, characters have levels. In Virtually Real, skills have levels, characters don’t.

XP Experience Points. These are the rewards used to make your character increase their skill levels.

Saving Throw A special attribute check used to avoid conditions. Conditions are based on wound levels.

Condition One of a number of basic penalties that describe an ill-effect of the character. There are different conditions with different penalties, each described with a letter code.

BMI Body Mass Index. A measure of how bulky a character appears and can be a save toward being knocked down by wind.

BBEG Big Bad Evil Guy/Girl. In Virtually Real, we usually say “antagonist”, the primary source of conflict, since they are rarely as two-dimensional as a “bad guy” and the rules don’t recognize “evil”.

Hit Points A measure of how much damage a character can withstand. In Virtually Real, this is based on your weight and Body attribute. Your total/max hit points is also your critical hit level and critical wound level.

TOTM A system that does not use miniatures and a positioning grid. All combat takes place in the “Theater Of The Mind”.

DL Difficulty Level. The target number the GM will set based on how difficult a task is. You may see this called a “DC” or “Difficulty Class” in D20 based systems. See DC below.

DC Damage Capacity (not “Difficulty Class”, see DL above). A measure of how much damage constitutes a serious wound based on the weight of the creature.

RAW Rules As Written. We don’t care about this in Virtually Real! This book is a set of tools to help the players and GM run great games. It’s not a box or a prison that is intended to confine how you like to play.

Party A group of characters adventuring together with a shared objective. Basically, all the players except the GM.

TPK Total Party Kill. This refers to an encounter where everybody dies, possibly after the first encounter with the “BBEG”.

EXPERIENCED GAMERS

Virtually Real’s mechanics are designed to simulate reality. This makes for a detailed, but gritty system. There are a lot of moving parts! You may be wondering if this is a skill based game or a class based game. The Occupation system is used to create a “class”, but all “class features” come from the skills. Essentially, it “feels” like a class-based system, but allows for easy and specific customizing, without “multi-classing”.

GETTING STARTED

1.3.1 Introduction

In this game, one person will take on the role of the Game Master. The Game Master (GM) sets the scenario and describes what the other players sees, hears, tastes, and feels. The goal is to create an engaging story based on the backgrounds of the other players. The other players will create their own characters within the game-world according to the rules in the next chapter and the guidance of the GM. The players will decide how their character would react to each situation and will describe the actions and reactions of the character. The game is played as a series of events making up a complete story.

The GM's story normally compels the characters to align against a common antagonist, played by the GM. In this game, the players are expected to work together, not compete. This includes the Game Master, who may be posing challenges to the players, but is not in competition. It is expected that the players will likely defeat the antagonist. The goal is not to win, but to tell enjoyable stories that immerse the players into a new and fantastic world.

There are chapters to help the GM create these stories and even to create the worlds you will adventure in. Some systems call this "homebrew", where the GM creates new materials. However, Virtually Real considers this to be a normal and vital part of the game, so the chapter on CREATING CAMPAIGN WORLDS will help you build anything you want!

Anyone is free to create and publish supplemental materials for the Virtually Real system using the rules provided here and your own imagination, providing you do not recreate the material in this book.

1.3.2 Materials Required

- ⇒ The Virtually Real Core Rulebook! (this one)
- ⇒ As many 6 sided dice as you can find!
- ⇒ At least 2 people: 1 GM + 1 or more players
- ⇒ A CHARACTER SHEET for each player

1.3.3 Why Virtually Real

The most important thing you can do in a role-playing game is to make decisions from the point of view of your character. As a player, you just face dice! Therefore, the dice should relay the suspense and drama the character is feeling through the mechanics.

People base their decisions on past performance. You base your decisions on what you feel your probability of success is and the consequences of failure. This system invites you to do the same. Think of the die roll as measuring how well you performed a task. You will perform better with experience, but what can you do to increase your odds right now? And what would the consequences be for failure?

EXPERIENCED GAMERS

You may have heard a statistic that found the ideal success rate is about 60%. In Virtually Real, your average result is also the difficulty level that corresponds to this statistic. For a primary skill, the DL that is closest to that 60% will be 7 (the average of 2 dice) plus the experience level of the skill.

1.3.4 Game Play

Games typically begin with a "session 0", where everyone gathers to discuss the sort of game you want to play, what genre and setting, and what backgrounds are appropriate. While the players build characters, the GM helps the players fit their characters into the setting, and begins building the backbone of the storyline, described in CREATING YOUR STORIES.

Typically, the story begins at the next session, giving time for the GM to prepare. A typical game session can last 2-8 hours, depending on the preferences of the group. The GM should attempt to pace the game such that you cover one "chapter" of the adventure per session. Each session consists of various scenes (sometimes called "encounters"). Experience is earned at the end of each scene. The players then decide what their characters will do next and the GM describes the next scene according to the choices of the players.

The player's job is to imagine the scene. The GM may describe and act as various people (Non-Player Characters, or NPCs), and the players will interact with these characters. There may be puzzles, quests, places to explore, political factions, espionage, or whatever type of story you wish to tell.

The GM may present the scenes with tactical precision on a hex map, as epic "theater of the mind" scenes, as a short montage scene, or as a long-distance "travel montage". The GM will adjust the time and abstraction level as appropriate.

How your character will react to each scene is up to you. Just describe the action you wish to take, and the GM will decide if you succeed, or if you will need to make one or more "skill checks", described in this chapter. A skill check's success depends on the abilities and skills of the character, not the player.

1.3.5 Using This Book

Don't think of this as a rule-book as much as a guide. You don't need to memorize the book and the GM is not required to follow it! Instead, when you are ready to incorporate a specific element into your game, you will find advice on how to handle it within these pages.

The book provides a core for describing characters and the world they interact with, rating their skills and abilities, and providing for their advancement. Most role-playing games will detail out a specific set of actions that form the core of your game play, leaving the rest more abstract. Virtually Real takes a different approach, allowing you to explore whatever is meaningful to you at the time, and simply ignore the rest

For Players

Look to this book for guidance on building characters, combat mechanics, and as a reference for styles, passions, and tactics. You should read the first few chapters in depth so that you get a feel for how the system works. Combat generally uses a grid for easier positioning, but TOTM is allowed. Finally, forget all the mechanics and just play your character!

Your job is to focus on immersing yourself in the story being told. You control the motivations and ideals of your character. What they say, where they go, and why. Think about how the events make the character feel and what they would do about it.

For Game Masters

Feel free to pilfer ideas from anywhere you like, even other game systems. Then you can build the occupations, weapons, and technology of the world using the rules in *CREATING CAMPAIGN WORLDS*. If you have a 3rd party supplement for Virtually Real which describes a setting, this will make your job much easier. You can focus on the story rather than building a whole world!

Read this book cover to cover! Once you get a feel for how the system is supposed to work, focus on the story and the drama, and forget the mechanics!

EXPERIENCED GAMERS

Virtually Real only uses standard 6 sided dice. While you could play with just a few, consider getting a bucket of 100 or more in various colors if you are playing in person. This will allow you to hold on to dice between turns to keep track of modifiers.





THE CAPACITY SYSTEM

Skills combine training and experience with one of your character's attributes. Every creature has 8 attributes, discussed in the next chapter. A skill's experience begins at the attribute's score.

Open Locks [2] 22/3

Add this many 6-sided dice

This is your XP

This is the experience level you
add to your rolls.

During play, you describe *how* you intend to accomplish your goal and the results you want to achieve. The GM tells you if a skill check is needed. Start by asking the GM what your character knows about the situation. Skill checks can transfer "character knowledge" into "player knowledge" or vice-versa.

You perform a skill check by rolling a number of "square" dice equal to the skill's *Capacity*, the number in square brackets. If the roll is not a critical failure, add your level to the dice total. You succeed without difficulty if the result equals or exceeds the Difficulty Level (DL) assigned by the GM.

At the end of a scene, any skill used with consequences for failure gains 1 XP (eXperience Point). Index your new XP total on the EXPERIENCE TABLE to find the skill's new experience level. If the level changes, write the new level after the slash.

EXPERIENCED GAMERS

Veteran RPG players would normally write the previous roll as "2d6+3". Virtually Real might write this roll as [2]+3 for NPCs.

