



Each player other than the GM has a unique character; these are the Protagonists of the story. The GM will lead them through the events of the story and play any other characters. Protagonists can choose to do whatever they want – the outcome of their actions will be decided by the dice and interpreted by the players.

When any character takes an action with an uncertain outcome, the GM decides which Ability the action matches. This is called an Ability test, like “Test Toughness”. The player who controls that character then rolls three six-sided dice, and usually removes one die according to their level in that Ability (as explained under ‘Action’ on page 3). The Protagonists and the GM compare the results to a number that the character is trying to equal or exceed (this number is specified by the adventure or decided by the GM), then incorporate the result into the story. Players should never describe the outcome they want, but instead the action the Protagonist wants to take.

The adventure is broken into Chapters, each of which takes a few hours to play.

PREPARATION

Before you begin, everyone should have a quick chat about the themes of the story, topics you’re not comfortable with, and the type of experience you would like to have. GM, you have a special responsibility here: it’s great to keep secrets that will upset the Protagonists, but if you think something might upset a *player* think about letting them know in advance. The content box at the start of your adventure book is a good rule of thumb, but read the adventure to the end and trust your judgement. Should you let players know something in advance, it’s important for everyone remember that the Protagonists do not have the same information.

Players should take a look through the Protagonists if they haven’t already done so, and choose the one they want to play as. Each player should choose a name for their Protagonist, writing it on their character sheet, and then take a moment to introduce them to the other players.

Make sure everyone has dice, a pen, and a comfortable seat, then begin.

THE GOLDEN RULE

Playing a game well does not mean winning, it means having a good game. **Make sure your fun is not at the expense of someone else’s fun.** Some stories can get intense, and while dark humour and dark plots can be great, they can also make people feel vulnerable, or give unpleasant people a chance to do harm.

This will be more fun if everyone gets into character, but the characters exist to serve the game, not the other way around. If you ever say to yourself, “this character wouldn’t do the thing that would move the story forward”, change the character. Maybe they are inspired to overcome their fear, or maybe they are starting to trust their companions better. Similarly, if you ever think, “I’m going to do this clever thing with the rules”, only do it if it doesn’t make sense for the character or the story.

THE PAUSE

If anyone at the table is feeling uncomfortable with any aspect of the story, a character’s actions, or the tone in the room during play, they should **raise their hand above their head to pause the game**. If that player wishes, they can make a request or statement for the game like “this is a bit too intense”, “I’d like a break”, or “I need this type of action to have negative consequences”. The players and the GM *must* respect that statement and incorporate it into the game.

If someone pauses the game, do not interrogate them. If they want to discuss it further, they will. People might be going through something they don’t feel comfortable talking about. **Don’t abuse the pause** – it may not matter to your group, or it may matter greatly to someone that they have this option, even if they never use it. If you don’t feel uncomfortable but think the game has strayed from the agreed tone, feel free to pause the game to point that out.



MEET YOUR PROTAGONISTS

RULES



All Protagonists have Drives, Abilities, and Gear. They also have numbers for Health and Resolve, as well as artwork and a space for their name. The character sheet describes what's important to the Protagonist and what they're capable of. It's up to you to decide who they are as people.

DRIVES

Drives are a list of the Protagonist's goals, needs and habits – the things they most want to achieve. Protagonists can ignore their Drives, but heeding them will improve their Resolve.

ABILITIES

Abilities indicate the Protagonist's aptitude in certain types of action. Each Ability has a level between 1 and 4. The higher the level, the better they are at those actions. There are four Abilities:

Use **Toughness** for any action that requires physical strength or durability: lift or push something heavy; grapple a bear; punch an attacker.

Use **Agility** for any action that requires physical speed or reflexes: sneak past someone; balance on a wall; dodge a falling tree; shoot something in the distance.

Use **Smarts** for any action that requires careful study or existing knowledge: remember old stories; work with machinery; resist mental attacks; cast spells.

