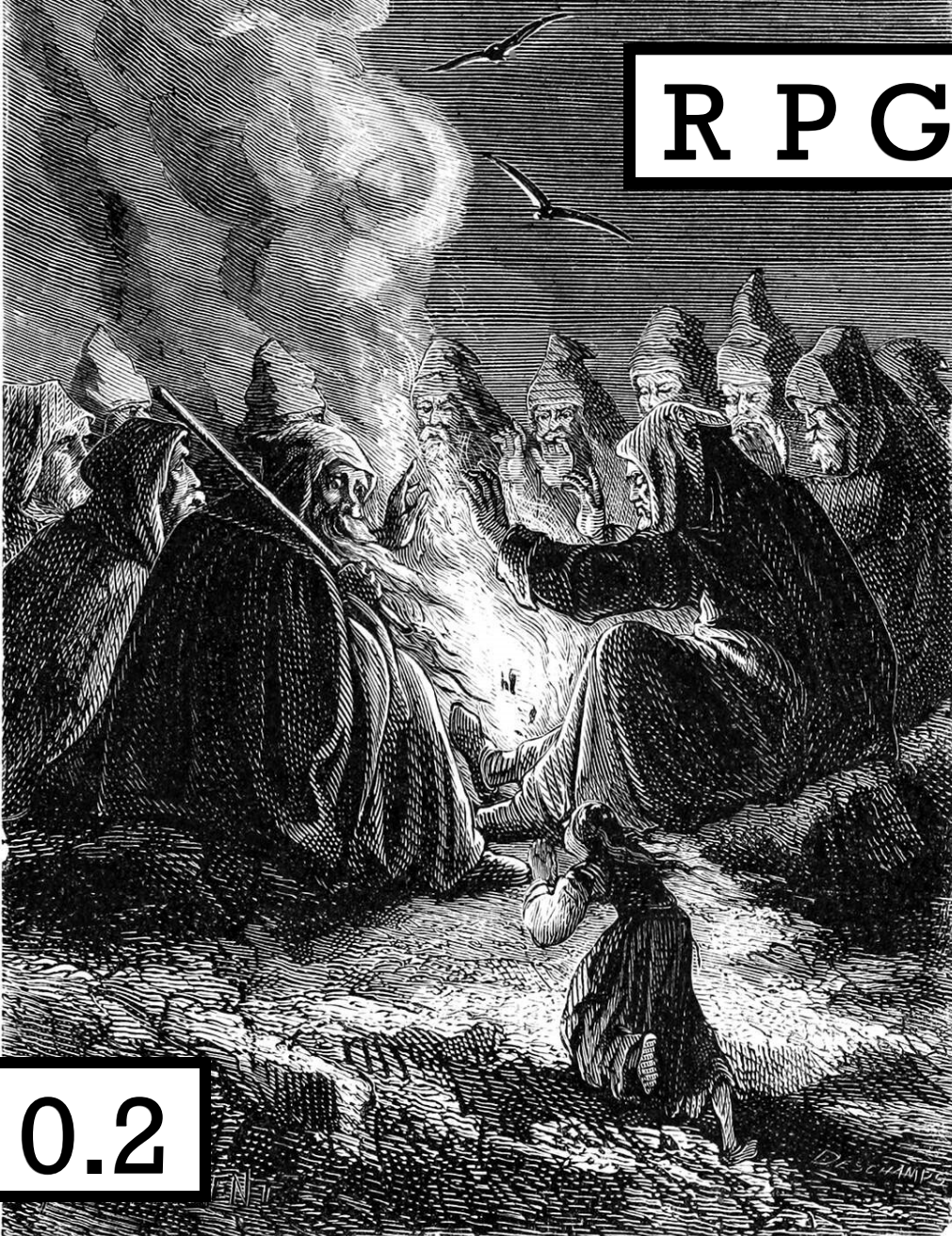


HOT

CIRCLE

RPG



0.2

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CAMPAIGN CREATION

Hot Circle RPG is a long format game that is played for an extended campaign made up of many sessions. A campaign is a single story with a specific genre, setting, and set of characters in a challenging and constantly changing situation. A session is a single game running from 2-4 hours that continues the story of the characters in a serial format.

Before the story commences in the first session, the group comes together for a “session zero” where they plan what the campaign will be and who the characters are.

First the group create the campaign together using this section. They decide what genre and style of story it will emulate, what settings make up the background, which factions hold power in those settings, and a situation that generates faction conflict resulting in a dramatic landscape to navigate.

After creating the campaign, the group decide on one person to be the gamemaster, whilst the others in the group are players. The players are responsible for each creating and controlling a single protagonist player character that shares the spotlight with the others in a combined story. This is covered in the Creating Characters section.

The gamemaster is an asymmetrical player role responsible for refereeing the game, setting the scenes, playing the supporting cast of non-player characters, and piling on obstacles and complications that challenge the player characters. This is covered in the Running the Game section.

GENRE

The first decision for a campaign is genre and style. The intention of a campaign is not to simulate reality, but to create a collaborative improvised story that emulates a specific genre and style. The group should agree on a genre they want to spend significant time on.

Discuss the genre: What does a story in that genre look and feel like? What specific style of story in that genre does the group enjoy? Does that style focus on larger than life characters in one action scene after the next? Morally grey characters in a web of subterfuge and betrayal? Naturalistic characters in a soap opera of love triangles and family?

Write down a genre and style for the campaign then move on to settings.

SETTINGS

Make a list of character types that normally appear in the genre being used. Then group them into similar social backgrounds, social classes, cultures, or environments. These are referred to as *Settings*.

