

F • reeform

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R • ecognition

A Generic Hack for the FU
RPG

'Buckets of Dice' Variant



FUBAR

A Generic Hack for the Freeform, Universal RPG

What is FUBAR?

Free Universal Beyond All Recognition, or *FUBAR*, is a hack of the *Freeform, Universal (FU)* system to add a little more structure and ‘crunch’ to the system. In some ways, the result sacrifices a portion of the elegance of *FU*’s streamlined system in exchange for greater guidance and detail, and is very much a reflection of my own preferences in role-playing systems and undoubtedly won’t be to everyone’s tastes. However, among the ideas found here, many ‘liberated’ from other RPG systems and bolted onto the *FU* chassis, hopefully there will be some of interest and value to others hacking *FU* for their own gaming groups.

The most significant changes include: adoption of the ‘Buckets of Dice’ variant resolution method seen in the roleplaying games *Sorcerer* and *Hot War*, which blunts the huge impact of bonus and penalty dice in standard *FU*; the addition of Resolve, a pool of points which double as both FU points and plot immunity ‘hit points’; and Goals that affect the Resolve point economy.

Dice System

The ‘buckets of dice’ variant uses a dice pool, with each side in a conflict rolling their respective dice pools and comparing the results. Players roll three ten-sided dice, or 3d10, against an opposing ‘resistance’ pool of 3d10. Each positive Condition, Descriptor, etc. adds a 1d10 ‘bonus die’ to the acting player’s dice pool and each negative one incurs a 1d10 ‘penalty die’ which is instead added to the

opposing player or GM's pool. As usual, the acting player frames a question to set the stakes for a conflict.

For example, intelligence agent Harper confronts a suspected Soviet spy and is interrogating her to see if he can pressure her into letting something slip. At an appropriate point in the dialogue, the GM calls for a roll and both sides assemble dice pools. Harper's player looks at his Descriptors, adding his 'Shrewd judge of character' trademark for a total pool of 4D. The GM's pool is unmodified in this instance, and remains at 3D. The question at stake is 'Does Harper learn whether the woman is a Soviet spy?'

Both roll their dice, Harper getting a 9, 7, 6 and 5 and the GM rolling 9, 5 and 2.

Once the dice are rolled, the highest results of the two pools are compared. Each die showing a result higher than the highest result in the other pool is counted as a success. In the event of a tie, the two highest dice are discarded and the next highest compared. If these next dice are a tie, then they are also discarded, and so on until the tie is broken. There is a chance of a tie all the way through, which means neither a Yes or No result, but an impasse where neither party's goal is achieved.

If the player's pool is the higher, the result is as follows:

No. of Higher Dice	Result	Outcome
1 die higher	Yes, but	You get what you want but there's a catch.
2 dice higher	Yes	You get what you want.
3+ dice higher	Yes, and	You get what you want and something good as well.

If the GM's pool is higher:

No. of Higher Dice	Result	Outcome
1 die higher	No, but	You don't get what you want but there's a silver lining.
2 dice higher	No	You don't get what you want and something bad happens instead.
3+ dice higher	No, and	You don't get what you want. Something bad happens instead, along with something more.

Returning to the example, Harper wins the conflict with 2 successes. The 9s rolled by both parties are ignored since if the highest results tie both dice are discarded. The GM's next highest result is a 5 and Harper has two results better than this, a 7 and a 6, giving 2 successes or a 'Yes' result. Harper tricks the woman into revealing herself as a Soviet agent.

Conflicts usually result in simply an answer to a closed question: in the case of 'Do I jump the chasm?' a 'Yes' result means the chasm is jumped; a 'No' means it isn't along with an implied nasty consequence. However, in some cases the outcome may be represented by adding either a new Condition or a Detail as makes sense from the context of the question being answered. Modifying 'and' and 'but' results create secondary Conditions or Details of equal or lesser magnitude to any bestowed by the central stakes of the conflict. From *FU* p.12:

- *Condition:* These are physical, mental or social effects that impact the way a character behaves or attempts actions. Conditions include things like 'angry', 'confused', 'tired' and 'unconscious'.
- *Detail:* These are features of an environment or scene that might change as a result of an action. Details might include curtains catching fire, windows breaking, animals running off, or machinery stalling. Details are always closely tied to the scene and the action.

For example, Drayt is gambling in a tavern, with the stakes set at winning a few copper pennies, enough to cover room and board for the evening. Drayt wins, with a 'Yes and' result.