Use **Wits** for any action that requires insight, instinct or quick reactions: interrogate a suspect; notice tracks; find secrets; flirt with a handsome stranger.

These are just examples of how each Ability can be used. When the Protagonists want to do something risky, the GM will decide which Ability applies. Having a low Ability level doesn't mean that a Protagonist can't achieve something amazing, it's just harder for them to do so.

Alongside the Abilities is a reminder of how each level affects dice rolls.

HEALTH

This is the amount of damage a Protagonist can take before they fall unconscious.

THE ENFORCER

NAME

BACKGROUND
A glib economy cop who got burned.
You were a well-respected agent on VGL, a freelance justice app created by the OCEC Corporation. The app allows users to report legal or societal infractions and empowers agents to apprehend subjects and bring them to district-specific processing centres for their punishment - in exchange for a tidy bonus for both the person who reported the crime and the agent who brought in the criminal. Things were going well - you had your own flat and a deposit down on a dog - but when you arrested the wrong person, their influential friends reconnected you to your poverty, you fell behind on your rent, and out of desperation (and a desire for a new start) you leveraged what little money you had with OCEC to secure a placement on-board Cane. There's nothing left in the Hiddenron Arcologies for you anymore, maybe you'll have more luck in Barstow Gate.

ABILITIES

TOUGHNESS 2
AGILITY 2
SMARTS 2
WITS 2

ABILITY REMINDER
Level 1: Remove the highest result
Level 2: Remove the middle result
Level 3: Remove the lowest result
Level 4: Keep all three results

HEALTH 20
RESOLVE 9

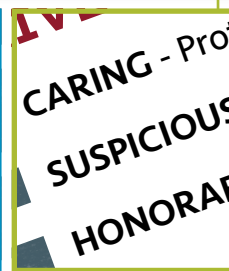
DRIVES
■ **CARING** - Protect vulnerable people.
■ **SUSPICIOUS** - Learn about the OCEC Corporation.
■ **HONOURABLE** - Gain the respect of those on board.

GEAR

BLACKOUT **USES** 1
"Everyone drinks it in the Arcologies!"
Reduce your Wits by 1 level until the end of the Chapter. Gain 5 Resolve. This can temporarily increase your Resolve above its starting value.

VISION JACKS **USES** 5
Great-value physical augmentations. May cause crimes and headaches.
Spend 2 Health to increase your Wits or Agility by 1 level for your next roll.

POCKETS



Players will use this box to keep track of their character's remaining Health.

RESOLVE

This is the amount of willpower the Protagonist has. It can be spent to improve their Abilities, and replenished by following their Drives. Players will use this box to keep track of their character's remaining Resolve.

GEAR

Gear is a list of everything a Protagonist has with them at the start of the story. There are two types: Gear which can just be used, and Gear which requires a roll of the dice. If a piece of Gear requires a roll it will explain what happens if the roll succeeds or fails. If not it will explain how it can be used.

Some Gear will not have a specific action – it is up to the imagination of the players to decide if and how that piece of Gear can be used. Even Gear which has a description can sometimes be used differently, if it makes sense for the story.

Some Gear can only be used a limited number of times. When this Gear is used, mark off one of the boxes underneath the description. **If a piece of Gear with limited uses requires a roll, then the box is marked whether or not the roll is successful.** When all the boxes are marked, the Gear cannot be used again.

Protagonists will gain and lose Gear during the story, and can even swap it, but Gear which is marked as "Innate" cannot be used by anyone else. If someone gains or loses Gear, the player should update their character sheet.

Each Protagonist has a maximum amount of Gear they can carry, as indicated on their character sheet. If something is small enough to fit into a pocket, it does not take up a slot.

OTHER CHARACTERS

Characters controlled by the GM will also have Ability levels and Health. Important characters might have their own Gear, Resolve, or special abilities. These will be listed in the GM's adventure booklet.