A good setting is one that also has in-world meaning to the characters as a way to classify people. One that many characters may grow up and remain within for their whole life. Try to come up with four to six broad but distinct settings that can cover the majority of character types between them and write them down.

FACTIONS

For each setting, think of who within that setting holds power. Make a list of the kind of powerful people and organizations that might exist in each setting. What types of powerful entities are commonly seen in this genre and style of story? These are referred to as *Factions*.

Try to come up with the 1 or 2 most powerful or genre-specific factions that hold power in each setting and write them down. Classify each as minor or major powers, with each setting having at most one major power.

SITUATION

Create a simple relationship map for the factions: For each faction decide on one other faction they cooperate with and another they compete with. If any faction relationships are obvious from the context or genre make a note of them, otherwise decide them randomly.

Write down each faction name and put them in a bag and then for each faction take out one name to find a competing faction and another to find a cooperating faction. Pick again if the faction doesn't make sense.

Now look at the relationship map. Try to identify any tensions, inconsistencies, or unlikely results. Is one faction cooperating with a group that cooperates with their competitor? This suggests conflict. If the relationship map is fairly stable, think of an event that flips one relationship from cooperate to compete, or turns a major faction minor. What balance does this disrupt? How will this effect the other factions?

Pick the conflict or tension the group finds most interesting to explore and turn it into a full blown *Situation* affecting several factions. This then serves as the conflict-producing theme the campaign focuses on.

CHARACTER CREATION

The game is entirely focused on characters. It is the job of each player to push their character through obstacles and consequences towards their beliefs, instincts, and traits. It is the job of the gamemaster to use other characters as challenge and conflict along the way. The rules of the game define properties for the characters to mediate this struggle.

Characters can have *Beliefs*, *Instincts*, *Traits*, *Conditions*, *Lifepaths*, *Assets* and *Artha* defined. These properties detail how a character differs from average. Every rule using these properties has a default average, so a perfectly average character is simply one with no properties defined.

Player characters will have all of these properties defined. Important non-player characters will have most of these properties defined. The majority of non-player characters may have only a single lifepath, trait, or belief defined. A random bystander would have none of these properties defined and hence be totally average as far as the rules are concerned.

BELIEFS

Beliefs are the core of each character and the thing that makes them a protagonist. A character always has three beliefs. Each belief is made up of a *Stance* and a *Goal*.

"I believe [stance] so I must [goal]."

A stance is a short freeform statement on how the character views the world, and what they care about enough to risk themselves. When a stance is confronted by a situation that challenges it, the result is a goal. It is an important task the character is driven by their belief to achieve. The goal may be short or long term, completed in one session or many, and the reward for achieving it will scale with this difficulty.

At the start of a new campaign, the group decides on a core conflict-producing *Situation* to focus on. For the game to work, each player needs to create a character that "buys in" to this situation heavily. The simplest way to ensure this is to give the character beliefs that have a stance at conflict with the situation, and a goal to change it. Have the character take sides.

Beliefs should be set before the first session, and then again at the end of every session. They may be reused or replaced as desired by the player but there must be always be three.

The stance part of a belief may change only slowly in the campaign, reflecting how the core of a character grows and is changed by events. When this happens the player is rewarded for showing character growth.

Goals can be changed each session however as new goals lead on from the success or consequences of the last. They may be resolved in which case the player is rewarded, or the situation may change and the goal need to be modified or abandoned.

INSTINCTS

Instincts allow the player to define automatic behavior that shows who their character is and how they react to the world when the pressure is on. What hard lessons can the character never forget? What does the character have a compulsion to do? These repetitive and distinctive behaviours help illustrate the character through showing not telling.

Instincts have one of these forms:

"I always [instinct]."

"I never [instinct]."

"When [trigger] then I [instinct]."

A character always has three instincts. They are freeform rules specifically about the character that may override other rules in the game. If the player asserts the instinct was followed, and the trigger is met, then it was. An instinct however must have a restricted scope, it cannot be so powerful that it replaces a versus obstacle test.

A good instinct should get the character out of trouble in some cases, and into trouble in others. The gamemaster will use this to tempt the character into complicating scenes by following or ignoring their instincts.

Instincts should be set before the first session, and then again at the end of every session. Instincts should change slowly. Changing an instinct is an effective way to show a character has changed at some core level, and the player is rewarded when this happens. Instincts may be reused or replaced as desired by the player but there must be always be three.

TRAITS

Traits are freeform adjectives that describe the character. If the character was introduced in a single paragraph, the adjectives would be traits (whilst the nouns would be lifepaths). As the characters make up an ensemble cast, traits are useful to tell each character apart. They are big distinctive signatures that remain stable and illustrate who the character is through personality, behavior, and appearance.

“People call me [trait].”

Traits act as roleplaying guides. If it is unclear what a character would do, or how they would be perceived in a scene, looking at their traits should help. A good trait will help sometimes and hinder or complicate others, and a player is rewarded for these complications.

A character should start the first session with three traits defined. Traits change very slowly. Unlike beliefs and instincts they cannot be reset at the end of the session, but only through a trait vote held after a significant milestone in the campaign. This trait vote will add or replace traits and the final number of traits is not restricted to three.

CONDITIONS

Conditions are simply temporary traits. They are not a core part of the character like a permanent trait, but a reaction or consequence to some external event. They are freeform adjectives that describe the current mood or state of the character. A condition may be minor or major and this determines how long it will affect the character, and how hard it is to clear.

A character may become tired, angry, hungry, or injured for example as a consequence applied by the gamemaster. A condition does not have to be negative however. A player may choose to apply a voluntary condition to their character at the end of a session based on how things went. A character may end up happy, excited, or hopeful after a session and take on a condition to show this.

