

# HIGH/LOW

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*“In like 3 years we’ll roll a non high-low die for the last time and won’t even know it.”*

-David



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# I: INTRODUCTION

HIGH/LOW is a collaborative storytelling game. When playing, you and your friends work together to tell an interactive story. You decide what challenges and obstacles the characters face, how they respond, what they say, and what happens to them. A small set of mechanics centered around standard six-sided dice (d6's) serves to add some uncertainty and drama into the story.

Most players control a single “player character” (PC), each of whom is a major protagonist in the story. One player, the “game manager” (GM), is responsible for the world that the PCs inhabit; they set up and describe situations that affect the PCs, and they are responsible for adjudicating the rules and determining the outcomes of the PCs’ actions.

The flow of the game is that of a conversation. It typically begins with the GM presenting a scenario or obstacle for the PCs. The other players then decide how their characters will respond, and the GM describes the results of those actions (often using dice to help decide how things go). In this way, piece by piece, the group works together to tell a dramatic, exciting story.

## I.1: ASPECTS

Everything in the game world (characters, inanimate objects, places, etc.) is described by ASPECTS, brief phrases describing something unique or noteworthy about whatever they describe. ASPECTS play at least three critically-important roles: they tell you **what is important about the game**; they help you **understand, imagine, and remember people and places**; and they tell you **when to use the mechanics**.

For example:

- A local restaurateur might have an ASPECT of *“Never Forgets a Face”* or *“Self-conscious About His Baldness.”*
- Their dining room might have an ASPECT of *“Tobacco Smoke Everywhere”* or *“Loud Old Window A/C Unit”* or *“Lots and Lots of Complementary Peanuts.”*
- Their restaurant might have an ASPECT of *“Greasy but Delicious”* or *“Worth the Trip to a Dangerous Neighborhood”* or *“Can’t Pay? Meal’s on the House.”*
- The town itself might have an ASPECT of *“Dying Midwestern Town”* or *“Neon Signs and Rainy Skies”* or *“Dense Smog Cloud.”*
- The broader region might have an ASPECT of *“The Government Is Always Watching.”*

ASPECTS are truths about the story. They grant narrative permission for characters to take certain actions or attempt certain tasks, and they affect the likelihood of success of those attempts (see [High/Low Rolls](#) on page 8).

## 2: STARTING A GAME

There are many ways to start building a game or a story, but they generally involve coming up with a brief description, and maybe some ASPECTS describing the location, society, and situation in which the characters' story begins.

There are many ways to go about this, and the world-building process can involve any amount of collaboration you see fit (the GM can build the world and share it with the players, or a session o can involve creating the world as a collaborative exercise). It is important to be able to get people to mostly agree on the following:

- **Genre and Setting:** What is the protagonists' world like?
- **Scale:** How epic or personal will the story be?
- **Tone:** Do you want to tell a dark and gritty story, a lighthearted and campy one, or somewhere in between? Do you want to lean into genre norms, or defy them?
- **Issues:** What threats and pressures inherent to the setting will spur the protagonists to action?
- **NPCs:** Who are some of the important people and factions, and what are some of the important locations?
- **Characters:** Who are the players' characters and what is their place in the world? (see [Making Characters](#) on page 6)

A typical game will start small, in the sense that the setting, issues, and NPCs will be fairly local to the characters, usually both geographically and contextually. Over time, the world will grow, and new issues and characters will be revealed. It is totally fine to build your game this way; or, by contrast, it is totally fine to start by filling in lots of details of the world at large before determining the player characters' respective places in that world.

## 3: MAKING CHARACTERS

### 3.1: CHARACTER ASPECTS

Each PC starts with four descriptive ASPECTS:

- **Core Concept:** The one-phrase “elevator pitch” summary of your character. Tropes and cliches are OK. Examples: *“Socially-unaware Ooze from a Distant Galaxy”* or *“Reluctant Lead Detective”* or *“Disciple of the Ivory Shroud”* or *“Monster-slaying Accountant”*
- **Trouble:** Something that regularly causes trouble for the character, or a looming threat. Example: *“Hunted by the Cult of the Sun God”* or *“Black Sheep of the Sanderson Family”* or *“Sucker for a Pretty Face”* or *“The Bottle Calls to Me”* or *“The Chamber of Commerce Hates Me”* or *“The Manners of a Goat”* or *“Tempted by Shiny Things”* or *“Rivals in the College of the Elements”*
- **Two Additional Aspects of Your Choice:** Any additional aspects you like, positive or negative, related to body, mind, background, or training. Examples: *“Two Left Feet”* or *“I Work Out”* or *“Brody Gave Me These Scars”* or *“Terrible Short-term Memory”* or *“Polyglot”* or *“Practiced Social Graces”* or *“Resting Bitch Face”* or *“Computer Wiz”* or anything else that fits.