Drayt achieves the object of the conflict, represented by a new Condition 'A few pennies'. Drayt's player suggests that he also wins the loser's prize horse, as his 'and' Detail. The GM disagrees, considering the reward of a horse far in excess of the conflict stakes of a few pennies. Instead he suggests a new Condition for Drayt, a reputation as a 'Shrewd Gambler'. This Condition is temporary, unlikely to last beyond the next few days and limited to those who have heard about it from tavern patrons. Everyone agrees this is appropriate to the modest stakes of the conflict.

Bonus and Penalty Dice

Descriptors are the primary source of bonus or penalty dice. However, other factors may positively or negatively affect a roll:

- *Unfamiliarity*: If a player character does not have an appropriate Descriptor to apply and the action falls outside of the character’s Concept, a 1D penalty should be applied.
- *Applicability*: If two characters are opposed and one has a more appropriate and applicable Concept or Descriptor, for example ‘Chess Master’ versus ‘Cunning’ in a game of chess, a 1D bonus might be awarded to the character with the more specific and applicable talents.
- *Conditions*: These will regularly provide bonus or penalty dice.
- *Circumstance*: Circumstantial modifiers overlap pretty freely with Conditions. For example, a character might be formally inflicted with the ‘Surprised’ Condition in one situation, or attacked from ambush as a Detail in another. Either way, 1D penalty is applied to represent this. Common circumstantial modifiers are:
 - Superior or inferior tools (see ‘What about Gear?’)
 - Being outnumbered or outnumbering the opposition
 - Holding a superior or inferior position (e.g. high ground, cover)
 - Environmental factors (e.g. darkness)

The impact of bonus and penalty dice is significant in determining success or failure, albeit less markedly than in standard *FU*:

Number of Bonus Dice	Chance of success (‘Yes but’ or better)
None	50%
One	62%
Two	70%
Three	76%

Resolve

FU points are renamed **Resolve** points and represent both the story-changing, dice-affecting currency from *FU* and the player characters' plot immunity, their story 'hit points'. The pool needn't be named **Resolve** as different genres may inspire different, more thematic, term, such as **Luck, Hope, Faith, Doom** or **Grit**. Whatever it's called, when you hit 0 you're out of it and can be written out of the scenario at any moment.

Player characters begin with a **Resolve** pool of 5 points and over the course of a session this pool of points will ebb and flow. **Resolve** can never exceed this pool size cap and if it should it drop to 0 the character has lost their plot immunity and can be written out of the story by a subsequent conflict loss or other significant setback - essentially, they've lost their will to continue fighting on.

Resolve does not represent hit points in the traditional roleplaying sense, where they simulate physical health only. A character can be in perfect physical health, yet be at 0 **Resolve** and able to be written out of the game - killed, exiled, imprisoned, sent insane - in a moment. Equally, a character can be carrying grievous wounds and hampering **Conditions**, yet be at maximum **Resolve**.

An example of this is **Bruce Willis'** character in the *Die Hard* movies: constantly limping, bleeding and bruised, yet always somehow keeping on.

During play, **Resolve** can be lost or spent in the following ways:

- Losing a 'high stakes' conflict, whether one involving deadly physical force, sanity-threatening effects or dire social consequences.
- Re-rolling some or all dice in a roll just made.
- Suffering a significant setback or defeat to your character's **Goal**.
- Creating a convenient coincidence or useful fact about the world.
- Activating an extremely powerful supernatural power.

Conversely, **Resolve** is regained by:

- Making significant progress towards your character's **Goal**, or accomplishing it.
- Suffering a significant complication or limitation due to one of your character's **Flaws**.
- Acting in a genre typical or genre reinforcing way (optional).

- Describing a downtime scene in recovery or relaxation.
- Conceding a high stakes conflict.
- At the start of each session (2 Resolve points).

Regardless, at the end of a scenario (usually 2-3 sessions) and before the next begins Resolve is reset to its full level.

‘High stakes’ conflicts are explained in greater detail later, but represent conflicts where the character stands to lose something important: deadly combat, a critical debate, a high-stakes bet, a pivotal argument with a lover, or facing down a terrifying creature. If a character loses a high stakes conflict, i.e. gets any variation of a ‘No’ result, then they lose 1 point of Resolve.

Re-rolling allows you to spend a Resolve to pick up and re-roll any number of dice from a roll just made to try to improve the outcome.

Your character’s Goal and Flaws are important influences: as well as setbacks or progress towards a Goal deducting or restoring 1 Resolve respectively, if a Goal is achieved the character’s Resolve immediately restores to its maximum amount.