Characters start the first session with no conditions, and can set or change a single voluntary condition at the end of each session. Conditions set by the gamemaster persist across sessions until cleared by using the condition to hinder obstacle tests (see *Artha* section).

LIFEPATHS

Lifepaths are freeform roles used to describe the life story of a character from birth. Each lifepath represents 5-10 years of human experience (or equivalent) and suggests what culture, skills, knowledge, property, and contacts a character has from that time.

Lifepaths have a lot of power in the game. Almost every mechanical and contextual decision about the character will involve lifepaths, and so they should be thought out carefully.

Each lifepath exists inside one of the *Settings* decided in Campaign Generation. The first lifepath represents childhood and is named for the setting as [setting]-born. The second lifepath represents their role in youth, the third in apprenticeship, the fourth as journeyman, the fifth as master, and the sixth as elder. This is only a rough guide, someone with a sheltered life will have fewer lifepaths, and someone well travelled or talented will have more.

Each lifepath following on from the first must exist inside the same setting as the last unless the gamemaster agrees it can act as a bridge into an additional setting. The player can then choose subsequent lifepaths in the new setting.

The gamemaster may also introduce requirements for rare or powerful lifepaths. If a character ends up as a leader for example, they should have lifepaths that show their rise to power.

If the player has a strong vision of the character they should use lifepaths to distill as much of that vision onto the character sheet as possible. Choose a final destination lifepath, and an origin lifepath, and then fill in the blanks between them including any bridges or requirements needed.

Lifepaths start with a rating of 3D6. A player can choose a single lifepath twice to increase it's rating to 4D6, with a higher lifepath rating succeeding more often. Characters start the first session with a number of lifepaths decided by the gamemaster, and this will have a strong influence on the power level and style of the campaign.

A two lifepath campaign focuses on rank amateurs and can be quite challenging. A three lifepath campaign is a good starting point and features young characters full of promise. A four lifepath campaign is also a good start, where the characters will be capable professionals. A five or six lifepath campaign can also be challenging, featuring powerful characters with much more agency in the story.

ASSETS

Assets are concrete examples of the possibilities suggested by character lifepaths. A lifepath is a cliché that suggests what a character is likely to have, know, and be able to do. The game has rules to turn this likelihood into a concrete asset the character has access to in a scene.

Assets can be temporary or permanent. Temporary assets are Gear, Contacts, Subjects, and Focuses. They are available temporarily for a scene (or a set of directly continuous scenes), and once established become more likely to be available again in future scenes. Corresponding permanent assets are Special Items, Relationships, Wises, and Skills. Special Items and Relationships are always available for a scene. And Wises and Skills permanently improve effectiveness.

Gear is wealth, possessions, and property the character has access to, and can be upgraded to a special item. Contacts are friends and acquaintances, who can become relationships. Subjects are passive areas of character knowledge, which can be upgraded to Wises. Focuses are active capabilities, which can be upgraded to Skills.

Characters start the first session with no temporary assets, one Wise or Skill in each lifepath, and one Special Item or Relationship in a single lifepath.

ARTHA

Characters start a campaign with one fate point and one persona point.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER

Name: Casper Age: 12 Pronouns: He/Him Fate: 1 Persona: 1

Description: A young ghost with bright eyes, big smile, and no legs.

Beliefs:

- The ghostly trio are up to no good, I will discover their latest plan.
- Friends are everything, I will help Wendy find her missing broom.
- Dreams have meaning, I will find out who this Richie Rich I dream is.

Instincts:

- Never scare someone.
- If I meet someone, try to be their friend.
- Always help a friend.

Traits:

- Ghostly
- Friendly
- Cute

Setting:

Human World
Enchanted Forest

Lifepath:

Human-Born
Runaway

Rating:

3D6
3D6

Assets:

Wises: Human-wise
Relationships: Wendy
Skills: Charm-skill

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OBSTACLE TEST

When a player character reaches the point in a scene where an obstacle must be confronted, the gamemaster should call for an *Obstacle Test*. The obstacle may be the fictional situation, requiring an *Independent Obstacle Test*, or the opposition of another character, requiring a *Versus Obstacle Test*.

The player must provide a clear *Intent* for the character, and a clear *Task* that will achieve the intent. Part of the intent should be to establish how long the task will take to perform. In an independent test the gamemaster must provide a clear *Consequence* that is at risk of occurring. In a versus test the opponent could be a player or gamemaster character. Each side states an intent and task, and offers a clear *Compromise*. The consequence is the opponent's intent.

Roll the Dice or Make a Ruling: If there is an intent, task, and a meaningful consequence, then perform the test and let the result stand. If there is no achievable intent, no valid task, or no interesting consequence, the gamemaster should make a ruling and either grant the intent or apply the consequence without a test.

The test is decided by comparing a task roll and an obstacle roll. If the test passes the intent is achieved. Otherwise the consequence occurs. In a versus test a compromise may occur instead. In any case the story progresses.

Fail Forward: If a test fails then the situation should evolve. It is not enough to say that the intent does not happen. There must be a meaningful consequence.

If a test fails the player cannot simply attempt the same task again. If a test passes the gamemaster cannot introduce the same obstacle again. A new test may have a similar intent, but it may not use the same task to achieve it. Each test is only made once and the results stand for the rest of the game. The test must change the fictional situation, cause or solve problems, and the game must move on.

Let It Ride: Tests are significant. Don't invalidate them by calling for the same test again. The situation does not evolve if the same obstacle is repeated.