Work alone or with your group to determine your character’s ASPECTS, and write them down somewhere. Note that ASPECTS work best:

- when they are non-overlapping,
- when they include relationships or other connections to the game world,
- when they convey multiple character details,
- and when they cut both ways, i.e., when they can provide either benefits or drawbacks, depending on the situation.

You should also feel free to wait to decide on some of your ASPECTS. You can always fill them in as the game progresses and you discover more about the character, or as situations that come up in the game make you think of new ASPECTS; and you can always change or refine them as you play.

### 3.2: DESCRIPTION

At this point, write down a brief but more detailed description, including your character's appearance, personality, past, goals, friends, enemies, and/or anything else you think is important or interesting.

As part of this exercise, it can be useful to define an overarching DRIVE for your character by answering the following questions:

- What do they want?
- What is stopping them?
- What will they do about it?

There is no required structure to a DRIVE; just see where the prompts take you (and feel free to workshop with the GM and the other players). Feel free to invent details of the world as part of this exercise; but also feel free to leave some things ambiguous.

For example, Cam wants to provide the best life possible for his little sister Sal, but life on the streets is rough. He'll dirty his hands, bloody his nose, and do any legally- or morally-ambiguous things necessary to take care of her. At least that's what he tells himself. Secretly, he finds these things exhilarating, and he revels in exerting whatever power he can over others. But he will go to great lengths to avoid Sal finding out about this side of his character.

### 3.3: GEAR

Every character also starts with one notable piece of GEAR. This might be a weapon ("*Heirloom Sword*" or "*Big Freaking Gun*") or a piece of clothing ("*Slinky Red Dress*" or "*Intimidating Platemail*") or any other equipment ("*Fancy Sports Car*" or "*Daddy's Credit Card*").

There is no restriction on this other than good judgement and what makes sense given the story/setting; but as with your character's ASPECTS, this may work best if it can cut both ways. For example, a character might have a "*Reliable Old Station Wagon*" or a "*Water-damaged Pistol*."

Mundane items are not GEAR, and they are generally are not tracked. If your character would reasonably have something with them, they do; if it's unreasonable for them to have it, they don't. If it's uncertain, make a high/low roll (see [High/Low Rolls](#) on page 8).

## 4: HIGH/LOW ROLLS

When your character takes an action where the outcome is meaningful but uncertain, start by describing what they are hoping to accomplish (“I want to hide my discomfort when biting into this hot burrito,” or “I want to disarm my opponent,” or “I want to find the self-destruct button.”).

The GM will then decide whether you are trying to roll “high” or “low” to determine what kind of numbers you’re hoping for, based on the vibes of the specific action you’re taking (sneaking stealthily might call for a “low” roll, whereas jumping the chasm might call for a “high” roll).

Then roll a d6: 1-3 are low and 4-6 are high. If your roll matches what you were trying to roll, you succeed; if not, you fail. Once you know the outcome of the roll, you and the GM work together to interpret that result in terms of the story. If you want to interpret things on a more granular level than just “success” or “failure,” you might consider using the following table as a guideline:

“High” Roll	“Low” Roll	Success?	Details
6	1	“Yes, and...”	You succeed, and something good happens in addition.
5	2	“Yes.”	You succeed.
4	3	“Yes, but...”	You succeed but only partially, or an additional complication arises.
3	4	“No, but...”	You fail but make progress, or another opportunity arises.
2	5	“No.”	You fail.
1	6	“No, and...”	You fail, and things get worse somehow.

High/low rolls are intended for unsure situations that move the story forward regardless of the outcome. They are not required in the case where a character, narratively, is all but guaranteed to succeed, and they should not be allowed if your character is all but guaranteed to fail (or if the result has no impact on the story). Those results should simply be narrated by the GM without a roll. In short: if the outcome is uncertain and both success and failure are interesting, you should roll; otherwise, don’t.

