HOW TO PLAY

Overview

One player takes on the role of **Game Master (GM)** while each other player plays a unique **Protagonist**. The GM leads the Protagonists through the events of the story and plays any **Non-Protagonist Characters (NPCs)** that appear. The Protagonists take actions in response to the story, with the outcomes determined by dice rolls.

The Core Mechanic

When a Protagonist takes an action with an uncertain outcome, they make an **Ability Test** (explained in detail later in this booklet) to see if they succeed or fail. To perform a Test:

- The GM sets a target **Difficulty**
- Roll three six-sided dice (d6) and remove one according to the tested Ability's score
- Compare the total shown on the remaining d6 to the Difficulty
- If the total is equal to or higher than the Difficulty number, the Protagonist succeeds. If it is lower, the Protagonist fails.

Preparation

Before play begins, it is good practice for all players to discuss the themes of the story, any topics they are uncomfortable with, and the type of experience the group would like to have. The GM should bear in mind that, while it can be fun to keep secrets that will upset the Protagonists, if something might upset a *player* then it is best to discuss it with them in advance. While some issues have a content box at the start of the Adventure booklet, which is a good rule of thumb, the GM should read the Adventure booklet to the end and use their judgement. Remember that the Protagonists do not have any of the advance information given to the players at this stage.

Each player other than the GM then chooses a Protagonist, taking their character sheet and giving them a name, and introduces them to the other players.

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

The Golden Rule

Adventure is a collaborative experience, not a competition – fun comes first. *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 exciting for some groups, they can also make people feel vulnerable or give unpleasant people a chance to do harm.

The game is more fun if everyone gets into character. However, the characters exist to serve the game, not the other way around. If a character is an impediment to the story, change the character – maybe they are inspired to overcome their fear, or maybe they start to trust their companions more. Similarly, prioritise playing the characters as true to themselves and to the story over being clever with the rules.

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, such as "this is a bit too intense", "I'd like a break", or "I need this type of action to have negative consequences". The other 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.

Do not abuse the pause. It may matter greatly to someone that they have this option, even if they never use it. If you don't feel uncomfortable but do think that the game has strayed from the agreed tone, feel free to pause the game to point that out.

Protagonists

Each Protagonist has a character sheet that lists their **Abilities**, **Health**, **Resolve**, **Drives**, and **Gear**. The character sheet also has artwork depicting the Protagonist and space for their player to give them a name. Who the Protagonist is as a person is up to their player.

Abilities

Abilities represent a Protagonist's aptitude for certain types of action. Each Ability has a score between 1 and 4. The higher the score, the better the Protagonist is at those actions. There are four Abilities:

Toughness represents physical strength and durability: lift or push something heavy; grapple a bear; punch a foe.

Agility represents physical speed and reflexes: sneak past someone; balance on a wall; dodge a falling tree; shoot something in the distance.

Smarts represents intellect and learned knowledge: remember old stories; work with machinery; resist mental attacks; use magic.

Wits represents insight, instinct, and quick thinking: interrogate a suspect; notice tracks; find secrets; flirt with a stranger.

When a Protagonist wants to do something risky, the GM decides which Ability applies. A low Ability score doesn't mean that a Protagonist can't achieve something; it's just harder for them to do so.

Health

Health shows how much **Damage** a Protagonist can take before they fall unconscious.

Resolve

Resolve represents a Protagonist's willpower. It can be spent to improve their Abilities and is replenished by following their Drives.

Drives

Drives are a Protagonist's goals, needs, and habits. Heeding a Protagonist's Drives will improve their Resolve.

Gear

Gear is a list of everything a Protagonist carries with them.

Some Gear can be used at will, while other Gear requires a dice roll when it is used. Any requirements for using Gear are listed in its description.

Not all Gear comes with a specific action listed – it is up to the players to decide how to use it in the context of the story. Remember that *any* Gear can be used creatively, as the story and GM allow.

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 have been marked, the Gear cannot be used again.

Protagonists can gain and lose Gear during the story and can even swap it between them. If a Protagonist gains or loses Gear, the player should update their character sheet.

Non-Protagonist Characters

All NPCs have Ability scores and Health. Some important NPCs might also have their own Gear, Resolve, or special abilities.

Ability Tests

When a character takes an action with an uncertain outcome, that player makes an Ability Test by rolling three d6. After rolling, remove one die as per that character's Ability score, then add together the values on the remaining dice. This result is compared to a target Difficulty set by the GM. A character can only take an action if it is physically possible – they can't shoot at something if they have no weapon.

Each Ability has a score from 1 to 4:

1: Remove the d6 with the highest value

2: Remove the d6 with the middle value

3: Remove the d6 with the lowest value

4: Do not remove a d6; keep all three dice.

If two d6 show the same number, one of the pair counts as the middle value. Only ever remove one d6 from the roll, even if duplicate numbers are rolled.

Whether the Test succeeds or fails, there must be a consequence after the dice are rolled. *Avoid Tests if an action has no positive or negative consequence* – just describe what happens.

Each Ability Test has a target Difficulty, usually between 6 and 10. When an Ability Test is called for, the Difficulty will be either listed in brackets or set by the GM according to the following scale:

6 is a simple Test

8 is a tricky Test

10 is a difficult Test

12 is an extreme Test.