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INTENT

The intent is *what* the character wants to achieve, the task is *how* they will achieve it. If the timing is important this should be specified as part of the intent. *To achieve some thing before some time limit.*

A valid intent must be possible and have a suitable scope achievable by a single task. If the intent specifies *how* it is achieved, the scope is too tight. It is a task not an intent. If the intent requires *several* tasks then the scope is too wide. Tighten the intent to be possible with just one of those tasks. If no task can achieve the intent, it is not possible and hence not valid.

TASK

The task is *how* the character attempts their intent. A valid task must be able to achieve the intent. It must be possible given the fictional situation and the inherent limitations of the character. The task defines the fictional reality of the test. It determines which lifepath to use for the task roll, and any modifiers that would apply. It determines the difficulty for the obstacle target in an independent test, suitable compromises for a versus test, and the consequence risked.

CONSEQUENCE

The consequence is what will happen if the intent is not achieved. A test must have an interesting consequence that complicates and challenges the goals of the character. The gamemaster decides the consequence for an independent test based on the task, obstacle, and fictional situation. For a versus test, the consequence is the intent of the opponent. The consequence should never be that nothing happens.

If it is difficult to find an interesting consequence that leads from the obstacle test, an emotional or physical *Condition* can be applied or increased instead. The condition is *Minor* or *Major* based on context.

COMPROMISE

In a versus test both sides offer a compromise outcome. The player performing the test offers a compromise that modifies the consequence. The opponent offers a compromise that modifies the intent. The compromise should be a more favourable version of that outcome, but must still be a success for the opponent.

If both sides agree then a simple versus test can be performed instead with no compromises defined. These are only pass/fail but are faster to resolve.

OBSTACLE TARGET

The obstacle target sets the bar for how difficult the test will be. For a versus test the opponent makes a task roll determined in the same way as for the character but adds +1D6 bonus dice (see *Task Roll*). The number of successes rolled by the opponent becomes the obstacle target for the test.

For an independent test the gamemaster sets a fixed obstacle target (Ob) based on the *Difficulty* of the task. The player can choose to add 1 Ob to the obstacle target for each hindering trait or condition the character has that would affect the task. This makes the test harder but the player is either awarded a fate point or can clear the condition (see *Artha* section).

Difficulty level with respect to:

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--------|------------|--------|--|
| (Ob 0) | Average Person or Apprentice | (Ob 1) | Journeyman | (Ob 2) | Master |
| +1 Ob | | | | | Obstacle is <i>easy</i> to overcome. |
| +2 Ob | | | | | Obstacle is <i>moderate</i> to overcome. |
| +3 Ob | | | | | Obstacle is <i>hard</i> to overcome. |
| +1 Ob/Trait | | | | | Hindering Trait |
| +1 Ob/Condition | | | | | Hindering Condition |

The gamemaster then decides whether any other factors such as assets would make the task significantly harder for an average person in that fictional situation and may assign *Disadvantage* to the character (reroll a successful task roll). Disadvantage can only be assigned once, and cancels *Advantage*.

Once the obstacle target has been decided, the gamemaster should inform the player, and then the player should make their task roll.

TASK ROLL

The nature of the task determines which single lifepath the *Task Roll* is based on. Either the character has a *Helpful Lifepath*, *Neutral Lifepath*, or *Hindering Lifepath* for the task. The player suggests a lifepath and the gamemaster judges whether it is helpful or neutral.

The player can decide the lifepath is hindering instead. Choosing to have a lifepath hinder the test makes it significantly harder but they player is either awarded a fate point or can clear tax from the lifepath used (see *Artha* section).

The lifepath type sets the base dice for the task roll:

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Helpful Lifepath | 3D6/4D6/5D6/6D6 (Lifepath Rating) |
| Neutral Lifepath | 2D6 |
| Hindering Lifepath | 1D6 |

The task roll has bonus dice added for each additional *Helpful Lifepath*, *Trait*, *Condition*, *Wise*, or *Skill* that would affect the task. In a versus test any hindering traits or conditions the opponent has add bonus dice.

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Helpful Lifepath | +1D6/Additional Lifepath |
| Helpful Trait | +1D6/Trait |
| Helpful Condition | +1D6/Condition |
| Helpful Wise | +1D6/Wise |
| Helpful Skill | +1D6/Skill |
| Opp. Hindering Trait | +1D6/Trait |
| Opp. Hindering Condition | +1D6/Condition |

The gamemaster then decides whether any other factors such as help or assets would make the task significantly easier for an average person in that situation, and may assign *Advantage* to the character (reroll a failed task roll). Advantage can only be assigned once, and cancels *Disadvantage*.

Once the task roll has been decided, the player totals up all the (six-sided) dice and rolls them. Each dice showing 4-6 is a success. Any dice showing a 6 may be rolled again to attempt additional successes.

Help: Another player or non-player character may help with an obstacle test. This gives Advantage but exposes the helper to any consequences.

REROLLS

Once the obstacle target has been set and the task roll has been made it is clear whether the test will be successful or not. If the number of successes is greater than or equal to the obstacle target the test would pass. Otherwise it would fail. At this point the player performs any *Rerolls* that apply to the test.

There are four ways to trigger a reroll:

1. Have advantage on the test.
2. Have disadvantage on the test.
3. Spend a *Persona Point*.
4. Accept the opponent's compromise in a versus test.

To use a reroll, pick up all of the dice for the task roll and roll them again. Each dice showing 4-6 is a success. Any dice showing a 6 can be rolled again for extra successes This is the new result for the task roll. The player making a test can reroll when the test is due to fail. The opponent or gamemaster can trigger a reroll when the test is due to succeed.

A reroll can be performed once per test by a player with advantage. If the test is due to fail, reroll the task roll and take the new result.