Rolls can be as specific or as general as the narrative demands. For example, you might roll to “Shoot the third guy from the left in the leg, just below the knee,” or you might roll to “Rout the enemy legions;” and the associated action might take seconds, minutes, hours, days, or months in-game. It all depends on what the story calls for, and what keeps things interesting and dramatic. Sometimes it’s fun and interesting to dive into the details, and sometimes it makes sense to zoom out and make a single roll to resolve even a large-scale or long-term action. Progress clocks (see page 10) can be a great tool for managing tension on larger tasks where a single roll might feel anticlimactic.

A variant of this process can also be used by the GM to disclaim decision-making responsibility. If a player asks a story question the GM doesn’t know the answer to, the GM can ask the player to “call it” high or low, and the GM can then roll a d6; if the result matches what the player called, they get the more favorable answer.



## 4.1: ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

Circumstances in the story often affect how likely it is that a given action succeeds, and high/low rolls should be modified to account for that:

- For each ASPECT, piece of GEAR, or CONDITION that provides a narrative advantage for the action being taken, roll one additional d6. The result is the single best die roll, player's choice.
- For each ASPECT, piece of GEAR, or CONDITION that makes the action harder, roll one additional d6. The result is the single worst die roll, GM's choice.
- Benefits and hindrances cancel each other out on a one-for-one basis, so you only ever roll using one of the two rules above. For example, a single benefit and a single hindrance would cancel each other out, and the player would only roll a single die.

You may use any ASPECT, piece of GEAR, or CONDITION to provide these bonuses/penalties, not just those that describe your character. For example, if you are sneaking around, you should feel free to use both your *"Soft-soled Shoes"* GEAR and the enemy guard's *"Bored After a Long Day"* CONDITION to benefit your sneaking. And the GM should feel free to use the environment's *"Creaky Floors"* ASPECT and the building's *"Cutting-edge Security System"* ASPECT to hinder it.

## 4.2: CONSEQUENCES AND CONDITIONS

Consequences from rolls may be purely narrative, or they may progress or regress a clock (see [Progress Clocks](#) on page 10), or they may take the form of CONDITIONS on yourself, other characters, or the environment. CONDITIONS are temporary ASPECTS that impact the way your character attempts actions or the results of those attempts. CONDITIONS might be *"On Fire"*, *"Broken Window"*, *"Smitten"*, *"Angry"*, *"Lost in Thought"*, *"In The Zone"*, *"Ice-cream Headache"*, *"Broken Rib"*, *"Bloody Nose"*, *"Social Pariah"*, or anything else narratively important. Like regular ASPECTS, CONDITIONS are true and so will generally impact the story even outside of high/low rolls.

How long a CONDITION lasts is up to the players and the GM. A CONDITION of *"Slick With Rainwater"* might last for the duration of a scene, whereas a CONDITION of *"Broken Arm"* might take longer to resolve (and it might turn into *"Arm in a Sling"* on the way to being removed completely).

The best consequences and CONDITIONS are those that move the story forward in interesting ways. Players should feel free to suggest consequences and CONDITIONS, but the decision ultimately rests with the GM.

## 5: PROGRESS CLOCKS

Oftentimes, players want to take on complex or long-lived tasks; you can track these tasks using progress clocks. A progress clock can be drawn any number of ways, but the most common is a circle divided into segments (see examples below). Draw a progress clock when you need to track ongoing effort against an obstacle or the approach of impending trouble.



The characters are sneaking into the watch tower? Make a progress clock to track the alertness of the patrolling guards; when the characters suffer consequences from partial successes or missed rolls, fill in segments on the clock; when it is full, the alarm is raised.

Generally, more complex problems should use progress clocks with more segments. A complex obstacle might use a 4-segment clock. An even more complicated obstacle might use a 6-segment clock, and a daunting obstacle might use an 8-segment clock.

When you create a clock, mark it with a description about the associated obstacle. This description should not imply a method, just the obstacle; for example, the clocks for an infiltration should be “Interior Patrols” and “The Tower,” not “Sneak Past the Guards” or “Climb the Tower.” The patrols and the tower are the obstacles; the characters can attempt to overcome them in a variety of ways.

It is up to the GM how much information is revealed to the players. They might choose to make the whole clock visible, or only its name, or nothing at all. As a general rule, though, as characters become aware of threats, the players should have at least some visibility into the associated clocks.

Complex enemy threats can be broken into several layers, each with its own progress clock. For example, the megacorporation’s central office might have a “Perimeter Security” clock, an “Interior Guards” clock, and an “Office Security” clock. The crew would have to make their way through all three layers to reach the company boss’s personal safe and valuables within.