1.4.1 Training vs Experience

Every skill is broken down into *training* and *experience*. You roll your training dice and then add your experience to the roll.

A secondary skill represents *amateur* level experience with no special training. A *primary* skill is one that you are considered proficient in, roughly equivalent to a journeyman of a trade or high school level knowledge. A *master* skill would be the equivalent of an advanced degree, mastercraftsman, or Olympic athlete.

Secondary Skills Any skill can be used as a *secondary* skill. A secondary skill's XP can never be lower than your attribute score. If you have a secondary skill with less XP than the related attribute, just erase it! If you add more XP to the skill, write it down. Secondary skills never raise attribute scores or earn passions.

Capacity refers to the number of dice you will add together, 1-5, written in square brackets. The capacities may be referred to by the names listed on the CAPACITIES table, such as *primary* and *secondary* for skills, or *human* or *superhuman* for attributes. The capacity determines the range of values, repeatability of results, and your chances of brilliant successes and critical failures, both described later. Capacities form the heart of the Virtually Real game system.

1.4.2 Skill Checks

A Difficulty Level (DL) is determined based on how difficult the job should be in a critical situation where you don't have the opportunity to take your time or be CAREFUL. You do not take additional penalties for being rushed or in a combat situation.

Your difficulty can be expressed as an opposed roll. If you're picking a lock, your adversary is the engineer who built the lock! What did they roll? The GM might determine their skill to have been [3]+5. That would average nearly 16!

GMs should study the DIFFICULTY LEVELS (DL) TABLE on the facing page and consider the different training and experience combinations that would be needed to produce those values as an average roll. That's the level of experience and training represented by that difficulty. You'll see more sample DLs in the individual Skill Descriptions, too. Relating these difficulties to your world and deciding what they mean is part of world building, so GMs always have final say on determining a DL.

APPENDIX B

The tables in this section are presented here so new people can get a feel for the system while learning the basics. These tables and many more are all collected at the back of the book in Appendix B so you don't have to hunt for them. In future chapters, almost no tables will be given in the text!

ZERO-CAPACITY ATTRIBUTES

A capacity of [0] can exist for some strange and unusual creatures. Roll this the same as [1], but add an extra disadvantage, and there are no brilliant rolls. These creatures can not use secondary skills of this attribute if the skill is not granted in the ancestry.

EXPERIENCED GAMERS

Virtually Real uses 3 meta-currencies:

- ⇒ Endurance Points (End) - Endurance points come from your Body. If they hit zero you will be winded.
- ⇒ Ki Points (Ki) - Ki points come from your Mind. If they hit zero you will be stressed.
- ⇒ Light Points - Light points represent the player's karmic link to the character's adrenal gland.

EXPERIENCE TABLE

XP / Fail By	Level	Degree
0	0	Success!
1 - 2	0	Minor ^a
3 - 5	0	Major
6 - 9	1	Serious
10 - 15	2	Critical
16 - 24	3	Double Crit
25 - 36	4	Triple Crit
37 - 53	5	"
54 - 78	6	"
79 - 114	7	"
115 - 166	8	"
167+ ^b	9	"

^aSee also "Close Enough"

^bThe maximum fixed bonus is +9

CAPACITIES

Dice	Capacity Name	Bril. ^a
1	Secondary / Subhuman	6 ^b
2	Primary / Human	12
3	Mastery / Superhuman	17-18
4	Supernatural!	22-24
5	Deific / Angelic	27-30

^aBrilliant Rolls

^bNon-6s aren't added!

DIFFICULTY LEVELS (DL) TABLE

Human Difficulty	DL ^a	Combo ^b
Common Knowledge, <i>Minor</i> challenge	4	6
Basic or Easy information	6	9
Simple task for a professional	8	12
<i>Major</i> challenge or task	10	15
Somewhat difficult job	12	18
Difficult job or task ^c	14	20
<i>Serious</i> challenge	16	24
Extraordinary work	18	27
Nearly Impossible ^d	20	30
<i>Critical</i> challenge ^e	22	32

^aD20 3.5 DC is roughly twice this value.

^bRoughly the same as a D&D 5e DC!

^cModern locks are "difficult" to pick

^dExceeding the speed of light is DL 42!

^eDouble Crit is 32; Triple Crit is 42

1.4.3 Situational Modifiers

Situational modifiers depend on the situation rather than concrete quantities like training or experience. GMs use situational modifiers to account for position, environment, and more; usually 1 die per source of advantage or disadvantage.

These modifiers are implemented as extra dice added to your roll. After rolling the dice, keep the highest or lowest values rolled. *The roll's capacity is always how many dice to keep!*

Unlike your experience level modifier, situational modifiers affect the chances of BRILLIANT RESULTS and CRITICAL RESULTS!

Advantage means to add another die to your roll per source of advantage, and keep the highest values rolled. If you roll a 1, 4, and 5, and one of those is an advantage; add the 4 and 5 for a total of 9. The 1 is “dropped”.

On a brilliant advantage roll, use any 6s from the “dropped dice” as the exploding 6s!

Disadvantage works just like Advantage, only you keep the lowest dice rolled! In the above example, disadvantage means drop the highest; add 4 + 1. You can't pull 6s from the dropped dice with a disadvantage roll.

Conflicted Rolls You can have disadvantages and advantages on the same roll. We will use the middle dice to generate a “decision value” to determine if we keep the “high” or “low” values. This create a high drama, “all-or-nothing” moment.

1. Roll all the dice and sort them from low to high.
2. If you have more advantages than disadvantages, skip that many *low* dice and find the middle. If you have more disadvantages, ignore that many of the *high* dice.
3. Identify the 2 dice in the middle of what remains. If the number of dice is odd, use the center die twice.
4. If you have “Luck”¹ the higher die moves that many positions up, the lower of the two dice stays the same.
5. Add these two dice together to find the *decision value*.

A decision value of 7 or more results in keeping the highest dice of the entire pool, including extra 6s on a brilliant result. A value less than 7 means you'll keep the lowest values.

¹Luck is a “Passion”



**ADVANTAGE
DROP THE 1**

Intimacies

Intimacies represent our values and the most fundamental parts of what drives us.

There is no limit to how many intimacies you can have. Character intimacies can sometimes be an advantage or disadvantage depending on circumstances. Each intimacy is either a positive or negative to one of the four EMOTIONAL TARGETS.

All creatures with Aura [1] or higher start with a few basic intimacies, representing instinctive values. Your native language, culture, home, and your own offspring are *inner* intimacies. Someone *else's* kids of the same species, or your neighborhood or village, is an *outer* intimacy. Those with Aura [2] or higher can have additional intimacies and can change the basic intimacies previously listed.

The most basic intimacies are *outer* intimacies, worth 1 die of advantage or disadvantage. An *outer* intimacy can include close friends, such as other members of the group. An *inner* intimacy is worth 2 dice, and might include family members, crushes, or sexual partners. A *defining* intimacy is worth 4 dice, and is something you would give your life to defend! Intimacies do not need to be people, and can be an idea, a concept, or your faith.

Intimacies can be changed at the end of a chapter. You may add/remove outer intimacies from the outer level, or adjust the level of other intimacies up or down by 1 at the end of each chapter. A person listed as an intimacy, even someone you hate, bypasses a number of emotional armors equal to their intimacy level. Someone you really love can ignore 4 armors!

When you choose to use an intimacy for an advantage, you must describe why the intimacy is meaningful to the character and how it applies. Those that view your reaction will know that this is something important to you. You must reveal your intimacies when you use them.

You can use light to activate heroic adrenaline responses to defend an intimacy. The intimacy level would be a penalty to your trauma (Isolation) save if they died. If you list someone as an intimacy, they will *not* earn light when they put their life on the line for you!

Intimacies play a part in MENTAL & EMOTIONAL COMBAT and saves of EMOTIONAL TARGETS. These rolls *always* take intimacies into consideration. To use an intimacy in other situations, every player (and the GM) must agree that the intimacy applies to the given roll. If the intimacy would be a disadvantage, then the GM can mandate the penalty, but should still listen to player feedback!

Intimacies Apply To

- ⇒ Geography & Navigation if you are intimate with the area.
- ⇒ History & Lore of an area you are intimate with.

- ⇒ Perception & Search checks of an area you are familiar with.
- ⇒ Culture & Language checks of your native language and culture.
- ⇒ Social interactions that target an opponent's intimacy.