When a character takes an action with an uncertain outcome, that player **rolls all three dice**. After rolling, one die will usually be removed. The values on the remaining dice are then added together. This result is compared to a target number that the character needs to beat. An action can only take place when it is physically possible – you can't shoot at something if you have no weapon.

Each Ability has a number from 1 to 4:

- 1: Remove the die with the highest value.
- 2: Remove the die with the middle value.
- 3: Remove the die with the lowest value.
- 4: Remove none, keep all three dice.

If two or more dice with the same value meet the above criteria, you only need remove one of them. Whether the action succeeds or fails, there must be a consequence after the dice are rolled. **Avoid unnecessary rolls if an action has no positive or negative consequence** – just describe what happens.

point. Adjustments could be made because of luck, clever planning, or for any other reason. If the Protagonist is affected by such circumstances, the GM can add or remove 1 or 2 to their Ability level. If the world of the story is affected, they may adjust the target difficulty up or down by 1, 2 or 3. A level can never be lower than 1 or higher than 4.

It's been raining heavily, so the GM increases the difficulty of trying to balance on a wall by 2.

Cris read the Baronesses' diary earlier, and is now trying to convince her that they should run away together. The GM agrees that the diary provided insight into the Baronesses' desires, and tells Cris to add one to her Wits level for the roll.

SUPPORT

Protagonists can add their support to another character's roll if it makes sense to do so, like helping them push a car. In those cases, **add 1 to the acting character's Ability level for each supporting character**. The supporting characters will also be affected by any negative consequences if the roll fails.

PUSHING YOUR RESOLVE

Protagonists can push themselves harder when something is very important to them. Before each roll a Protagonist can spend Resolve to increase their Ability level for that roll only. Increase the level by 1 for each Resolve spent.

If two or more Protagonists are involved in a roll they must decide individually whether they want to push their Resolve (and by how much) before anyone rolls any dice.

GAINING RESOLVE

When a Protagonist takes a major action in pursuit of one of their Drives, tick that Drive and gain 1 Resolve if the action succeeds, or 2 Resolve if it fails. Each Drive can be used in this way once per Chapter. **A Protagonist's Resolve can never go above its starting number.**

LAST STAND

Once per game, a Protagonist can reduce their Resolve to zero before a roll. In this instance, do not roll the dice, but count the result as 13. This will put the character in Serious Danger (see overleaf) so only use a Last Stand when it really counts.

EXAMPLE

If the Protagonists have unlimited time to search a room for clues, they don't have to roll Wits. If they are under time pressure to find something, then they roll and either succeed or fail to find it in time.

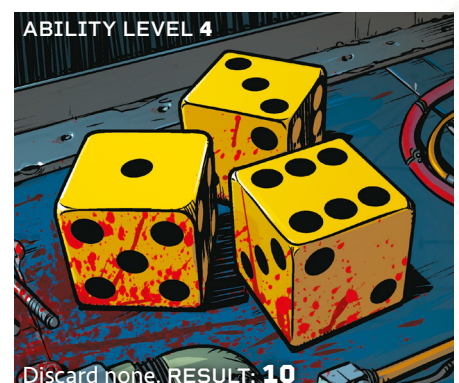
Each action has a target difficulty, usually between 6 and 10. If this is not listed in the adventure booklet, the GM will have to choose an number:

- 6 is doable.
- 8 is tricky.
- 10 is hard.
- 12 is extremely difficult.

A character succeeds in a roll if their result equals or exceeds the target.

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

Sometimes circumstances will work for or against the Protagonists. When this happens the difficulty of the action can be adjusted. **Adjustments to rolls are one of the most important parts of the game.** Adjustments made before a roll are at the discretion of the GM, based on what has happened up to that



CONFLICT

RULES



Conflict takes many forms, from winning a fistfight to outwitting a rival. When two or more characters are in conflict they will simultaneously roll to take an Action – whoever gets the highest result succeeds. **This is called a contest. In the case of a tie, a character trying to change something beats a character trying to prevent change.**

An elf is trying to hold a door closed and an orc is trying to open it. They both roll a 7 on Toughness and the door bursts open.