Not every situation or obstacle requires a clock. Use clocks when a situation is complex or layered and you need to track something over time; otherwise, resolve the result of an action with a single roll.

Progress clocks are a really flexible tool for tracking progress toward any abstract goal. You can use progress clocks in several different ways, for example:

- **Danger Clocks:** The GM can use a clock to represent a progressive danger, like suspicion growing during a seduction, the proximity of pursuers in a chase, or the alert level of guards on patrol. In this case, when a complication occurs, the GM ticks one, two, or three segments on the clock, depending on how severe the complication was. When the clock is full, the danger comes to fruition: the guards hunt down the intruders, activate an alarm, release the hounds, etc.
- **Racing Clocks:** Create two opposed clocks to represent a race. The characters might have a progress clock called “Escape” while their pursuers have a clock called “Cornered.” If the characters fill their clock before the pursuers fill theirs, they get away. Otherwise, they’re cornered and can’t flee. If both complete at the same time, something else happens; maybe the characters escape to their lair, but the pursuers were close enough that they now know the lair’s location.

You can also use racing clocks for environmental hazards. Maybe the characters are trying to complete the “Search” clock to find the lockbox on the sinking ship before the GM fills the “Sunk” clock and the vessel goes down.

- **Linked Clocks:** You can make a clock that unlocks another clock once it’s filled. For example, the GM might make a linked clock called “Cornered” after an “Alert the Guards” clock fills up. When you fight a veteran warrior, she might have a clock for her “Defense” and then a linked clock for “Vulnerable.” Once you overcome the “Defense” clock, then you can attempt to overcome the “Vulnerable” clock and defeat her. You might affect the “Defense” clock with violence in a knife-fight, or you lower her defense with deception if you have the opportunity. As always, the method of action is up to the players and the details of the fiction at hand.
- **Tug-of-war Clocks:** You can make a clock that can be filled and emptied by events, to represent a back-and-forth situation. You might make a “Revolution!” clock that indicates when the refugees start to riot due to poor treatment. Some events will tick the clock up and some will tick it down. Once it fills, the revolution begins. A tug-of-war clock is also perfect for an ongoing turf war between two crews or factions.
- **Long-term Projects:** Some projects will take a long time. A basic long-term project (like tinkering up a new feature for a device) is eight segments. Truly long-term projects (like creating a new designer drug) can be two, three, or even four clocks, representing all the phases of development, testing, and final completion. Add or subtract clocks depending on the details of the situation and complexity of the project. A long-term project is a good catch-all for dealing with any unusual player goal, including things that circumvent or change elements of the mechanics or the setting.

## 6: EDGE TOKENS

This is a game that encourages players to take an active role in shaping the story being told by the group. Players can always make suggestions (and the GM is encouraged to listen to them!), but there is also a mechanism that players can use to exert control over the story more directly: EDGE TOKENS.

### 6.1: SPENDING EDGE TOKENS

Each player starts each play session with two EDGE TOKENS, and each EDGE TOKEN can be spent to take one of the following actions:

- **Adjust a single die up or down by one to your benefit** (regardless of who rolled the die).
- **Re-roll all your d6's on a high/low roll.** You must keep the new result unless you spend another EDGE TOKEN to roll again.
- **Use a relevant ASPECT to help another character** when they are making a roll, giving them an additional d6.
- **Avoid having one of your ASPECTS, CONDITIONS, or pieces of GEAR complicate your character's life.** When the GM uses an ASPECT or piece of GEAR or CONDITION against you (narratively, or in the form of adding a penalty die), you can avoid that penalty by spending an EDGE TOKEN. You should be prepared to explain how this complication is avoided in the narrative, or to help the GM come up with an explanation.
- **Avoid or reduce a complication.** If you don't want to accept the result of a "Yes, but..." or "No, and..." result, you can spend an EDGE TOKEN to avoid that complication, or at least to minimize its impact (the GM has the ultimate say in the extent to which this can be done). In some cases, this can be used to avoid being TAKEN OUT of a conflict.
- **Turn a mundane item into a piece of GEAR for the duration of the scene.** This can be used to gain a bonus on related rolls.
- **Declare a new truth about the story.** This can be about the past (e.g., "The person working at the gate is my best friend from kindergarten, though we haven't spoken in years.") or the present (e.g., "It's a really hot night, so one of the windows is slightly ajar."). This should be allowed to impact the story, but not blow it wide open. So you can't say "I actually already found the big bad's lair and destroyed the world-ending artifact last month." For things that have a really substantial impact, the GM has veto power, or they might require playing out a scene and some high/low rolls to see how big of an impact the story detail can have.