When a character’s Flaw plays a pivotal role in restricting their choices or introducing complications to their life, then 1 Resolve point is often regained. For example, the Flaw ‘Keen Sense of Vengeance’ might penalise attempts to convince an old enemy to join forces. The Flaw adds a penalty die to any appropriate roll, but no Resolve is regained as the impact is not pivotal. However, if the player decides that they flat out won’t parley with a former enemy, or even worse, try to sabotage negotiations, then this level of complication certainly warrants regaining a Resolve point.

In some circumstances you might find a Trademark looks like it should act as a Flaw in some circumstances, and vice versa. This is a good thing, since it means additional sources of Resolve-rewarding complications. An example might be an ‘Every Inch a Cop’ Trademark, mostly positive but occasionally complicating life for the character and acting as a Flaw – witnessing an unrelated crime while tailing another suspect, for instance. If the player decides her character just can’t walk on by, and intervenes to stop the crime in progress at the cost of losing the suspect (or worse, alerting the suspect to the tail), then the Trademark is acting as a Flaw and a Resolve point should be awarded for the complication.

Narrating facts and convenient coincidences can assist a character to overcome obstacles or sidestep them altogether, costing 1 Resolve per plausible fact or coincidence described. These often create Details or Conditions to apply to the

scene or GM characters. For example, 1 Resolve could be spent to narrate that the apemen respect generosity above all other virtues, that recent riots have set the police station on fire, or that the abandoned tool shed contains a fuelled chainsaw. The scope of the coincidence or fact is limited by the believability of the coincidence – a good gauge of how much of a stretch is how the rest of the group react. If your fellow players raise their eyebrows in scepticism, it's a fair bet you've narrated a fact or coincidence a little too convenient for credibility. However, naming a fact related to one of your character's Descriptors can help increase the scope of the coincidence. For example, just happening to have an antidote to the poison you've just drank in your pocket is a stretch beyond a single Resolve point – unless you happen to have 'Alchemist' as a Trademark, in which case the coincidence is believable.

In some genres supernatural powers may be accessible to characters, such as spells or super powers. Some rare, powerful uses of these abilities might require spending Resolve to activate, but 'normal' use of a power should not – reserve this kind of cost for summoning Great Cthulhu or its cousin.

Rewarding certain types of actions and decisions can be an effective way of incentivising genre-typical actions: splitting up in a horror scenario, acting heroically in a superhero scenario, betraying an ally in a gritty spy campaign, and so on. If the group is unclear on the genre tropes to be rewarded, it might be helpful to list a few examples before kicking off the first session.

Once per player character per session Resolve can be regained through a 'downtime' scene, representing rest, medical attention or relaxation, depending on the types of trauma that have caused Resolve loss. By spending a scene in rest, recovery or indulging a character's interests or pleasures, 1 Resolve point is regained. There must be adequate opportunity for this relaxation, so this may not be a plausible option except at certain points in a scenario. Ideally, the relaxation scene should illuminate something interesting about the character, providing an insight into their personality and what makes them tick. These scenes might also provide opportunities to remove or reduce a character's negative Conditions.

A character gains 1 Resolve as an incentive to concede during a high stakes conflict. This means that the character proposes or accepts a compromise outcome where they lose the conflict, but on more favourable or negotiated terms than if the conflict had run its course and the character was defeated outright. This Resolve gain is to encourage players to consider conceding conflicts and to offset the sting of losing. Low stakes conflicts can be conceded, but without the risk of Resolve loss on the line, no Resolve is gained for doing so.

Finally, at the beginning of each session 2 Resolve points are regained. The exception is when the last session ended on a cliff hanger, so as not to rob the opening scene of tension. In this case, the 2 points are regained at the first appropriate opportunity once the cliff hanger scene has been resolved.

Due to the need to spend Resolve to take advantage of some of its beneficial uses, coupled with a cap on Resolve so that characters cannot accumulate points endlessly, an interesting tension results. Players are faced with a balancing act between letting their character's Resolve fall too low for safety, versus keeping it high and safe, but losing out on the positive benefits of Resolve in the form of re-rolls and creating convenient facts about the world.

If a character's Resolve falls below 0 they are out of the game, either immediately or in the next scene as the player describes what final fate befalls their character.

A player character's final moments are the player's alone to describe and might be a direct consequence of what caused them to fall into negative Resolve, for example being stabbed then dying, or unrelated entirely: a Goal is stymied and Resolve falls into the negative, and in a subsequent scene the player describes their character retiring from their adventuring life an exhausted and broken individual.