If both characters are trying to change something, the Protagonist wins. If two Protagonists are in conflict with one another, and both are changing something, each tied character should roll one die until someone gets a higher result.

ROUNDS

If multiple people are trying to act at the same time (such as in a race or a brawl), a round system applies. **At the start of the conflict, all characters should roll Wits, and then take turns from the highest to lowest result.** In the case of ties, the players get to choose who goes first. If no agreement can be reached, those players should roll one die each as a tie-breaker. In any round, each character will have a turn. On their turn each character can take up to two actions, such as moving, attacking or using Gear, whether or not it requires a die roll. When all characters have had a turn (even if a character did nothing) another round can begin if needed, keeping the previous order.

ATTACKS

An attack is when one character takes an action in order to harm another character.

During attacks, both will roll using the same Ability:

Toughness for close-quarters fighting,

Agility for long-range fighting,

Smarts for magical or psychic fighting,

Wits for battles of charm or intelligence.

When attacking it does not matter which character is taking the action – either character can potentially get hurt. When making an attack, **subtract the lower result from the higher result.** The character who rolled the lower result loses that much Health. If there is a tie, both characters lose 1 Health.

This always applies to Toughness attacks, and applies to other types of attack when appropriate. For example if you are making a ranged attack against an unarmed opponent, they avoid damage if they have a higher roll, but do not deal damage back.

If a Protagonist does not want to harm another character, but wants to do something special like knock something out of their hand or confuse them, they should let the GM know before the roll. The GM will decide if that's possible, then roll a contest of whichever ability applies without dealing damage.

SERIOUS DANGER

If a Protagonist's Health or Resolve is reduced to zero, they fall unconscious and cannot take any other actions until another character revives them. If this happens during a round of conflict, the unconscious Protagonist loses 1 Health or Resolve (whichever is remaining) on each of their turns, until another character takes a turn to stabilize them. At this point, they no longer lose Health or Resolve, but they

cannot act until they are revived at the end of the conflict.

A character dies if their Health and Resolve both reach zero. If a player's Protagonist dies, that player should start the next Chapter with a new character.

It is only possible to revive an unconscious character after a conflict has ended. The revived character wakes up and their Health or Resolve (whichever was at zero) returns to one. No roll is needed to stabilize or revive a character.

MOVEMENT

Movement is abstracted in this game, and common sense regarding distances should be applied. In rounds of conflict, however, relative distance may become important. In conflict rounds, the distance from a character or object can be broken down as follows:

Close – within touching distance.

Near – in the same room.

Far – within shouting distance.

Distant – any further than that.

Unless the GM says otherwise, a character can move from 'close' to 'near' or 'near' to 'far' within a single round, and can move twice in a single round instead of taking another action.

The ground is covered in slime, so characters must spend an action to get loose before moving.

Big Dave has lost his sword. He runs to grab it in one motion. The GM allows it as a single action if he passes an Agility test.

Elijah wants to protect the faraway treasure, so moves twice instead of taking another action.

ENDING THE CHAPTER

RULES



At the end of each Chapter, the players should discuss what happened and take some time to prepare the Protagonists for the next Chapter.

REST

Reset each Protagonist's Drives, as well as their Health and Resolve if specified. Any Gear which can be reset, repaired or reloaded, regains its available uses.

GROWTH

The most interesting characters grow and change. If a Protagonist's outlook on the world has changed due to the events of the Chapter, the players should discuss whether or not that change should be reflected by **adding to, adjusting or replacing some of their Drives.** Players should note any agreed changes on their character sheets.

PREPARATION

The GM should keep track of any major events that happened in this Chapter. **When planning for the next Chapter, they should try to incorporate those events** alongside, or instead of, the specified material.

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