A reroll must be performed once per test by a player with disadvantage. If the test is due to succeed, reroll the task roll and take the new result.

A reroll can be performed by spending a persona point each time. The player can spend a persona point to reroll when the test is due to fail. The opponent can spend a persona point to trigger a reroll when the test is due to succeed. Record any spent persona points next to the lifepath used in the test for the purposes of advancement.

A reroll can be performed in a versus test once by accepting the compromise. The player taking the test can reroll once by choosing to replace their intent with the opponent's compromise. The opponent can trigger a reroll once by choosing replace the consequence with the player's compromise.

Rerolls may be performed in any order and repeated until no-one in the test wishes to make a compromise or spend further persona points, and at this stage the result stands.

OUTCOME

If the number of successes from the task roll is greater than or equal to the obstacle target then the intent occurs. Otherwise the consequence occurs. In a versus test either outcome may have been replaced by a compromise instead.

The test is now resolved and the result stands. Remember to Let It Ride. The gamemaster should narrate how the task resulted in the outcome, the fallout of this and then the existing scene should continue on from there.

Dice: The rules default to using six-sided dice for task rolls. Any dice showing 4-6 counts as a success, and any dice showing 6 may be rolled again for more successes. These odds can be reproduced using playing cards instead of dice. Draw a card in place of each dice. Count red cards as successes. Draw an extra card for each red picture card that is dealt. Shuffle the deck after each test.

ABILITY TEST

Player characters will face obstacles that lie beyond their reach without knowledge or advantage granted by Assets. Characters establish the existence of assets from a specific lifepath by making *Ability Tests*.

An ability test is requested by the player and performed before or during a scene to establish the presence of something in the fiction. They are a way to skip the planning and backstory and jump straight into the conflict, but they carry a risk of *Taxing* the ability if the character overextends.

RESOURCES TEST

A *Resources Test* is used to establish the character already possesses a useful piece of *Gear* from some previous lifepath. This gear may be equipment, property, currency or any physical possession. The intent of the test is to establish the character owns the gear and has it available. The consequence is to tax the resources ability for that specific lifepath.

The rarity, value, and likeliness of the gear set the difficulty for the obstacle target of the test. Each modifier can apply more than once for emphasis.

| | | |
|-----------------|-------|--|
| Base Difficulty | 1 Ob | Gear is commonplace. |
| Valuable Gear | +1 Ob | Gear is valuable. |
| Rare Gear | +1 Ob | Gear is rare. |
| Unlikely Gear | +1 Ob | Gear is heavy/bulky, or overly coincidental. |

The nature of the gear determines the lifepath used for the task roll. Does the character have a lifepath that makes ownership more likely (roll lifepath rating), less likely (roll 1D6), or neither (roll 2D6)? Add +1D6 bonus to test an existing gear asset.

Spend fate points to reroll the task roll if the test would otherwise fail. This may be repeated. Record any spent fate points next to the lifepath for advancement. This can be used to upgrade Gear to a Special Item that is always available in a scene without needing to make a resources test (see *Advancement* section).

If the test passed, the character has the gear available in the scene. Make a note of the gear as a temporary asset. If the test failed then Tax the resources ability for that lifepath instead. Until the tax is cleared the character can not make a resources test using that lifepath again (see *Artha* section).

CIRCLES TEST

A *Circles Test* is used to establish the character already knows a *Contact* from some previous lifepath. The contact must share a *Setting* with the character, and is either a new gamemaster character or an existing contact being reintroduced.

The intent of the circles test is to establish that the character knows a friendly contact who is available for a scene. The consequence is to Tax the circles ability instead for that lifepath. The gamemaster may choose an alternative consequence for a new contact, they are available for a scene but are hostile to the character.

The specificity, social rank, demeanour, and likeliness of the Contact asset set the difficulty for the obstacle target of the test.

| | | |
|-------------------|-------|--|
| Base Difficulty | 1 Ob | Contact is average person. |
| Hostile Contact | +1 Ob | Contact is antagonistic. |
| Specific Lifepath | +1 Ob | Contact has a specific lifepath. |
| Different Rank | +1 Ob | Contact has higher or lower social rank. |
| Unlikely Contact | +1 Ob | Contact out of place or overly coincidental. |

The background and social rank of the contact determine the lifepath to use for the task roll. Does the character have a lifepath that makes knowing the contact more likely (roll lifepath rating) such as a similar lifepath, less likely (roll 1D6), or neither (roll 2D6)? Modifiers apply for existing contacts or shared relationships.

| | | |
|---------------------|------|---|
| Friendly Contact | +1D6 | Existing contact with positive demeanour. |
| Shared Relationship | +1D6 | Contact shares relationship with character. |

Spend fate points to reroll the task roll if the test would otherwise fail. This may be repeated. Record any spent fate points next to the lifepath for advancement. This can be used to upgrade a Contact into Relationship that is always available for a scene without needing to make a circles test (see *Advancement* section).

If the test passes the contact exists and is available for the scene. Make a note of the contact as a temporary asset, give them a name, and record their demeanour as friendly. If the test failed then either the contact is available but hostile, or the circles ability should be taxed for that lifepath. Until the tax is cleared the character can not make a circles test using that lifepath again (see *Artha* section).

WISES TEST

A *Wises Test* is used to establish the character knows a useful fact about some *Subject* from a previous lifepath. A subject is a broad area of knowledge about a specific topic. The *wises test* concerns a specific question or fact about that subject matter.

A *wises test* can be used to transfer information the character would know to the player. They can be used to establish the character knows something about a topic, observes something in their surroundings relating to a topic, or has insight into another character's motivations about a topic.