## 6.2: EARNING EDGE TOKENS

You're not limited to just those two **EDGE TOKENS**, though; you can earn additional **EDGE TOKENS** by taking one of the following actions:

- **Voluntarily adjusting a single die up or down by any amount to your detriment** and accepting the results of that change.
- **Conceding a conflict.** See [Conceding](#) on page 18.
- **Striking a bargain with the GM.** There are many forms that this may take, but the GM can generally offer you edge tokens for adding additional complications in myriad forms. Either the player or the GM can offer this bargain, but both parties need to agree to it for it to take effect. This might involve accepting an **EDGE TOKEN** in exchange for any of the following as you take an action:
  - unintended harm to someone or something,
  - sacrificing money or an item,
  - betraying a friend or a loved one,
  - offending or angering a person or group,
  - suffering harm of some kind,
  - losing progress toward a long-term goal,
  - or literally any other kind of interesting/dramatic complication.
- **Doing cool things.** The GM should feel free to reward additional **EDGE TOKENS** as they see fit, including for excellent role play; making progress on goals and quests; attempting something really cool; vivid descriptions of successes or failures; clever suggestions or tactical decisions; or anything else that makes the story more interesting or the game more fun.

## 7: ADVANCEMENT

In **HIGH/LOW**, characters grow and evolve by gaining new **ASPECTS** or **GEAR**, by modifying existing **ASPECTS** or **GEAR**, and/or by having general narrative effects on the world and its inhabitants. There is no notion of experience points or “level.” Rather, as in a good storybook or movie, characters simply gain new abilities, gear, connections, and specialties when it's appropriate given the flow of the story.

## 8: CONFLICTS

While the rules presented so far can be used to cover a wide variety of situations, you may wish to use additional rules for conflicts: situations where characters are actively trying to harm one another. It could be a fist fight, a sword duel, a shootout, a chase, a tense interrogation, or anything similar. As long as the characters involved have the intent and the means to harm one another, and multiple characters are acting simultaneously, the rules presented here may be helpful.

Conflicts usually follow the following flow:

- **The GM sets the scene**, both narratively and mechanically.
- **Characters take turns resolving actions** until the conflict ends.

### 8.1: SETTING THE SCENE

The GM kicks things off by setting the scene. There are numerous pieces involved here, but narratively we're striving to answer these questions:

- Who is in the conflict?
- Where are they positioned relative to each other?
- What is the environment like?

Start by describing these in broad strokes, but as you're setting the scene, keep an eye out for fun-sounding features of the environment to turn into **CONDITIONS** during the fight. Don't overdo it, but if you can find 3-5 evocative things about the environment and/or the combatants and turn those into **CONDITIONS**, it can make the conflict more dynamic, both by providing additional flavor and by providing opportunities to apply game mechanics creatively. Good options include:

- Anything regarding the general mood, weather, or lighting, e.g., *"Dimly Lit"* or *"Stormy Night"* or *"Unsettling Vibe"* or *"Incredibly Loud Techno Music"*
- Anything that might affect movement, e.g., *"Muddy Ground"* or *"Dusty Books Everywhere"* or *"Crumbling Ruins"* or *"Ladder Access Only"*
- Things to hide behind, knock over, wreck, or use as improvised weapons, e.g., *"Huge Comfy Couch"* or *"Dark Corners"* or *"Meticulously-organized Workbench"* or *"Gasoline Containers"* or *"Accessible Rafters"* or *"Numerous Heavy Crates"*

You should also use this time to set up any necessary progress clocks for enemies or environmental hazards or time limits. You might have an “eruption” clock for a fight in a volcano, a “reinforcements” clock after the alarm goes off, a “heavy armor” clock on a beefy enemy, or anything like that.

If the conflict takes place over a large or diverse physical area, this is also the time to set up ZONES (see below).

Beyond the physical layout, there may be additional elements of the scene that are important to set out: character motivations and goals, stakes, and the like.

## 8.1.1: ZONES

ZONES are abstract representations of physical space. In general, a ZONE is an area where it’s close enough that you can interact directly with anyone in the same ZONE in a few seconds (attack them, help them, etc.).