A character succeeds a Test if their result equals or exceeds the Difficulty.

Adjusting Difficulty

Sometimes circumstances will work for or against a character. When this happens, the Difficulty of the Test can be adjusted. *Adjustments to Tests are one of the most important parts of the game.* Adjustments made before a Test are at the discretion of the GM, based on what has happened up to that point. Adjustments can be made because of luck, clever planning, or any other reason. If the circumstances affect a character, the GM adjusts their Ability score up or down by 1 or 2. If the world of the story is affected, the GM adjusts the Difficulty up or down by 1, 2, or 3. An Ability score can never be lower than 1 or higher than 4.

Support

Protagonists can **Support** another character's Test if it makes sense to do so, such as by helping them push a wagon. In those cases, add 1 to the acting character's Ability score for each supporting Protagonist. The supporting Protagonists will also be affected by any negative consequences if the Test fails.

Pushing Resolve

Protagonists can push themselves harder when something is very important to them. Before each Test, a Protagonist can spend Resolve to increase their Ability score by 1 per Resolve for that Test.

If two or more Protagonists are involved in a Test, 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, mark that Drive and gain 1 Resolve if they succeed or 2 Resolve if they fail. A Protagonist can mark each of their Drives only once per Chapter. A Protagonist's Resolve can never go above its starting value.

Last Stand

Once per game, a Protagonist can perform a **Last Stand** before a Test, reducing their Resolve to 0 and automatically treating the Test result as a 13. This will put the character in **Serious Danger**, so only use a Last Stand when it really counts.

ABILITY LEVEL 1	
+ + ✗ = 4	
REMOVE HIGHEST VALUE	

ABILITY LEVEL 2	
+ ✗ + = 7	
REMOVE MIDDLE VALUE	

ABILITY LEVEL 3	
✗ + + = 9	
REMOVE LOWEST VALUE	

ABILITY LEVEL 4	
+ + = 10	
KEEP ALL DICE	

CONFLICT

Conflicts take many forms, from fistfights to battles of wits. When two or more characters are in opposition, they simultaneously make an Ability Test – whoever gets the highest result succeeds.

In the case of a tie, a character trying to change something beats a character trying to prevent change.

If both characters are trying to change something, the Protagonist wins. If two Protagonists are in a Conflict with one another, and both are trying to change something, each tied character rolls one d6 until someone gets a higher result.

Rounds

If multiple characters 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 make a Wits Test and then take turns from the highest to the lowest result. In the case of ties, the players get to choose who goes first. If no agreement can be reached, those players each roll one d6 as a tiebreaker, with the highest result going first.

During each round, all characters involved in the Conflict take a single turn. On their turn, each character can take up to two different actions, such as moving, making an **Attack**, or using Gear, whether or not it requires a Test. When all characters have had a turn (even if a character did nothing) another round can begin if needed, continuing in the same order.

Attacks

An Attack is a Conflict where one character takes an action in order to harm another character. During an Attack, both characters make a Test 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.

During a Toughness Attack, it does not matter which character initiated it – either character can potentially get hurt. When making an Attack, *subtract the lower Test result from the higher Test result*. The character who rolled the lower Test result takes that much Damage. If there is a tie, both characters take 1 Damage. Also note that some Gear may inflict additional Damage if that character wins the Conflict. Damage from Gear is *not* added on a tie.

For other Attacks, assign Damage only if appropriate. For example, if a character makes a ranged Attack against an unarmed opponent and the target has the higher Test result, they avoid Damage but do not deal Damage back.

If a Protagonist wants to do something like disarming or confusing an opponent instead of harming them, they should let the GM know before making a Test. The GM will decide if that's possible, then set a Conflict of whichever Ability applies without dealing Damage.

Serious Danger

If a Protagonist's Health or Resolve is reduced to 0, they fall unconscious and cannot take actions until another character revives them. If this happens during a Conflict, the unconscious Protagonist loses 1 Health or Resolve (whichever is remaining) on each of their turns until another character takes an action to stabilise them. At this point, they no longer lose Health or Resolve, but they cannot act until they are revived.

If a character's Health and Resolve both reach 0, they die. If a Protagonist dies, their player chooses a new Protagonist to play in the next Chapter.

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 0) returns to 1. Stabilising or reviving a character does not require a Test.

Movement

Movement is treated as abstract, with distance arbitrated by common sense. However, during a Conflict, relative distance may become important. In Conflict rounds, the distance from one character or object to another can be broken down as follows:

- **Close** – within touching distance
- **Near** – in the same room
- **Far** – within shouting distance
- **Distant** – beyond shouting distance.

A character can move from 'close' to 'near' or 'near' to 'far' within a single round, and they can move twice in a single round instead of taking another action.

ENDING A CHAPTER

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

Rest

Clear any marks from each Protagonist's Drives, as well as their Health and Resolve if specified in the Special Rules booklet. Any Gear that can be reset, repaired, or reloaded regains its available uses.

Growth

If a Protagonist's outlook on the world has changed due to the events of a Chapter, discuss whether or not that change should be reflected by adding to, adjusting, or replacing some of their Drives. Note any agreed changes on the Protagonist's character sheet.

Preparation

Make a note of any major events that happened during this Chapter. When planning for the next Chapter, the GM should try to incorporate those events alongside, or instead of, the specified material.