The intent of the *wises test* is to establish the character knows that fact in specific and about the subject in general. The consequence is to tax the *wises ability* for that lifepath. The gamemaster may choose an alternative consequence, the character is certain they know that fact but are badly misinformed.

The secrecy, obscurity, remoteness, and likeliness of the subject set the difficulty for the obstacle target of the test. Each modifier can apply more than once for emphasis.

| | | |
|------------------|-------|---|
| Base Difficulty | 1 Ob | Subject is common knowledge. |
| Obscure Subject | +1 Ob | Subject is obscure, or unusual. |
| Secret Subject | +1 Ob | Subject is actively hidden or suppressed. |
| Distant Subject | +1 Ob | Subject is from a distant land or time. |
| Unlikely Subject | +1 Ob | Subject is overly coincidental to know. |

The subject matter determines the lifepath used for the task roll. Does the character have a lifepath that makes knowing this subject more likely (roll lifepath rating), less likely (roll 1D6), or neither (roll 2D6)? Add +1D6 bonus dice for a pre-established subject or wise.

Spend fate points to reroll the task roll if the test would otherwise fail. This may be repeated. Record any spent fate points next to the lifepath for advancement. This can be used to upgrade a Subject into a Wise that gives bonus dice to related obstacle tests (see *Advancement* section).

If the test passes the character knows the fact and knows about the subject matter. Make a note of the subject as a temporary asset and name it [subject]-wise. The specific fact or question will then be explained by the gamemaster, or the player will be given the right to define their own explanation as official game lore.

The gamemaster has final discretion over this decision and may veto explanations without giving reason (to protect established facts).

If the test failed then either the character is seriously misinformed about the fact, or the *wises ability* should be taxed for that lifepath. Until the tax is cleared the character can not make a *wises test* using that lifepath again (see *Artha* section).

DEEDS TEST

A *Deeds Test* is used to establish that the character did something in the past that demonstrates a *Focus* for the character. A *deeds test* can be used in place of a flashback or planning session. They can be used to establish previous events in the story that will affect the current fictional situation. They must focus on the actions of the character, must not be opposed by any other character, and must not contradict the established facts of the game.

A *deeds test* should be used to replace less interesting scenes, not to skip interesting but difficult scenes. The gamemaster can refuse any *deeds test* they feel would be better served by a full scene with an obstacle test.

The intent of the *deeds test* is to establish the character successfully performed the action in the past. The consequence is to tax the *deeds ability* for that lifepath instead. The gamemaster may choose an alternative consequence, the character did perform the action but it resulted in consequences or a condition similar to a failed obstacle test.

The *deeds test* uses the same difficulty scale for the obstacle target as an obstacle test, without any other modifiers such as those for traits or conditions.

Difficulty level with respect to:

- (Ob 0) Average Person or Apprentice (Ob 1) Journeyman (Ob 2) Master
- +1 Ob Obstacle is *easy* to overcome.
- +2 Ob Obstacle is *moderate* to overcome.
- +3 Ob Obstacle is *hard* to overcome.

The nature of the deed determines the lifepath used for the task roll. Does the character have a lifepath that makes performing the deed more likely (roll lifepath rating), less likely (roll 1D6), or neither (roll 2D6)? Add +1D6 bonus dice if testing a pre-existing focus or skill.

Spend fate points to reroll the task roll if the test would otherwise fail. This may be repeated. Record spent fate points next to the lifepath for advancement. This can be used to upgrade a Focus to a Skill that gives bonus dice to related obstacle tests (see *Advancement* section).

If the test passed the character successfully performed the deed in the past. Make a note of the focus as an temporary asset called [focus]-skill. If the test failed then either the deeds ability should be taxed for that lifepath, or there were consequences or conditions. Until the tax is cleared the character can not make a deeds test using that lifepath again (see *Artha* section).

LINKED TESTS

A series of tests can be linked mechanically if the intent and task of the tests are linked fictionally. Linked tests can be used in these situations at the discretion of the gamemaster.

One obstacle test may lead directly into another with the result of the first significantly affecting the odds of the second. Alternatively the results of an abilities test may significantly affect the odds of a subsequent obstacle test. One ability test can't be linked with another ability test, however.

To link two tests, perform the first test as normal. If the first test passes make the second test with advantage. If the first test fails make the second test with disadvantage. This process can be continued to link several tests from one or more players together.

ARTHA

Artha is a metacurrency that exists outside the fiction of the game. It is awarded for player choices that make the game more interesting. Artha represents the narrative power of the character as a protagonist and can be used to reroll tests. Spending artha on tests causes the lifepaths used to improve over time. Artha comes in two forms, Fate Points and Persona Points.

FATE POINTS

There are several situations in the game where something that has been established about a player character could cause them problems and complications. The player is faced with a decision between ignoring the sub-optimal choice, or accepting it and complicating the situation. The player is awarded *Fate Points* when they make the sub-optimal choice.

The player is rewarded fate points immediately after:

| | |
|---|--------|
| Expressing a belief (stance) causes significant complications | 1 Fate |
| Following an instinct causes significant complications | 1 Fate |
| Expressing a trait causes significant complications | 1 Fate |
| Helping a relationship causes significant complications | 1 Fate |
| Using a hindering lifepath for an obstacle/ability test | 1 Fate |
| Using a hindering trait/condition for an obstacle test | 1 Fate |
| Accepting a compel from another player | 1 Fate |

Fate points are not awarded when *using a hindering lifepath* to clear tax, or *using a hindering condition* to clear a condition.

Fate points can be used to reroll future ability tests (but not obstacle tests). Record the spent fate point next to the lifepath the test is based on for the purposes of advancement. Spent fate can be used to make assets permanent.