Generally speaking, a conflict should rarely involve more than a handful of zones. ZONES should give a tactile sense of the environment, but they shouldn’t be too complicated; this isn’t a miniatures board game. Here are some good rules of thumb:

- If the ASPECTS would differ dramatically between two areas, they should be separate ZONES. For example, the front yard might have “*Muddy Ground*” but the inside might have “*Slippery Tile Floors.*”
- If you can describe the area as bigger than a house, you can probably divide it into multiple ZONES.
- If two areas are separated by stairs, a ladder, a fence, or a wall (any of which make direct interaction with people in the other area difficult), they should probably be separate ZONES.

## 8.2: TAKING TURNS

During a conflict, several characters are often acting at the same time. To simulate characters acting simultaneously, each character involved in a conflict takes turns specifying small actions to be taken and resolving rolls as necessary. The GM always decides who gets to go first based on what makes sense narratively (though players can make arguments if they feel the wrong decision is being made). Once the first player has gone, they decide who acts next. As a general rule, no character may act again until every other character has acted. This pattern continues until the situation is resolved.

## 8.2.I: PLAYER ACTIONS

There are several actions a character can take on their turn. While it is possible to take any actions you see fit (in order to advance a clock, for example), there are several common things you may wish to do during a conflict, including:

- **Attack** an enemy in your ZONE (or in an adjacent ZONE with a ranged weapon). If you succeed, you can generally take a minor enemy (“mook”) out of the fight entirely, or inflict conditions and/or advance a clock associated with a more powerful enemy.
- **Create an advantage** for themselves or others. This usually takes the form of a new CONDITION on a character or the environment, which can then be brought to bear on a later attack. There is no real limit to the kinds of conditions that can be created (other than the agreed-upon rules of the shared narrative), but here are some examples of the kinds of things you might consider:
  - **Positioning:** While relative positioning within a ZONE isn’t generally tracked (unless that’s what your group wants), you can create a CONDITION to represent the relevant features of that kind of positioning. For example, you might give yourself “*High Ground*” or “*Under the Dining Room Table*” or “*Bobbing and Weaving*,” or you might give an enemy “*Cornered*” or “*On the Defensive*.”
  - **Minor Injuries or Other Hindrances:** Some strikes in a fight are debilitating despite not doing any real long-term harm. Examples include making an enemy “*Winded*” or “*Stunned*” or giving them a “*Charlie Horse*” or tripping them to make them “*Prone*” or throwing sand in their eyes to make them “*Temporarily Blind*” or knocking away their weapon to make them “*Disarmed*.” Any of these would allow you or an ally to follow up with an attack that does more lasting harm.
  - **Environment:** You can also manipulate the environment to create advantages. For example, you might make it harder to move into your ZONE by creating a “*Makeshift Barricade*,” or create some cover by knocking over the “*Big Oaken Bookcase*,” or light things “*On Fire*.”
- **Remove a disadvantage** works similarly to creating an advantage but can be used to remove a CONDITION applied in this way.
- **Adopt a defensive stance.** Add a “*Defensive Stance*” CONDITION to your character until you act again; “*Defensive Stance*” provides one bonus die on any roll made to avoid direct harm from an enemy action.

In addition to taking an action, a character can usually move from one ZONE to another adjacent ZONE unless there are ASPECTS making movement into or out of those ZONES difficult (in which case it may take an entire turn or more to move between them).



## 8.2.2: ENEMY ACTIONS

Generally, players are the only ones who roll dice, but if enemies take actions that could make things worse for a player character, that character will generally have an opportunity to make a roll to try to avoid or mitigate the negative effects of those enemy actions.

Enemy actions can have a variety of effects, including advancing or regressing a progress clock, or adding (or worsening) a **CONDITION** to a character or the environment.

## 8.3: GETTING TAKEN OUT

When a character has accrued enough negative **CONDITIONS**, or a single **CONDITION** becomes severe enough, they may be **TAKEN OUT**. Being **TAKEN OUT** is bad; it means not only that the character can't fight anymore, but the player whose character was responsible gets to decide what their loss looks like and what happens to them after the conflict.

This means that there is a real risk of character death when you are **TAKEN OUT**; and, to be fair, if you're talking about a physical conflict where people have knives or guns, death is a realistic possibility. That said, though, instant death of a protagonist can be frustrating for a player, and it's also often quite boring from a narrative perspective compared to putting that character through hell and exploring their response. So try to look for other narratively-interesting things that could happen as a result of being **TAKEN OUT**. Maybe the character's "*Family Heirloom*" **GEAR** is shattered; or they now have a "*Missing Left Leg*" **ASPECT**; or their "*Always Looks on the Bright Side*" **ASPECT** morphs into "*Tinges of Cynicism*;" or maybe they don't die, but just before they pass out they see the death of a friendly NPC, which they are powerless to prevent. All of these choices allow the story to continue in interesting ways that an instant death doesn't.