Passion & Style

Some skills have a “style” that is chosen when the skill reaches primary training, usually during character creation. Styles are “trees” full of “passions”. A passion represents something that you are slightly better at, maybe an edge on a specific combat maneuver. Styles stem from a “root” passion that you gain upon being trained in the style, even at level 0. You gain new passions from this style each level, starting at level 2.

Careful

You can be careful if it's not in a combat or rushed setting and you take additional time. This gives you an advantage die, drastically reducing the chances of critical failure and improving overall results. Adjust the required time by 1 step up on the Duration table. Most craftsman will be making their living with *Careful* skill checks because defective junk will make you poor! Wizards and alchemists should be careful all the time! In certain situations, it may be worth being *extra* careful, adjusting your time by 2 duration steps for two advantage dice. This is used for custom jobs for VIP clients at 4-10 times the cost!

1.4.4 Degrees Of Success

Some people do things better or faster than others. How well is determined by the degree of success or failure. In combat, your damage is your attack's degree of success. Here are some examples of how you might apply degrees of success.

Close Enough

Sometimes, it's just close enough! If you can keep rolling to retry and get within 1 or 2 points of the DL, then you make it, but with lessened effect or some sort of complication or negative consequence. This is a minor failure, or “*yes, but.*” For example, a magic spell might have side effects, a reduced duration, or delayed reaction. For other skills, as long as you can keep trying, assume you will eventually succeed when you roll a close enough result.

A close enough knowledge check means you know enough to have some facts, but not enough to know when you are wrong! The information you get will be tainted in some way. Perhaps the information is horribly one-sided, contains conspiracy theories, or other inaccurate details. These may be



commonly believed by many members of society, but still verifiably wrong. On a crit fail, you know nothing.

The default consequence is taking longer, possibly adding a tension die. For example, if you are picking a lock, normally a 1 minute check, and you miss the DL by 1, it takes you 1 1/2 times as long, while missing by 2 means it takes 3 times as long. The GM may say, “You’ve almost got it!”, and then moves on to the next player to let the players feel the delay involved.

Faster Skills If you roll *above* the DL, then your skill check is faster than normal or some sort of beneficial effect. If you get 6 over, it gets done in half the time. There is a chart in Appendix B that will help if you need to perform a skill in the middle of combat and need to know exactly how long it takes! The GM is free to make use of this chart with a variety of skills.

Brilliant Results

If your dice are all 6s, you did something that was “brilliant”. This means the dice “explode” and you get another die to roll, making super-high results.

A brilliant result grants 1 extra XP in that skill *immediately!* If this increases the skill level, do so now! You still get the 1 XP at the end of the scene.

A 6 on 1 die *may* be brilliant. Roll another die. If you roll another 6, it is a brilliant result. Add the skill's related *attribute capacity* (2 for humans) to the total, then roll another die. If you keep getting 6s, keep adding the attribute capac-

ity and roll again. On any other number, stop rolling and do NOT add the die result. This means that if the initial roll is a 6 and your second die is a 4, its not a brilliant roll and your total is just 6.

If rolling [2] dice, double 6s is *always* brilliant. Roll another die. If you roll another 6, add the attribute capacity to your total and keep rolling as long as you get 6s. On any other number, add the number rolled! Mastery rolls of [3] dice are brilliant on 17-18. Supernatural [4] is 22-24. Deific [5] is 27-30.

A brilliant result let's you keep any 6s from your discarded dice as exploded dice, and roll another die!

Effect Bonus Rather than faster skills, you might get an "effect bonus" or "*Yes, and.*" Index the amount by which you beat the DL on the EXPERIENCE TABLE on page 13 and use the "level" column, not degrees. This bonus is separate from the result you wanted to achieve. The effect bonus does not change damage or other values that are already part of the result roll.

Most skill's don't declare an effect bonus. Effects, such as magic and technology, will list the effect bonuses with the effect descriptions. Effect bonuses are based on the amount by which you exceed the difficulty of the effect, *not* the target's saving throw! The target's saving throw determines the *severity of failure*, listed with the effect description.

1.4.5 Degrees of Failure

Critical Results Rolling all 1s is a critical result. No matter how well trained you are, there is always some chance that something just goofs. You just *fail*. If *Climbing*, you fell! If you are looking for a trap, you set it off! If it's an attack, the attack flat out misses with no defense required. For a *knowledge* check, you are completely clueless about the subject. For *Stealth*, you might step on a creaky step or knock something over, causing it to loudly crash to the floor. It's just "*No!*" Count it as a zero, and don't add your skill level. You fail by the DL. If the DL was 10 or higher, this is a critical fail.

Severity of Failure The severity of your attempt may be indexed on the EXPERIENCE TABLE to determine the "*degree*" of severity. Any failure by only 1-2 points below the DL is considered *minor*; it's CLOSE ENOUGH. At 3-5 points below the DL, this is *major*. *Serious* is from 6-9 points below the DL. Failing by 10 or more is *critical*. Effects with saving throws describe the conditions for each degree of failure. The use of severity in skills is up to the GM.

Conditions

Conditions are just situational modifiers that last longer than 1 roll. They may be the result of physical, mental, or emotional trauma.

The GM will hand you a die, possibly colored to show which rolls it applies to, based on the related attribute. You will mark the letter for the duration of the condition in a box, as D for Day. Minor wounds don't cause conditions. Major wounds are recorded in the top CONDITIONS row on your character sheet; left for Physical, right for Mental. Emotional conditions for Major and Severe wounds are listed as in the EMOTIONAL box.

Physical conditions affect Body, Agility, and Appearance skills and saves. Mental conditions affect Mind, and Logic skills and saves. Aura saves must be assigned one of the EMOTIONAL TARGETS.

Severe conditions are marked in the second row and affect initiative. Severe conditions and higher usually require a skill check to heal. This will be covered in AFTER THE BATTLE. Maneuver and Speed penalties are covered in the THE ART OF COMBAT chapter.

Critical conditions affect *all* rolls and add a +1 critical modifier to all of your rolls. Critical conditions prevent the use of Fast Actions and often other passions as well. Critical conditions increase your critical range, so all critical conditions are listed together to make it easier to count the critical increases.

If a condition row is full, the condition moves to a more serious condition, usually 1 row down. When a condition expires, the wound drops in severity and changes based on the "Heal to ..." column. GMs can add additional modifiers and conditions for any reason.

You take X conditions for 0 HP, negative "DC" HP, and for negative "Crit" HP.

Damage Capacity Physical wounds (including Health saves against toxins) use a severity index based on "Damage Capacity", listed on the creature size chart and for each race. Major wounds always begin at 3 points of damage and Serious wounds at DC+3. The critical level for physical damage is your maximum hit points (HP), found as the base for your creature size (listed for your race), plus your Body attribute modifier. For humans, damage capacity and your degree of failure are exactly the same until you hit critical damage.

Soft Failures Sometimes a fail is just a fail and failure levels don't apply. The lock opens or it doesn't. Rather than condition levels, the GM has the option of supplying a "soft failure", also known as "fail forward", or "*No, but.*" You fail, *but ...* and the GM adds some information that was learned. Perhaps the GM might suggest another course of action with a consequence, such as "You could probably just smash the lock open, but it's going to make a lot of noise". The use of

soft failures drives the story forward. A failure should always be an opportunity to learn something new, look at things differently, or gain new insights.

Retries If this is a skill check where the character could normally try again or continue working (at +1 critical, see below), then the GM may allow a retry. This is particularly effective for retrying language checks. A critical failure means that retries are either not possible or that all retries will fail. The GM should come up with an appropriate reason for not allowing retries, but “you feel this lock is just too difficult for you” is perfectly valid. The GM may let you try again in the next chapter of the story if your skill has improved. See the CREATING YOUR STORIES chapter for more info about Chapters and Acts.

Extended Criticals

Extending the range of a critical failure can be due indirect information, retrying failures, or critical conditions.

The extended critical range adds to the number of possibilities that are a critical failure. It doesn't change how high you roll or how well you perform, just the chance that something goes sideways on you! Everything from your capacity number, to Capacity + Crit modifier is a critical failure. For rolls of [5] dice, your critical range *starts* at +1, so rolls of both 5 (all 1s) and 6 are both critical failures. This bumps the probability *up* to 1 in 1000!