There's a way out, however: if the player chooses, instead of being written out of the game their character can trade one of their Trademark Descriptors for a new, permanent Flaw reflecting the incident. In return their character stays in the game and their Resolve pool is immediately restored to its maximum amount.

When Resolve drops, a character's plot immunity diminishes, and in-game events usually reflect this: the character's luck takes a turn for the worst, Conditions inflicted are more serious, enemies smell blood and make their move and the character's situation generally becomes more precarious and threatened. The GM shouldn't pull any punches - when a character's Resolve drops to 0 or 1, go for the throat, ratchet up the tension and make them run for cover.

As mentioned earlier, tailor Resolve for your genre. A thematic change can be to reverse how Resolve works and renaming it something more menacing, such as Doom, counting up from zero instead of down from five. Rerolling dice or losing a high stakes roll adds a point of Doom, whereas suffering from a Flaw or taking a respite lowers Doom a point, with the character being written out once Doom exceeds five. Although mechanically not significantly different, this can be an effective way of tangibly altering the feel of Resolve in your game.

Character Creation

Concept

The character's Concept defines who they are and what they can do in the broadest sense, and is the baseline indicator of competency before Descriptors are taken into account. If an action does not fall within a character's Concept, a 1D penalty is usually applied. Equally, a particularly apt Concept might add a 1D bonus.

These usually take the form of *Adjective Noun*, such as 'Shifty Bureaucrat' or 'Beaten Soldier', and include a basic ability in everything related to these terms. In the former example, this might encompass knowledge of whose palm to grease, understanding official documents, evasive doublespeak, political etiquette and so on.

A useful device is to list out three to five areas the Concept encompasses so that the players and GM have a shared understanding of what does and doesn't fall within the Concept's umbrella. For example, a 'Grizzled Sheriff' includes the abilities:

- Staredown
- Know the law
- Fight
- Be tough
- Investigate crimes

These are usually plainer, less descriptive terms than you'd use as Descriptors, since otherwise they can feel like your Descriptors are duplicating the Concept - for example, 'Dig out the Truth' is a more evocative and specific description better suited to a character's Descriptor than their Concept.

The list of Concept abilities needn't be too limiting - although it doesn't state it, you'd probably assume the Grizzled Sheriff can also drive a vehicle, if set in the modern day, or ride a horse if in the old West even though this isn't specifically listed out, as this would be common to most characters in the scenario.

Descriptors

Each character starts with 10 Descriptors. All Descriptors should be evocative in what they tell about the character and not too broad in application. These consist of:

- *5 Trademarks:* Positive and useful in nature, these Descriptors cover skills, physical, social or mental attributes, motivations, treasured or unusual possessions, weird abilities, and retainers or boon companions. In some situations they might be a drawback and act as a Flaw, but usually they are an asset. Examples are ‘Fierce and wild’, ‘Born liar’, ‘Drive like a maniac’, ‘X-Ray Gun’ and ‘Built like a tank’.
- *2 Flaws:* Negative in nature, these Descriptors provide interesting complications for the character. Usually they are a drawback and source of Resolve points, but occasionally a Flaw might help in a conflict. Examples are ‘Hopelessly loyal’, ‘Hook for a hand’, ‘Hunted by the law’ or ‘Sucker for a pretty face’.
- *3 Relationships:* At least one relationship should be positive and one should be negative; clearly indicate the object of the Relationship and its nature. Other player characters are ideal characters to hold a Relationship with. Relationships are likely to change more frequently than other Descriptors due to the often fluid nature of interpersonal affairs. Examples are ‘Annie’s the one I love’, ‘Baron Zaren will pay!’ and ‘Ray’s got my back’.

Goals

Every player should choose a Goal representing their character’s current primary ambition. Goals must be defined as finite objectives, where success or failure is ultimately clear. For example, ‘Find the Macron Device’ is good because it’s specific. Compare this with ‘Obsessed with finding Alien Technology’ - this is too open-ended and non-specific for a Goal and is more a general character motivation, better expressed as a Trademark or Flaw.

Goals affect Resolve points, with a point lost or gained every time a significant setback is suffered or notable progress made. Goals should be difficult to short cut and involve a series of smaller ‘milestones’ along the way. As a rule of thumb, expect a Goal to be resolved at the end of a campaign arc, roughly after 2 - 4 scenarios.