That doesn't mean there's no room for character death in the game, however; you should probably just save that possibility for conflicts that are extremely pivotal, dramatic, and meaningful for the character (in other words, conflicts in which that character would knowingly and willingly risk dying in order to win). And it's generally always a good idea to make sure that players know that death is on the table heading into a conflict, even if their character doesn't.

## 8.4: CONCEDED

When all else fails, when you're worried that you can't absorb a hit or that continuing to fight just isn't worth the punishment, you can decide to stop. Once the dice hit the table, what happens happens; but, whatever the reason, you can interrupt any action at any time before the roll is made to declare that you concede the conflict.

Concession gives the other person what they wanted from you, or in the case of more than two combatants, removes you as a concern for the opposing side. You're out of the conflict, period.

But there are benefits to conceding, too. Firstly, concession lets you avoid the worst parts of your fate. You still lost, and that needs to be reflected in the story; but things should generally be at least a little bit better than if you had continued to try and been **TAKEN OUT** instead. For example, conceding might mean that your character is accidentally left for dead on the battlefield, as opposed to being captured and dragged to the enemy's headquarters.

Beyond narrative effects, conceding always awards an **EDGE TOKEN**, which opens the possibility of coming back stronger later on.

## 8.5: ENDING A CONFLICT

Under most circumstances, when all of the members of one side have either conceded the conflict or have been **TAKEN OUT**, the conflict is over.

But there are other things that may end a conflict as well. A notable example might be that a progress clock related to an environmental factor or other external threat is filled; in this situation, the conflict might come to an abrupt and catastrophic end, or everyone's attention might be drawn elsewhere. In these cases, the game might transition to another conflict (possibly with different participants and/or stakes), or the new situation might be resolved with a single roll or a progress clock.

You may also occasionally find yourself in a conflict scene where the participants are no longer interested in or willing to harm one another because of some change in the circumstances, in which case it may make sense to transition away from the turn-based conflict rules.

One final reason that you may wish to end a conflict voluntarily is if the pace of play is starting to drag. The point at which this happens will be different for every group and every game, but don't be afraid to wrap things up with some quick high/low rolls to resolve things quickly if you feel like the game is getting too bogged down in the minutiae of combat.

## 9: ADVICE

Games and campaigns can take many forms, but there are some common elements that the best games have. This section contains some general advice for playing the game, both for players and for GM's.

### 9.1: ADVICE FOR PLAYERS

- **Decide what you're trying to accomplish in the story first, then consult the rules to help you do it.** In other words, don't look at the rules as a straitjacket or a hard limit on an action. Instead, use them as a variety of potential tools to model whatever you're trying to do. Your intent, whatever it is, always takes precedence over the mechanics. Tell a cool story and describe action like you would in a novel or a movie, then worry about the rules later.
- **Feel free to make your own additions to the story.** If you have an idea for the story, or for what should happen as a result of one of your rolls (successful or otherwise), don't hesitate to suggest it.
- **Match the setting.** The rules give a lot of flexibility in character creation, but it is important to try to match the tone and the power level of the game everyone else is playing to avoid one character stealing the show.
- **Be proactive.** There's no limit to the kinds of characters you can play, but it's important that everyone play a character who is going to get involved and make a difference in the world, or at least to explore interesting hooks and hints that show up in the story. If you want to play a character who isn't terribly proactive, it's still worth trying to find ways for them to move the plot forward, accidentally or otherwise.
- **Share the spotlight.** Find the balance between letting your character shine and helping to give other players an opportunity to let their characters shine. Your character may have all kinds of interesting nuance that you want to explore, but your fellow players and your GM have put a lot of thought into their characters and their place in the world as well.
- **Lean into complications and failed rolls.** It's great when things go your way, but when they don't, as long as the results are not catastrophic, roll with it! It often makes for a more interesting story when things don't quite go to plan, and even serious consequences can make for really interesting story beats. Beyond that, accepting these consequences can often result in **EDGE TOKENS** that can turn the later rolls in your favor.