Every critical condition adds +1 to the critical range. Count the boxes and it to your crit range.

Each helper generally adds their XP to a leader (Added Experience), but also adds +1 crit. Too many cooks spoil the soup!

Add +1 critical each time information for a knowledge check changes hands. For example, a scout describes what they saw up ahead, and you rely on their information for a *Knowledge* check. This check will be +1 critical. If the scout told a runner, and that runner gave you the information, then add +2. Yes, this is telephone game!

All magic and technological effects add +1 critical to whatever dice roll they modify. Magical armor and force fields add +1 crit to all physical defense rolls. More on this is given in THE EFFECTS SYSTEM.

Finally, if you couldn't succeed on the first try, and retries are allowed, a second try will be at +1 critical. Every retry adds another +1 to the critical range until you roll a critical failure. Once you roll that failure, you can't retry anymore. It may be because you broke something or just got too frustrated. In any case, no retries until the next Chapter! You've been beat!

BY THE NUMBERS

Note that adding +1 to the critical range is serious. A primary skill normally has a 2.7% chance of a critical fail. A 3 has twice as many chances to roll as a 2 because you can have 1+2 and 2+1! That increases that 2.7% chance to 8.3%! 3 out of 36 rolls now critically fail compared to 1 out of 36. A +2 crit would be a crit range from 2-4 bringing the chance up to 16.7%!

1.4.6 Attributes & Saves

A “save” or “saving throw” refers to a “throw” of the dice used to “save” your life, or at least resist some attack against it. Saving throws are reactions to someone else's action used as a defense. You roll these as attribute checks.

The capacity of a saving throw is normally [2]. Roll two dice and add the attribute modifier for that attribute's score. You cannot retry a saving throw except by the TAKING A MULLIGAN rule. The wound level difficulties (4 minor, 10 major, 16 serious, & 22 critical) are the usual save values when opposed rolls are not used. The GM is free to change these.

Capacity Modifiers

Roll your attribute capacity or skill capacity, whichever is largest. If you roll more dice than the skill capacity, the extra dice are advantages. These special advantages cancel other situational modifiers, reducing CONFLICTED ROLLS; attribute advantages *cancel* disadvantages rather than *conflicting* with them.

For saving throws, if the attribute capacity is lower than the save's capacity, then you take a *disadvantage* to the save. This does not apply to skill checks. Attribute capacities only provide *advantages* to skill checks, but not *disadvantages*.

The most common saving throws are mentioned below.

Health Saves A Health save is always considered a primary save [2] with Body as the related attribute. So, if a Dwarf with Body [3]+2 were to become ill, you would roll 3 dice, drop the lowest, then add the +2. If the save is due to a toxin, use the creature's damage capacity to determine severity of failure rather than the standard failure degrees from the XP table. This is documented fully in the AFTER THE BATTLE chapter. If you critically fail a Health save or BCT save with an X condition, you must give up a point of light or die. H conditions from magic healing are advantages to Health saves, rather than the usual disadvantage!

Dodge & Evade *Dodging* an attack is a normal capacity [2] save, but requires time (a *combat action*). If you don't have enough time, *evading* an attack can be done at capacity [1]. You must be aware of the attack to roll the save. Mental attacks can also be dodged and evaded using Logic. In these cases, you are always aware of any attack who's defense is Logic. You always take a Maneuver penalty after using one of these defenses.


Initiative A typical initiative roll is Reflex with capacity [1]. If you have a weapon in hand and ready, then use the [I] box for your weapon as the skill level rather than your raw Reflex modifier. This box contains your Reflex attribute modifier, plus any bonuses from your weapon or weapon proficiencies. If you have Basic Combat Training at primary training or higher, then initiative becomes capacity [2].

Perception A Perception roll is a save to notice fine details or softly spoken words. It's not what you see, but rather what you notice. Perception is a Mind save. A Careful check is 1 reflex action and a Very Careful check is a non-combat action. Once you fail a save, you can only retry by being more careful and only if the situation hasn't changed. So, you can't retry to hear a whisper because the whisper has passed. You have an effective perception distance that varies with lighting and the weather. Checks beyond this range suffer standard range penalties. Perception is explained more in the combat section under STEALTH & CONCEALMENT. Mental evasion does *not* apply to perception saves, only Logic.


Save Time When making an Agility or Logic save you are aware of the attack and actively resisting. You can choose to not resist and do nothing, and your roll is a 0. The saves for all other attributes are free actions that the target is not even aware of (you are only aware of the effects of failure), and are rolled as capacity [2]. When attacking Logic, the attacker is aware of the attack and will take defense penalties, just like a physical dodge. When attacking the Mind, the target is no more aware of the attack than the save they made against that virus his Body fought off. You only know if you lose!

1.4.7 Adrenaline Responses


Emotional Targets

 **Violence** This target represents your fear of physical harm vs a sense of security.


- ⇒ Save: *Basic Combat Training*
- ⇒ Defensive Adrenal Response: *Sprint*
- ⇒ Aggressive Adrenal Response: *Strength*
- ⇒ Chakra: *Root*

 **Despair** This target represents helplessness and depression vs hope and joy.

- ⇒ Save: *Faith*
- ⇒ Defensive Adrenal Response: *Perception*
- ⇒ Aggressive Adrenal Response: *Primal Surge*
- ⇒ Chakra: *Sacral*

 **Isolation** This target represents loneliness vs connection, including love.

- ⇒ Save: *Culture - Influence*
- ⇒ Defensive Adrenal Response: *Deception*
- ⇒ Aggressive Adrenal Response: *Authority*
- ⇒ Chakra: *Throat*

 **Guilt** This target represents shame and self-loathing vs pride, honor, and integrity.

- ⇒ Save: *Culture - Integrity*
- ⇒ Defensive Adrenal Response: *Will*
- ⇒ Aggressive Adrenal Response: *Deception*
- ⇒ Chakra: *Heart*

There are four emotional targets your mind must defend. Each target has boxes for wounds and armor that will start blank unless some flaw or trait says otherwise. Each square box represents a condition die added to your roll.

Wounds are disadvantages, and armors are advantages. Mark the condition in the boxes starting from the center (closest to the icons) and work your way out. Armors are the emotional barriers, protecting us from emotional harm, but also cutting us off from positive experiences as well. Emotional armor can affect just about anything, even how we experience music. Mental state and how to role-play it is described in AFTER THE BATTLE.

The complete rules for in-depth social engagements are given in AFTER THE BATTLE.

Darkness

Darkness points can turn wounds into emotional armor and can turn our fear into anger.

Your Darkness emanates on an ethereal level, affecting your body language and demeanor causing a penalty to appearance rolls. Index darkness points on the XP table to find the level, just like a skill. You will roll your Darkness points just like any other attribute.

Your Darkness *level* is how many disadvantage dice you take. Darkness will be an *advantage* to Deception & Authority, but is a penalty to Diplomacy, Support, Appearance, and Faith. Darkness grants an advantage at turning our fear into anger, in turning that defense into offense, but it's a penalty to control it once you get there. Darkness does not affect initiative, nor any BCT saves.

Darkness has a “style”, which earns passions *every* level, even level 1. Some of these passions allow you to apply your emotional wounds, armors, and intimacies to other rolls, sometimes with a cost in additional darkness points.

Some passions allow you to *spend* a ki point, instead of *taking* a Darkness point. It becomes your choice of which you use. However, if you use a ki point, the maximum duration of the effect is a long rest. If you turn an emotional wound into armor with a ki point, it will only last a day and does not change the duration of the condition. It just prolongs it a day. If you want a longer duration of effect, you will need to take on more darkness, or be ready to spend ki every day.

The ability to use “powers” (spend ki points to create an “Effect” as defined in The Effects System), requires a Darkness for each technology you use in this way. You’ll always get the root passion of every Darkness tree, then choose from any Darkness style as Darkness gains levels.

Light

Light shines on the darkness, exposing that all of us are equally injured and flawed, each in our own way, trying to protect ourselves from pain and hurt.

You earn light points from achieving life goals, 1 per chapter. You start with 1 and get another each chapter. You can also gain light points when you risk your life in service to another. You do not earn light points to save someone if they have already listed you as in intimacy. If you list someone as a intimacy with a positive emotional connection, you must make a trauma save (Isolation) for that person’s loss. If this person is hated, then you can gain advantages on checks to use anger against them.