COMPELS

One player can *Compel* another to try to influence them into making an interesting but sub-optimal choice that would award fate points. If the compeller has at least one fate point to offer, and the gamemaster judges the situation to be valid, the target player must choose to accept or decline the offer.

If the target accepts, they must make the sub-optimal choice, and in return the compeller must transfer one fate point to the target for *accepting the compel*. The target also receives the fate point they would normally get for making the choice (none when *using a hindering lifepath* to clear tax, or *using a hindering condition* to clear a condition).

If the target refuses, they must transfer one fate point to the compeller instead. If the target has no fate points, they must accept the compel.

CLEARING TAX

When tax is applied to an ability / lifepath combination, it means that the player can't make an ability test using that lifepath until the tax is cleared. This lessens the risk of the character being one dimensional in play by rationing how often specific lifepaths can be helpful to the plot. When one lifepath becomes taxed it forces the player to incorporate other lifepaths into the story, introducing history and depth.

When a player uses a lifepath to hinder an obstacle test (not an ability test) they can choose to clear the tax from that lifepath rather than receiving a fate point. This clears tax from all abilities for that lifepath immediately after the hindered test is completed.

CLEARING CONDITIONS

Conditions are emotional or physical consequences to failed obstacle tests. They have a rank either Minor or Major. To clear a condition, the player must use it to hinder an obstacle test (not an ability test).

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Minor Consequence | Hinder 1 Obstacle Test |
| Major Consequence | Hinder 3 Obstacle Tests |

A minor condition can be cleared by using it to hinder a single obstacle test. A major condition must hinder three separate obstacle tests to be cleared. Keep track of the number of tests hindered next to the condition. The condition is cleared immediately after the last test is hindered.

PERSONA POINTS

Persona points are awarded to the player for pushing their character through obstacles and consequences to their goals. Persona points are much more powerful than fate points. They are directly fueled by the character goals and in turn make achieving difficult goals possible. They are reviewed and awarded at the end of a session for:

| | |
|---|--|
| Furthering a Belief (goal) | 1 Persona each |
| Replacing a Belief (stance), Instinct, or Trait | 2 Persona each |
| Resolving a Belief (goal) | Simple:2 Moderate:4 Complex:6 Persona each |
| Resolved goal involves another PC | +1 Persona each |

A player is rewarded for progressing and resolving goals (especially those that involve other player characters). They are also rewarded when a stance, instinct, or trait fundamentally changes as this is a sign of character growth.

Persona points can be used to reroll future obstacle tests (but not ability tests). Record the spent persona point next to the lifepath the test is based on for the purposes of advancement. Spent persona can be used later to increase a lifepath rating.

ADVANCEMENT

Player characters are awarded Artha for expressing their nature, struggling to overcome obstacles, and fulfilling their beliefs. When a player spends Artha on a lifepath in a test, they are signaling what is important to them about the character.

When sufficient Artha has been spent on a lifepath it advances. A character lifepath can increase in rating or gain special items, relationships, wises, or skills. Over time a character can gain and lose traits, or gain a new lifepath.

LIFEPATH RATING

When a player spends a persona point to reroll an obstacle test, make a note of it next to the lifepath that was used. When enough persona points have been spent, erase them, and then immediately increase the rating of that lifepath by 1 up to a maximum rating of 6.

| <u>Lifepath Rating</u> | <u>Upgraded Rating</u> | <u>Persona Points to Advance</u> |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 3D6 | 4D6 | 6 PP |
| 4D6 | 5D6 | 12 PP |
| 5D6 | 6D6 | 18 PP |

UPGRADING ASSETS

When a player spends a fate point to reroll an ability test, make a note of it next to the lifepath that was used. When enough fate points have been spent, erase them, and then choose one temporary asset for that lifepath (gear, contact, subject, or focus) to upgrade immediately into a permanent asset (special item, relationship, wise, or skill).

| <u>Temporary Asset</u> | <u>Permanent Asset</u> | <u>Fate Points to Advance</u> |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Subject | Wise | 6 FP |
| Focus | Skill | 6 FP |
| Gear | Special Item | 9 FP |
| Contact | Relationship | 12 FP |

RUNNING THE GAME

A special item or relationship asset can be introduced into a scene without making an ability test, unlike a gear or contact asset. A skill or wise asset can be used as a bonus to obstacle tests.

If the events of the game lead to the loss of a permanent asset (which should be kept a very rare occurrence) the player receives the spent fate point cost back plus one persona point at the end of session.

TRAIT VOTE

Hold a *Trait Vote* when the characters have passed a significant milestone in the story, such as when the campaign *Situation* has changed significantly over several sessions due to the actions of the characters.

A trait vote can be used to remove, alter, or add new traits to reflect how the character has changed during play. A trait defines the place of the character in the story and the features that make them distinctive, and these change as the story grows.

For each character in turn, the group votes on which existing character trait should be removed (each write down an existing trait or choose *None*). Discuss how the character has been played since the last vote and try to find consensus on a trait that was under-expressed or no longer accurate. The player of the character has the deciding vote. If a trait receives a majority of votes, it is removed, otherwise all traits remain.

Next the group votes on a new trait to add to each character (each come up with and write down a new trait). Discuss how the character has changed since the last vote and try to find consensus on a new focus for the character or role in the story. The trait that receives a majority of votes is added to the character. There is no fixed number of traits required.

NEW LIFEPATH

Adding a new lifepath is optional and rare. It is decided by the gamemaster and can only happen after a significant time-skip in the story. After a significant milestone is reached and trait vote held, the gamemaster may decide to introduce a time-skip (from months to years) into the story.