Each Goal milestone is an opportunity for progress but with a risk of a serious setback. Whenever a Goal milestone is successful, 1 Resolve is gained. Conversely, if the player character fails their milestone, then they lose 1 Resolve. For the final resolution of a Goal, if the pivotal conflict or encounter was successful, the player character's Resolve immediately restores to its full value, a new Trademark is gained and the completed Goal should be replaced by a new one. If the Goal-resolving conflict is failed, the character loses 1 Resolve, gains a new Flaw representing that failure and a new Goal must be chosen.

A player can choose to abandon a Goal between sessions, losing 1 Resolve but with no Flaw inflicted. If the Goal should become irrelevant or unachievable for reasons outside the character's control, no Resolve is lost and a new Goal is chosen. A Goal may be altered or rephrased between sessions at no Resolve cost, as long as both player and GM agree that the change is not so drastic as to constitute effective abandonment of the Goal.

Example Character

As an example character, let's consider Police Constable Jerry Lytle, with the Concept of 'Cynical Copper':

- *A Cynical Copper knows how to investigate a crime, interrogate a suspect, hold his own in a fight and understands the law as part of his Concept.*
- *Trademarks: Spot a liar; Vicious scrapper; Crazy like a fox; Blend in; Ruthless*
- *Flaw: Gambling problem; Suspicious of everyone.*
- *Relationships: Knowles (PC) can't be trusted; Freddie Mason (NPC, London gangster) saved my life once; Karen (NPC, estranged wife) gets under my skin.*
- *Goal: Uncover the ring of corrupt cops.*
- *Resolve: 5*

Magic and other Supernatural Abilities

Superhuman powers can be difficult to handle if not all player characters possess them. A game involving a group of superheroes is no problem since each character will get one or more signature powers and the GM need only concern him or herself with keeping each broadly within the same range of usefulness so that one character does not dominate the game.

However, where only one or two characters possess these supernatural powers this requires additional thought. The key is ensuring that all characters share roughly equal spotlight time and that the supernatural characters do not end up dominating play through their powers. For this reason, balancing a character's awesome power with an equally crippling flaw is not often a helpful approach as both the power and the flaw become opportunities for that character's story to overshadow those of the other player characters.

In a flexible system like *FU* supernatural powers can often be treated exactly like any other Descriptor: an ability like 'Hulk Strength' may not be any more effective in a conflict than a mundane Descriptor like 'Body Builder', since the dice represent your ability to leverage that ability to achieve a desired outcome. The fictional detail will vary - Hulk will smash walls to achieve his aims, while the body builder is restricted to breaking down doors - but the mechanical resolution need not.

Options to consider are:

Treating the Descriptor as any other: In this case, the Descriptors should be specific, 'Raise the Dead' rather than 'Dark Necromantic Powers' for example. If a power is to remain very broad in its application, consider penalising it when opposing more specific Descriptors. Using your 'Fire Magic' Descriptor to create a jet of flame might be at a penalty die compared to 'Keen shot with a Bow'. 'Jet of Flame' on the other hand is suitably specific.

The potential downside is if you want a character with a broad range of powers you may end up using all of their Descriptors on powers rather than interesting personality traits. Less significant abilities, like the casting of cantrips, might fall under the character's Concept rather than a specific Descriptor.

Defining Powers within the Concept: Expanding on the suggestion of listing out abilities covered by the character's Concept, the character uses some of these 'slots' to describe specific abilities, for example an 'Obsessed Necromancer' might have the following mix of powers and abilities: Occult knowledge, communicate with the dead, summon the dead, protection from spirits and withering touch. Because these abilities are usually highly useful, it is often helpful to combine this option with one of the other suggestions such as magic points, long casting times, rare ingredients or an unpredictable number of uses. The player should work with the GM to describe how these powers work, including required ingredients, ritual elements and casting times.

- *Balancing broad supernatural Descriptors with great specific expertise:* Each player character gets one ‘super’ Descriptor, either a broadly-applicable Swiss army knife ability such as ‘Dark Necromantic Powers’ or a narrower ability that confers 2D instead of 1D when used, such as ‘Finest Swordsman in the West’ or ‘Herculean Strength’.

As well as adding 2D, the fiction surrounding the ability can also be suitably larger in scope. ‘Herculean Strength’ can be used to lift a castle portcullis or smash a wall, ‘Finest Swordsman’ to duel with a group of foes at once without penalty and so on. This is ideal for larger than life genres and the 2D Descriptors can represent mastery of mundane abilities as equally as supernatural powers.

If 2D seems too powerful, another option may be appealing: when the ‘mastery’ Descriptor is used in a roll, distinguish it by rolling a different coloured die. This die can be re-rolled once if desired, keeping the new result.