Light cancel out darkness points. Darkness can not go below 0. Darkness represents blocking yourself off from others.

Each time you earn light, decrease darkness by 1. You can also choose to give up that light point and decrement your darkness again.



SERIOUS EMOTIONAL CONDITIONS

Letter	Description	At Next	Heal to
F	Fear	Long Rest	A
G	Guilt	Long Rest	A
P	Despair	Long Rest	A
I	Isolation	Long Rest	A
T	New Trauma	Scene	D

Critical conditions can change the results of other rolls. For example, an X condition can sometimes mean death. You can spend a point of light to use the original results of the table. This will prevent death or becoming an NPC, but it costs 1 light point each time.

Defensive Adrenaline Response

Adrenaline is a critical condition that engages your fight or flight reflexes to defend you from physical or emotional trauma. While adrenaline affects us all the time; in especially dangerous situations, it can sometimes allow us to do improbable and even super-human things.

When we suffer a critical wound, physically or emotionally, it causes an adrenal response that will grant advantages to specific rolls that protect us from harm, and disadvantages to everything else. Write your total number of adrenal bonuses (your adrenaline level) in one of your critical condition boxes. A number in a CRIT box means you have an adrenaline rush!

The number inside the box is the number of advantage dice to all future emotional saves, like an extra layer of emotional armor. The adrenaline bonuses extends to defensive uses of your “defensive adrenal response” skills listed on the “ARMOR” side of your EMOTIONAL box. Sprinting goes to running away, not Charge or other offensive attacks. A bonus against Deception is bonus against being deceived, not to deceive others.

Each additional adrenal response is an extra layer of protection of at least 1 die, sometimes more as effects can stack. Additional adrenal responses increase the number in the box, but do not add additional penalties. Everything else is 1 disadvantage. Because this is a critical condition, all rolls are +1 critical per critical condition, even rolls for which this is an advantage.

Aggressive Adrenal Response

You may be able to change a defensive adrenal response into an aggressive one.

You'll attack yourself by rolling a new save, or other means discussed in AFTER THE BATTLE. On failure, consult the Basic Combat Training chart to see how long you delay. You bypass your own armor, but any existing adrenal response gives you an advantage. Use of intimacies on this roll requires a passion, but Darkness bonuses always apply. On a failure, you lose a Mind action rather than Reflex action.

On success, you spend a Darkness point and circle WOUNDS under the EMOTIONAL section of your character sheet. Your adrenaline level now goes to the *aggressive* adrenal response skills, listed under WOUNDS; as well as aggressive uses of the defensive skills, listed under ARMOR. Aggression grants advantage when using Authority, advantage on power attacks and strength checks and feats, charging, and deception checks used to manipulate others. You gain "Primal Surge" equal to your adrenaline level.

On a *minor* success, you still spend a Mind action performing self-talk and give up your offense. A *major* success (you beat the DL by 3+) means you succeed instantly and keep your offense. A *serious* success is the same as an effect bonus. Add any effect bonus to your total adrenal advantage. The number in the CRIT box goes up and so do all your bonuses.

Brilliant successes always apply to all rolls affected by adrenaline. At the end of the scene, you must give up an Endurance point as this adrenaline fades. If already Winded, you will become Tired, the serious version of this effect!

Critical Conditions

As noted previously, a critical condition affects *all* rolls and adds +1 critical per condition.

Critical conditions often include an adrenal response. The "X" condition (HP reached 0) is a critical condition that causes a Fear adrenal response. A critical wound to an emotional target causes an adrenal response. Fear grants a *bonus* to Sprinting, instead of a penalty. The +1 critical from a critical condition still applies to this roll! Conditions that provide adrenal bonuses will stack, providing additional advantages.

Wounds leave you vulnerable while they heal. You may also spend a Darkness point to keep an emotional wound's

CRITICAL CONDITIONS

Letter	Description	At Next	Heal to
[#]	Fear	Scene	F
[#]	Guilt ^a	Initiative	G
[#]	Despair	Scene	P
[#]	Isolation	Short Rest	I
X	Dying (0 HP) ^b	Long Rest	B
U	Undone (0 End) ^c	Long Rest	V
B	Broken Bones ^d	Long Rest	B
N	Numb (0 Ki) ^e	Short Rest	J
L	Limb Loss ^f	Chapter	L ^g
H	Fast Healing ^h	Scene	H

^aCrit fail an integrity check and become an NPC

^bNo Fast Actions; can't spend End;
crit fail of Body or BCT save kills you

^cNo Fast Actions; can't spend End

^dNo Fast Actions; can't spend End

^eNo Concentration bonuses; can't spend Ki

^fNo Fast Actions or Off-hand Actions

^gL/SPD heals to L/Man; both Chapter conditions

^hCauses penalty to future magic healing,
blocks ki from being spent, and
prevents natural HP recovery!

duration and turn it into an emotional "armor" against future attack. This armor "protects" from positive emotions as much as negative emotions! When wounds are turned into armors they move from the wound/disadvantage side to the armor/advantage side, but without changing duration.

We'll talk more about emotional conditions in AFTER THE BATTLE and in the SKILL DESCRIPTIONS chapter.

Defending An Intimacy

You can trigger an adrenaline response by describing how your actions will defend a particular Intimacy. Intimacies are things your character values, listed on the character sheet. We'll cover them more in the next chapter. You will spend 1, 2, or 4 light points (depending on if the intimacy is *outer*, *inner*, or *defining*) to activate a heroic adrenal response. Only 1 other player (or the GM) must agree that the intimacy fits the situation when you spend light. Light is in short supply, so this is something that has meaning for you! Spending light does not cost time.

If you choose to activate an inner or defining intimacy, you must use the full 2 or 4 light points if you have them. If you simply don't have enough points, you just get the lower effect. If you have the points and don't spend them, you have to lower your intimacy level.

The intimacy will have one of the four Emotional Targets associated with it and if this is a positive or negative response. Write the intimacy level (1, 2, or 4) in the appro-

appropriate “Armor” box of the emotional target. This the number of emotional armors you gain. Write the number in the farthest right emotional armor box. This bonus lasts 1 scene. Erase it when the scene changes. This condition does not increase DARKNESS as emotional hardening would, and you do not take any conditions. Instead, others take this as a condition against you. You get all the adrenaline benefits, including bonuses to aggressive actions.

The adrenaline condition adds its intimacy level as that many advantage dice to *all 3* skills listed in every emotional target, as well as all Initiative & Reaction Time checks. Any “adrenaline” passions can be used, and a new wave begins for you immediately!

Taking A Mulligan

You can take a mulligan on one of your own rolls as long as you have at least Aura [1]. Taking a mulligan can only be done once per roll. You must agree to a narrative “side-effect” decided by the GM. You must decide to use a mulligan before the GM describes the results of the roll and before any other rolls are made.

A Mulligan must be done to “Defend an Intimacy.” This doesn’t have to be a person. It can be any intimacy; even an idea, hate, or phobia! The player will describe how this roll specifically defends or protects an intimacy they have and why this is meaningful to their character. As long as *one* other player agrees that the intimacy fits, the GM offers an in-game side-effect. You can even declare that you are using a new *outer* intimacy and can add it to your character sheet. You can not remove the intimacy at the next chapter, but you can change it to *inner*.

The player must agree to the side-effect and pay the intimacy cost in *light* before re-rolling the dice! The cost in light is the number of advantage dice you are adding to the roll, depending on the intimacy: 1 for an *outer* intimacy, 2 for *inner*, and 4 for *defining*. The side-effect happens regardless of the results of the new roll.

You can spend light to force an NPC intimacy to mulligan a roll! You use your intimacy to them as the number of dice *and* as the reason. If this is a hated enemy, you are defending your hate, and that hate applies *disadvantages* to the reroll! Giving someone a disadvantage on a mulligan means you take a point of darkness! The point of darkness is the condition.

Culture Saves

The last two emotional targets both use a culture save. If more than one culture or subculture skill fits the situation, then the GM may choose which to use.

Cultures are “styles”, and as such, are a tree with three branches. The central branch is called “Creed”, and generally has the most colorful or recognizable parts of a culture, including any bonuses to Faith.