After the time skip each player should add a new lifepath to their character at rating 3D6 and then narrate a short prologue scene expressing how the character has changed. Whilst the first time-skip may be relatively short, any further skips must last several years at least, since lifepaths usually last from 5-10 years of human experience (or equivalent).

In session zero the group create the framework for the campaign with settings, factions, and situation, and the players create characters born in those settings and invested in the situation.

Between the zero-th and first session the gamemaster should take the framework and flesh it out into specific details. Plan out some locations, supporting characters, obstacles, and consequences for the first session.

Rather than creating a whole world, focus on the settings of the characters' most recent lifepath. What environments are people in those settings surrounded by? Sketch out some examples of those locations. Choose some of these to set the starting scene for each character and flesh the location out more. Do the characters have any short-term goals tied to a specific location? Flesh these out too.

Next think of supporting characters or relationships that may come up in the first session. Who might each character interact with in the their starting scenes and short-term goals? Come up with a lifepath, trait, or goal for each. What contextual information do they have that can help the player understand something about the situation or attempt their goals?

Finally think of obstacles to present to the players. The first scene for each character should get them started on a goal and introduce an obstacle to it. How will you make their goals complicated? What consequences may come up from failed tests. Can one of their own beliefs, instincts, traits, or relationships be made to conflict with the goal? Those of other players?

Are any of the factions opposed to their goals? If so plan a supporting character that represents that faction and give them an opposing goal. Place the faction character between the character and their goals. Do any obstacles suggest locations the character might visit? Sketch these out.

After this initial planning the gamemaster has some notes to help them improvise the first session. The structure of the first session is the same as that for all sessions:

Set a scene for one or more of the characters. Use description and dialog to give them information they need on the situation and to pursue their goals. Introduce obstacles and consequences to their goals when they come up. When a character wants to introduce people, things, or information call for an ability test. When they attempt something with interesting stakes call for an obstacle test. When the scene has achieved something move the spotlight to a new character and set a new scene. Keep the spotlight moving from scene to scene and then wrap up the session.

SETTING SCENES

A session is a series of connected scenes starring a cast of protagonist characters in a shared imagined space. As with a movie there are many ways to connect scenes, though the easiest is in simple chronological order, another is to cut between two scenes with simultaneous events.

As the scene is set in an imagined space the gamemaster must start by describing the timing, context, sights, sounds, location, and characters present in the scene. Then ask the players in the scene “What do you do?”

When the characters act, describe to the players how the surroundings and supporting characters react, and what that looks like. A scene should establish something, introduce a complication, or overcome an obstacle, then cut to the next scene. Each of these result from tests. Cut frequently to share the spotlight. Cut after two ability tests, or one obstacle test.

Confirm what the players want to do in the next scene and if they want to establish something (ability test) or include a relationship character before it starts. Cut right to the interesting part when setting the scene. Ability tests can always fill in the blanks so don't waste any time on needless scenes for the sake of continuity (such as planning or travel.)

CALLING FOR TESTS

When the character wants to know about, observe, or understand something in the scene call for a *Wises Test*. If they succeed then describe what they know or ask the player to answer their own question. If they want to have something available (including money) call for a *Resources Test*. If they want to find, know, or share a scene with someone call for a *Circles Test*. When they want to insert a past event call for a *Deeds Test*. These are edits to the scene and once the outcome is established the scene continues.

If a character is trying to overcome an obstacle unopposed, make a ruling or if there are interesting consequences call for an *Independent Obstacle Test*. If they are opposed by someone call for an *Versus Obstacle Test* with our without a *Compromise* defined. The consequence of a versus test should match the intent in severity. Only if the player gives an *Intent* to kill or convince someone should these same outcomes be allowed as a *Consequence* against that character, and only ever tested with a compromise defined.

If the player agrees to the intent as an outcome for the test they must accept the equivalent consequence in good faith. Resolve the test and let the result ride from then on. Now continue the scene by incorporating the outcome into the description of events and move forward.

END OF SESSION

When the time available to play is running out, or a juicy cliffhanger comes up, finish the final scene with “...and that's where we'll end it.” then go through the end of session process:

Award Persona Points.
Set Beliefs and Instincts.
Trait Vote (after significant milestone).
Set Voluntary Conditions.

First each player should be awarded persona points for progressing and resolving beliefs. Second they decide on and read out their beliefs and instincts for the next session. If any stance or instinct changed then award persona points. Third if a significant milestone occurred a trait vote should be held for each character, and persona points awarded for any changed traits. Finally each player can choose to set a single voluntary condition for their character. This should be accompanied by a brief epilogue scene illustrating the condition.

BETWEEN SESSIONS

Before the next session, update your records with the events of the last. If significant new supporting cast were introduced, record them and flesh them out with lifepaths, traits, or beliefs. If events impacted any factions, update the faction relationship map. Have any factions shifted alliances or changed importance? How have their plans been shifted by the events of the session? Can any loose ends be tied together, back to a faction, or to a player character by history or relationships?

Summarize the *Situation* as it currently stands. Then repeat the prep suggested for the first session. Given character beliefs, what locations are likely to be visited? Flesh them out. What supporting cast may be encountered? Plan what information they have and their motivations. What will the characters attempt? Plan obstacles to complicate their goals.

If a specific character is approaching a significant plot milestone, think how to focus the spotlight on the character for the next session. If the campaign has had several significant milestones and all of the characters have been highlighted, think how to create a climax that will affect them all. This can be a good way to either finish a “season” of the campaign, perhaps followed by a time-skip and new lifepaths for the characters, or to wrap up the campaign completely and start a new one.