## 9.2: ADVICE FOR GM'S

- **Don't let the rules get in the way of what makes narrative sense.** If you or the players describe something in the game and it makes sense to apply a certain rule outside of the normal circumstances where you would do so, or to skip applying a rule altogether, go ahead and do it. The story should always come first.
- **Listen to the players.** During game creation and during gameplay, the players will tell you what they like (through their actions in game if not directly). Try to give your players plenty of opportunities to engage with the parts of the game that they find fun.
- **Be a fan of the players and their characters.** Provide opportunities for each character to shine by using their ASPECTS and GEAR to both help and hinder them. Bring elements of their backstories into play, and give opportunities for everyone to get to know the characters.
- **Play to discover what happens.** It is good to have a plan for the broad strokes of the story you want to tell, but it's also good not to over-prepare for one scenario (what if your players don't take that route?). Go with the flow and build things up through play. It can be scary not to know where things are going, but oftentimes great ideas will develop during play, and players' hypotheses can serve as additional inspiration for an ending or twist that you haven't written yet. Don't be afraid to let things deviate from your plan (or even to start with only a hook and no grand plan!). And as you discover things about the story, feel free to add new ASPECTS to anything and everything to make these changes meaningful mechanically.
- **Let the players help you.** You don't have to shoulder the whole burden of making up story details yourself. The more collaborative you get, the more emotional investment the players are going to have in the result, because they shared in its creation. During play, players can also suggest benefits and drawbacks associated with the results of a high/low roll, or while striking a bargain. If you're unsure of what should happen in a given situation, feel free to ask the players directly what they think should happen, or even to let them narrate their own results. It's good to leave some elements of mystery, but it's also nice for the players to have some direct control over the story.
- **Make rolls meaningful.** Don't hide every secret behind a roll; let the players discover some things purely through roleplay. Rolls should only be called for when success and failure are both reasonably probable, when there is drama and tension behind and action, and when the story can move forward in an interesting way regardless of the result of the roll. A character not noticing a crucial story hook because of a failed roll is almost never interesting, so don't let that happen unless you have a way to spice it up.

- **Make even “failed” rolls exciting.** Even a failed roll can move the story forward in an interesting way, and it’s up to you to make that happen (rather than making the PCs look foolish or incompetent). Perhaps the failure can be attributed to circumstances rather than incompetence; maybe the lock is more complex than it looked, or your contact failed to show up on time, etc. Perhaps instead you succeed, but at some cost; maybe you’ve alerted the bad guys, maybe there’s only time to save one of the refugees, maybe you manage to land on your feet but twist your ankle in the process, or maybe you’ve inadvertently created an opportunity for the bad guys.
- **Manage the probabilities.** Beyond deciding whether a roll is necessary/allowed (versus an action automatically succeeding or failing), you can also exert some influence by being selective about when to bring mechanics into play against the players. If you want things to be tough, or to bring about some dire situations for the players, make sure to use every possible ASPECT, piece of GEAR, and CONDITION against the player characters; but if you want something to be easy, feel free to leave some out. Rolling a bonus die (or two or three) dramatically increases the chances of success, and rolling a penalty die dramatically reduces the chance of success and makes additional consequences much more likely; so this is a powerful way to control the flow and tension of a scene, as well as how confident or vulnerable the characters feel in a given moment.
- **Don’t blindside the players.** For actions that require a roll, try to make sure that everyone is on the same page (at least in broad strokes) about the details first: set the scene, establish and clarify what the character is trying to do, and communicate the stakes (how much of an impact can be made with a success, and just how serious will failure be?). It’s especially important to communicate when a character is at risk of being TAKEN OUT (or worse) so the player can act accordingly. If a player doesn’t want to follow through with an action after understanding the stakes, that’s fine.
- **Track trends, not details.** For example, in a combat scenario facing off against a large mob of enemies, don’t track each enemy individually. Instead, use a clock like “Overwhelmed” to track the flow of combat. As PCs take actions to whittle down the mob’s numbers or resources, clear segments; and as reinforcements or new threats arrive, fill in segments.
- **Manage the pace** by zooming in or out. If a scene is getting boring because of too many little details, pull back and use a single roll to wrap it up, narrating the result as a montage of sorts. If things are going too fast, slow things down by describing more details, calling for more rolls, and giving opportunities for characters to interact.
- **Keep the tokens flowing!** EDGE TOKENS let players help shape the story they want to tell. They allow characters to pull off incredible heroic moments when the time is right, and the mechanisms by which players earn them can add a lot to the story along the way as well. Don’t be stingy with them! Offer bargains, use characters’ ASPECTS against them, and reward play that moves things forward and/or makes things interesting.



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