The last two branches are Integrity and Influence. If your character is more social and group oriented, then the Influence branch represents your greater social influence and passions related to peer interactions and sociability. The Integrity branch are passions concerned with adherence to social norms and values. Obeying laws and customs, valor, honesty, and leadership ability fall under the second. The passions will describe what situations they apply to.

In the case of Cultures, the GM will decide if this is an Integrity, Influence, or Knowledge roll. The first two are Aura-related and take the given wounds and armors to the check, even if this is not an emotional attack. If this is a check to determine your knowledge of the culture, then this check is Logic-related and emotional wounds and armors no longer apply (although other mental conditions do). Wounds, Armors, and Intimacies always affect the middle skill when used for saves, but these don’t apply to Knowledge checks about your culture.

Narrative Consequences

Narrative consequences exist for *every* action a character takes. It’s easy to have consequences when you are caught. What happens if you aren’t?

Every culture has norms of behavior. If you fail to follow them, you will need to make a Guilt/Integrity save. The difficulty level depends on how severe the custom is. For capital crimes, this is a critical offense, DL 22. Murder and other serious offenses are DL 16. A major violation such as theft is DL 10, and minor infractions are DL 4. Special honor codes may add additional modifiers and more things to follow. If there is question about the DL to use, this is up to the GM. Honor intimacies are penalties to the save.

Voluntary Trauma

A player may decide their character would have an emotional reaction to a particular scene. The player decides which emotional target applies and selects a wound level they feel is appropriate for their character. After GM approval, roll and apply the effects. Aggressive reactions are the results of self-talk that happens *after* you are harmed, and this is a separate roll. We’ll cover more on this subject, plus many others, like Acts of Atonement, Rights of Passage, Cultural Styles, and more in AFTER THE BATTLE.

1.4.8 Combining Skills

There are times when a single skill just doesn't fit and you want to check two skills with a single roll. Advantages apply to the roll if they would apply to either skill. An advantage that applies to both skills does not apply to the roll twice if the skills are combined.

Added Experience

The Added Experience rule allows two skills to complement each other. For example, if trying to identify an edible plant, a character might ask if *Botany* or *Survival* is the correct roll. Use both! You must have the same skill capacity in each skill to use Added Experience.

For example if you had *Botany* [2]20/3 and *Survival* [2]40/5, you would roll 2 dice and add all XP together, giving 60 XP for a +6 to your roll. Add the XP, *not the levels*.

You can use this method for collaborative efforts. Every helper's adds 1/2 their XP, rounded down. This can be used for multiple people standing watch to simulate more eyes on an area and a multitude of other situations. The GM may decide limits on how many people can help.

Combination Roll

Combination rolls are opposed by another Combination roll or a DL from the *Combo* column on the DIFFICULTY LEVELS (DL) TABLE.

To make a combination roll, add the capacities of both skills, then subtract one to find the new capacity for the check. Add the levels of both skills. Critical range is +2.

Combination checks can sometimes be *split* among two people where you are combining the effects of one person and how it is received by another, such as during NPC Reaction Rolls and Performance appreciation rolls. The PC rolls a normal skill or attribute check with the usual critical failure rates, and the GM rolls for the NPC at -1 die, then adds the rolls together.

We'll use this roll for Training checks to learn new skills by combining the skill with the related attribute.

1.4.9 Multistage Task

A multistage task is used for long-term "montage" tasks won't be role-played in detail.

This system is used for crafting, investigations, complex knowledge checks, or even sneaking past multiple guard checkpoints. A long climb with places to stop and rest, researching the library, the journey between towns, or a multistage height operation can all be multistage tasks.

MultiStage Task Resolution

- ⇒ Points of resource allocation divide up your stages. Each stage has its own resource cost such as *time*, *money*, or *endurance*; determined by the GM according to the task at hand.
- ⇒ The GM and players will collectively decide what skills are used at each stage. Stages can use COMBINATION ROLL checks to represent skill combinations.
- ⇒ On failure, you can restart the stage (at +1 critical) and pay the resource costs all over again. Assume you can reuse any non-consumable materials and only pay 1/4 of any monetary costs, but time and endurance must be repaid in full.
- ⇒ You may not begin a later stage until all previous stages are complete. If you hit a *critical* failure, then this project stalls for some reason and must be restarted at stage 1.
- ⇒ A skill check that results in an "effect bonus" above the difficulty grants a bonus to the next stage. The GM describes some reason why your next roll is getting a bonus due to your skill at the previous stage.
- ⇒ A "close enough" result at any stage causes *all* future stages to have a disadvantage! You can decide to redo this stage (at +1 critical) and hope for a better result ("Crap! Go back!"), or you can just plow on ahead and hope for the best!

Arm Wrestling

This is an example of a fast use of a Multistage Task.

Use opposed STRENGTH FEATS checks. Rather than allowing re-rolls, opponents may spend an Endurance point to add an advantage die to their roll. That is the resource cost. Each additional stage both opponents re-roll their checks. On a minor win, you gain some ground over your opponent, but this is purely a narrative bonus.

A *major* win gives your opponent a disadvantage. A *serious* win lets you move a disadvantage die from you to your opponent. A *critical* win (opponent loses by 10+) means you win!

1.4.10 Special Rolls

Attribute checks are rare compared to saving throws, and are rolled as if the attribute were a skill of the attribute's capacity.

In other words, your attribute capacity is how many dice you roll for an attribute check. Add the attribute modifier to the total. The capacity does not give advantage dice, like on a save, because you are using the full "capacity" of the attribute in an attribute check, not just modifying it like on a save. Like a save, you don't earn XP for an attribute check. Attributes will be covered more in the next chapter, but for now, here are the most common uses.

Strength Feats A feat of strength is a non-combat action. Roll a Body attribute check and add your weight size. Your "Weight Lifting" passion grants advantages to the roll *and* adds its value to the total. Index the total on the Strength Feats table to determine how much force you were able to exert. The table has DLs for breaking rope, bending bars, bashing doors, and other feats. The GM decides the consequences of failure.

Brilliant successes do not normally apply. Rolls can be retried at +1 critical using another non-combat action and an Endurance point. Keep the higher roll until you roll a critical failure, and then you drop it.

Movement Speed Movement rules depend on what scale and method you are using. Overland daily travel, short combat runs between targets, and sprinting away from a chasing enemy are all different situations involving your Speed attribute and will be covered in the *THE ART OF COMBAT* and *INTO THE WILD* chapters.

Attribute Changes The related attribute for a skill may change depending on circumstances. When you use a skill to determine how much you know about the subject rather than how well you performed the task, the related attribute switches to Logic! A parry attempt is always an Agility-related roll. A check to find a suitable contact within an alliance should be Aura. Changing the related attribute changes which conditions apply to the roll, and may change what attribute advantages from your species apply.

NPC Reaction Rolls Your Appearance determines how others initially react to you, and your Aura determines how you react to them. Your Appearance attribute check is part of a *COMBINATION ROLL*, covered in *AFTER THE BATTLE*.



TENSION POOL

This optional rule was originally developed by “The Angry GM” of *THEANGRYGM.COM* and is included here in an abbreviated form. It is one method that you can use to add an extra level of tension and drama.



Each time a character does a time-consuming task, the GM loudly drops a die into a glass bowl in front of all the players. For example, in addition to the +1 critical for re-rolling a failed skill check (as per EXTENDED CRITICALS), the GM drops a die in the tension pool bowl, then asks what everyone else is doing while the would-be thief is fiddling with the lock.

If you commit a reckless action, such as yelling or bashing in doors, you roll the dice that are in the bowl. If it's time-consuming *and* reckless, add a die and then roll the pool. If multiple characters all do time-consuming tasks at once, you only add 1 die to the pool for the time spent. If you add a 6th die to the bowl, immediately roll the pool.

When the pool is rolled, the dice are not returned to the bowl and the bowl will be empty until new tension dice are added.

If any 1's are rolled, that indicates a complication has arisen. Complications can be that a wandering guard or monster has heard the commotion, a trap is sprung, some old rotted beam gives way, or whatever else the GM finds appropriate. The complication should be sealed to the degree and type of recklessness that was taken.

The GM may clear the pool at the end of each scene, or choose to keep the dice from scene to scene when running on montage. If being chased by the primary antagonist, who gets closer every moment, you would keep the tension dice until that danger has gone!

EXPERIENCE & LEARNING

When you use a skill with consequences for failure, and you are aware of the outcome, you earn 1 Experience Point (XP) in that skill at the end of the scene. This is per scene, not per roll of the dice.

In most situations, you know how successful you are and earn experience regardless of if you succeed or fail. We learn at least as much from our failures as our successes!

You do not earn experience in a scene for situations that have no consequences, such as practicing. Examples would be playing an instrument without an audience, practicing with a safety net, or just doing the daily cooking. Regular practice earns 1 XP per chapter if you have not otherwise gained XP in that skill this chapter.

If one player attempts something that might affect the outcome of the story, and fails, they get 1 XP as normal. The

BONUS XP: INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Showing Up for the session!	1
Clever but Futile Idea	1
Daring Action / Defending Another	1
Useful Idea / Deductive Insight	2
Exceptional Role-Playing	1+
Achieving a personal short-term goal	1
Endangering Self For Others	1 ^{*a}
Critical Plan that Saves Lives	2
Act Of Self Sacrifice ^b	3*
Critical plan that saved the group	3
Achieving a personal, long-term goal	3
Making everyone laugh	1
Make someone shoot liquid from nose	2

^aA (*) indicates you earn 1 light point as well as the Bonus XP.

^bYou just have to be willing, actual death not required

story has branched from the failure. If another player says, “I’ll try too!”, and fails at the same skill check, the storyline has not changed at all, and they do *not* get XP for the check! This is also a good time to drop a die into the TENSION POOL jar! If that player had succeeded where the other had failed, then both players would get experience for that skill this scene since both had branched the story.

If you are unaware of the outcome of a skill, you do not gain experience for rolling the check. For example, if you are using *Search* to look for traps, and find nothing, was the check successful or not? Maybe a trap is lurking un-sprung, or there is no trap to find. You gain no experience for the search unless you either find the trap, roll a critical failure and spring it on yourself, or someone else finds the trap by setting it off. A trap you didn’t find nearly killing you or a friend will certainly be a learning experience!

Similarly, a failed knowledge check doesn’t let you know more about something just by finding out you don’t know! However, the GM can award an experience point in the skill if you discover information about that topic. Books or a teacher are a good way to increase your knowledge on a subject.

1.6.1 Bonus Experience

Bonus XP may be placed into any skills you like at the end of the chapter. This lets you customize your character, sometimes called “milestone leveling”.

Players earn Bonus XP for various tasks summarized in the tables. When the GM gives out story awards for completing the chapter, you can then transfer that Bonus XP into your skills in any way you like. There is one provision. No skill can be raised more than a single level at a time. You

BONUS XP: STORY AWARDS

Major/Chapter Goal ^a	1*
Serious/Act Goal	2
Completing the Story ^b	4
Solving simple puzzle	1
Solving challenging puzzle	2
Solving a difficult puzzle	4

^aRewards for Acts, Chapters, and Story are not cumulative

^bThis is a “critical achievement”

BONUS XP: COMBAT AWARDS

Avoiding Violence	2
1 PC Dies ^{a,b}	2
2 PCs Die	4
3+ PCs Die	2/death

^aHitting 0 HP is close enough!

^bEvery party member gets the bonus, even the dead ones

need not leave a skill at the minimum for a level, just don't add enough to jump over a level.

Throughout the game, story and combat awards may be given to the whole group equally, while some other awards are individual. If a character dies with unspent Bonus XP, the player gets to keep those, and use them with their new character! Consider it reincarnation.

Your role-playing XP bonus doesn't require a method-actor style of play to be earned! You can earn this XP by prioritizing your intimacies, disposition, and passions over other matters in ways that further the drama in the story. Play to the character's inner motivations!

Additionally, a player may decide that another player has done something so critical or valuable that they may donate any number of their own Bonus XP to that player! This must be done in response to something they have done for you, and the effect is immediate. If you give away at least 6 XP at once, you earn 1 point of *light* (positive karma). If you give away 10 or more, index the XP on the EXPERIENCE TABLE to find how many light points you receive.

If you put Bonus XP into Darkness, roll an Integrity save against the total number of Bonus XP you put into Darkness as the save DL. Any failure is something like impostor syndrome, and a critical failure when you already have a G critical condition results in becoming an NPC.

Light Points

You earn points of light according to the asterisks on the Bonus XP tables. Each asterisk is a point.

You get 1 each chapter, and one for each scene where you risk yourself for the well-being of a stranger or enemy. You do not earn light for protecting someone if they list you as an intimacy. For example, if a powerful enemy falls to the ground, and instead of finishing them, you step back and let them get up to fight, you might get a point of light if that puts your life in danger, but only if they don't have you listed as an intimacy. You don't get Bonus XP for this, either. You also don't earn the light point for a scene if you don't accept a surrender!

Each time you earn a point of light, immediately decrement your darkness total by the same amount and record the light on your character sheet. This may cause your darkness level to decrease. If your darkness level decreases, you lose one passion of your choice from any darkness tree providing it is not a prerequisite for an existing passion. You can't drop a passion that came before an existing one in the same tree.

Light points align yourself to the will of the universe! These points can be spent to activate intimacies, and help you do the things you wish to do. The cost in light points is equal to the number of dice of advantage that the intimacy represents; 1, 2, or 4. Higher level intimacies can be activated at lower levels at reduced benefit and cost. You can have a maximum number of points of light stored equal to your Aura attribute *score*. If at your maximum, earning new light points will still decrement your Darkness (until it reaches 0), but will not increase the light total further.

Beginners Luck Starting the game with a new character is the start of an Act for you, so you always begin the game with 1 point of light, even if you begin in the middle of the story. This point does not decrement your Darkness level should you start with Darkness points.

1.6.2 Combat Experience

Basic Combat Training (BCT) is a combat-related skill used to keep a level head during combat and also grants access to a particular “style” of combat. BCT earns XP in any scene in which you fail a BCT check. You get *another* point if you critically fail, but do not get XP for brilliant success rolls.

Other Combat XP is based on the highest wound you took. If you only took minor wounds, you get no XP, and this scene counts as practice. A major wound grants 2 XP, serious 4 XP, and critical wounds 8 XP. No more than 1 XP may be placed into any skill in any given scene (except brilliant success XP), and every skill must have been used during the scene, even if it failed. If you don't have enough eligi-

ble combat skills, then the remaining XP is forfeit. Using a passion from a skill counts as the skill being used.

This XP is distributed between your weapon proficiencies, shield proficiency (if you used one), armor proficiency, combat styles, and ki powers that were used to influence the combat. XP is granted to the skills that caused the most influential successes and failures. If unsure which skill should get XP for combat, the player decides.

Combat skills may still earn XP for practice at the end of the chapter. If the player explicitly says they want to practice a particular skill to become better at it, then they should be allowed to do so.

1.6.3 Getting Trained

The game will start with you being fully trained in most of the skills you need. However, eventually someone wants to turn a *secondary* skill into *primary*, or turn a *primary* skill into *mastery*. For humans, *mastery* is typically the maximum capacity for all skills. So, how do you get trained when you are out on the adventuring trail?

Self Taught

The simplest method is to work hard, watch people when you can, and try to learn it on your own. The self taught method can only bring you up to a training level *equal* to your attribute capacity and can not be used for “restricted” skills, such as ki based abilities or new styles. So for humans, you can’t teach yourself how to become a master-of-craft and you can’t get a master’s degree without training. The GM *can* make exceptions.

If you have earned XP every chapter this Act and meet all prerequisites, then you can attempt to increase your training after completing an Act in the story. This is done with a Combination skill check. You can attempt to increase only 1 skill or occupation at a time.

You may apply Bonus XP before the training check, not after. You must have a minimum amount of experience in the skill equal to twice the skill’s cost. Roll a COMBINATION skill check of the skill itself + the new skill’s related attribute. The DL is found on the SKILL LEARNING DL TABLE on the facing page. The DL is higher for more difficult skills. Index the cost of the skill as XP on the EXPERIENCE TABLE on page 13 to find the modifier. For example, domestic skills are normally 8 XP, so the DL is 17 to learn (16 +1 for the 8 XP cost). On failure, you can keep practicing and try again in the next Act. On a critical failure, you can try again in 2 Acts.

You must attempt an action or skill test which has consequences for failure and would normally earn an experience point as the training test. This can be done during “downtime” or can be role-played during the session. You only earn XP for this check on *failure*. The GM should form some sort

of narrative for the check, perhaps this is a battle with your teacher for their final approval! On *success*, raise the training of the skill by one die and then divide the XP in the skill in half, rounding down. If you had 41 XP in the skill, you now have 20 XP. If you *failed* by only 1 or 2, then increment the training and give yourself the attribute bump as if you succeeded, but put an underline under the skill name for every point you missed the roll! When rolling skill checks, the number of underlines is added to your critical failure range. Each Chapter, you can attempt a new roll, at the new skill level, to learn the skill and get a better result to erase those underlines!

Some skills may change their name to reflect the new abilities and possibly the related attribute when upgrading your training. If the related attribute changes, you use the new skill’s related attribute to learn it.

BY THE NUMBERS

This may seem like a high XP cost, but your old rolls were 2 dice + 5 for 40XP, so results would be 7-17 with an average of 12, and a 28% critical rate, with 16XP needed to go to the next level. With the new skill, you are rolling 3 dice, +3 for the 20XP, that’s 6-21 with an average of 13.5, and a 0.5% critical rate, with only 5XP needed to get to the next level! Average rolls improved by 1.5, critical failure rates dropped way down and you’ll gain the next level very soon!

Increasing a skill’s training increases the related attribute score by 1. Mastery skills increase the attribute by 2, supernatural by 3, deific by 4.

When applying an Occupation, apply attribute bonuses after assigning skill XP. The attribute bonuses are already summarized in the Occupation packages for your character. You also gain similar bonuses to the attribute anytime a skill reaches an odd level that is *higher* than the related attribute. Some skills may grant additional bonuses listed in the skill description. See CHARACTER CREATION for more info.

Finding A Trainer

The availability of a trainer is left to the GM. A qualified teacher has the training you want to achieve, but not higher. They generally won’t bother with you if your capacity is more than just 1 die behind. To teach a style, they must know all 3 of the “2nd level” passions in the style.

A teacher that spends a chapter with you, allows you to make a training check at the end of the chapter instead of the end of the act. Their help and guidance allow you to add half of their XP in the skill to yours when making the training check.

Teaching requires 1 week for every experience point that the skill costs. If you roll higher than the target number, this

SKILL LEARNING DL TABLE

Target Training	DL ^a
Secondary ^b	8+
Primary (Serious Event)	16+
Mastery (Critical Event)	22+
Supernatural (Double Crit)	28+
Deific (Triple Crit) ^c	34+

^aIndex the skill cost on the XP Table to find the modifier.

^bThis is only for non-humans with a weak related attribute

^cSkills can't go above Deific. Who would train them?

reduces the time required proportionately. You may use the chart for FAST SKILLS in the TABLES Appendix to find the multiplier and multiply the number of weeks.

Trainers can lower the XP cost of an occupation you are working on by 1 for every week of regular practice and instruction, rather than once per chapter. If your trainer is a book (see below), then the book's skill replaces the trainer's skill. If your literacy improves, you can reread the book.

You learn an occupation by rolling a Combination check of the two attributes that get the most bonuses from the occupation (choose LOG over others on a tie, otherwise it's player choice) and pay the skill point cost with Bonus XP (see OCCUPATIONS in the next chapter). The difficulty level is 10+, so a 100 XP occupation is DL 17 using a Combination check of the two attributes. If you spend 25 weeks in training, your XP cost is down to 75 XP, and the DL is only 16. Time is a week per skill point as normal. Note that for a full 100 XP occupation, the rules would indicate that it took you about 2 years. Consider who who spent two years with when you create your character.

There is normally a rite of passage in a particular culture when a member of that society achieves a skill with a capacity higher than the related attribute, a master among his people. Occupations of 75 XP or more (before discounts) also usually involve a lesser rite of passage. Some GMs may wish to start the campaign with the rite of passage that granted the character's occupation. RITES OF PASSAGE are covered on page 104.



Reading Books

In some cases, you obviously can't train yourself through practice, like history. You can't practice a skill if you don't know if you are getting it wrong, so SELF TAUGHT methods aren't an option. You may not have a qualified trainer willing to work with you while you risk your life on an adventure, either. Luckily, there are books! This includes any form of knowledge stored through a language.

The book has a capacity and score/xp. You must be able to read the language the book was written in and have a *Literacy* training equal to or greater than the book's capacity to use the book. A book takes a number of hours to read according to the CAPACITY BONUS Table on page 37, using the book's training and level as if it were an attribute's. The DL to read it is equal to the Training DL, but with the capacity 1 less! A book that was [2] 20/3 would have a DL of

EXAMPLE!

You are learning Acrobatics, an Agility (AGL) based skill. Your Agility is [2]14/2. You have Acrobatics [1]40/5. It's a 12 point skill, so normally takes 12 weeks to learn, DL 18 (16 + 2). You would normally make this check at [2]+7; AGL[2]+Acrobatics [1]-1 = 2 dice; then add all modifiers (+7). You'll need to roll an 11 to make the roll. A trainer with Acrobatics [2]100/7 means adding another 50 XP, for 90/7. Now you only need to roll a 9! That increases the odds from 8% to 28%! If you make the roll, you now have Acrobatics [2]20/3 (because the XP is cut in half) and your AGL goes up by 1 point to 15/2.

11. Use your literacy + the given skill using a Combination check.

Roll the check after spending a number of hours equal to the book training. If you get a “close-enough” roll reading it, then you only understand about half the book. Treat it as if the book's skill had half as much XP, rounded down. On a failure, you waste the training capacity in hours, but may try again by starting over. On a critical failure, you need to gain a level in the skill first and a start a new chapter in your life before you try again.

On success, the book becomes your new trainer and teacher. The check itself determines the total time spend reading, as adjusted through the FAST SKILLS table since everyone reads at a different speed. So, a bit of reading on *Astrology* [2]16/3, takes an average of 6 hours to read and understand, adjusted by your roll.

Books about advanced topics (capacity 3 or higher), are useful as reference material. If you fail a knowledge or lore check and have the book with you, you can re-roll the check using the book, but looking it up can take a few minutes. If you keep a bunch of books around to look up the information, then you will need to keep a library. The *Research* skill will help you find information in libraries or online services using a MULTISTAGE TASK.

Writing Books

You write a book with your *Literacy* skill for technical topics and *Creative Writing* skill for songs, poems, and other stories. Stories using *Creative Writing* can convey *Lore* and are easier to be read (advantage to decipher). You must have *Literacy* at the training of the book to be written. It takes a week per XP to write and the maximum is your own literacy or book's skill, whichever is lower. You'll need to roll a Combination check of your literacy and skill to succeed according to the SKILL LEARNING DL TABLE. Add the score of the book being written to the cost of the skill itself when figuring the XP cost adjustment to the DL. On a failure, you can retry after a Chapter passes. On a critical failure, you start over from the beginning at the next Act.

Recording Effects

You can learn new “effects” from a written document. The document details the effect and science it applies to. In a fantasy setting, this will be a spell written in a spell-book or on a scroll. For other genres, this might represent a chemical formula with a documented process, an electrical schematic for a circuit, a computer program, or an engineering drawing. A document is specific to the science and you must have the same science as described by the document. The DL to learn the effect is the same as the DL to build the effect.

You need a language of at least the same capacity as the skill you are describing, and magic requires at least an mastery language skill to record.

The benefit is that instead of pairing your science skill with a technical skill, you can roll your science with *Literacy* in whatever language the document was written in (and add the technical science using Added XP if you have it). You don't need to understand the paired technical skill if you can read the document. If you fail, you can re-roll once you've gained a level in that literacy or the related science. Re-rolls to learn the effect from this document are at +1 critical for every retry, starting over each Act. Documents are *not* consumed by reading them, just as downloading a file from a server does not delete it.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Don't worry if you are still unsure how everything comes together. Most of the time, you just roll 2 dice and add the skill's level. At the end of the scene, bump those skills up by 1. Your GM will help with the rest. Now it's time to figure out where those skills come from. It's time to build a character! Ready? Turn the page!