- *Balancing broad supernatural Descriptors by reducing their potency:* The reverse of the previous option, a broad magical Trademark contains three distinct, specific powers or spells, instead of adding 1D. For example, the supernatural Trademark ‘Necromancy’ gives the abilities ‘Compel Spirit’, ‘Animate Corpse’ and ‘Spirit Sight’, each at +0D instead of the usual single ability at +1D. However, if the Descriptor describes to a single, discrete supernatural ability, for example ‘Super Strength’, then treat just as a normal Descriptor with broader fictional applications as described earlier.
- *Additional costs for supernatural Descriptors:* Perhaps a Resolve point is needed to cast mighty spells, or is permanently lost when a broad-based supernatural Descriptor is chosen at character creation, reducing Resolve to a maximum of four. Alternatively or additionally, inconvenient fictional restrictions might apply: long casting times, rare spell ingredients, human sacrifice, and so on.
- *Unpredictable number of uses:* For example, any ‘No and’ result when using the power also cancels the supernatural power for a period. If used excessively, e.g. more than once per scene, or using the ability more times than your Resolve pool cap in a session, the power stops working on any ‘No’ or ‘No and’ result. Restoration of the ability could occur after time, or after fulfilling some arcane ritual.
- *Magic points:* Every power has a limited number of uses represented by three poker chips or similar. Each non-trivial use of the power costs one of these

points. When gone, the character can either start to spend Resolve instead, or must recharge their powers somehow: for example, prayers and offerings to a deity, ritual sacrifice, the passage of time, communing at a place of power. With advancement, rather than gaining a new Trademark a magic-using character can instead choose to increase their magic pool by two.

Ultimately it's about balancing the utility and scene stealing potential of a supernatural Descriptor against those of the other characters. It can be tricky to accommodate a mixed party of characters where you don't want to allow overly-broad Descriptors but equally do not want a supernatural character to be forced to spend all their Descriptors to define various aspects of their supernatural powers.

In some genres it might be appropriate to dispense with attempts at balance. For example, in a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* scenario a supernaturally-powered Slayer supported by a bunch of ostensibly normal friends would be entirely genre-appropriate.

What about Gear?

Unless the item is special, such as an heirloom of special significance ('My father's gold watch') or unusual ('Experimental Projekt X Device'), gear is not handled as a Descriptor. Instead, if a character is in a situation where gear gives them an advantage or disadvantage compared to an opponent, e.g. taking a knife to a gunfight, then apply a 1D bonus or penalty die to reflect the advantage conferred in the situation. In many cases gear won't add a bonus, but makes the attempt even possible, or broadens the range of options open to the character - you can't shoot your enemy without a gun for example.

Gear can also influence whether a conflict is considered low or high stakes. A sword might escalate a physical scuffle from low to high stakes, whereas a suit of head-to-toe plate armour might reduce sword strikes to low stakes and render being punched totally ineffective. A royal letter of authority might allow a character to freely boss his social betters around, an action which would normally warrant a conflict, in some cases a high stakes conflict if social ostracism is a powerful force in your game's genre, and effectively elevating the character's status above that of his erstwhile superiors.

Arms and Armour

A common feature of role-playing games is the detailing of arms and armour, adding differentiation between different weapons and armour to add tactical spice to physical combat conflicts.

If a little more complication is desired to reflect this differentiation, consider the following option:

Every weapon is classified as one of three types, sidearm, battle arm or heavy arm:

- *Sidearms (1d10 bonus)*: These are generally convenient to carry, and are often concealable. They are generally either intended as a backup weapon in any serious combat or are cheap and disposable. In some societies and company they may be considered acceptable to carry where other, larger weapons are outlawed. Examples include pistols, short bows, daggers, batons or one-handed clubs.
- *Battle arms (2d10 bonus)*: These are the mainstay weapons of war. While not easily concealed, they are usually not overly bulky and the majority of melee weapons can be wielded one-handed. Examples include broadswords, maces, spears, crossbows, javelins, longbows, muskets, submachine guns, hunting rifles, assault rifles and shotguns.
- *Heavy arms (3d10 bonus)*: These are over-size weapons capable of devastating damage and difficult to conceal and almost always requiring two hands to wield. Examples include two-handed axes, great swords, polearms, lances, swivel guns, elephant guns or support machine guns.

Superior Weaponry Bonus

The weapons of combatants are compared when engaged in close combat and to any ranged combat where both sides are trying to attack one another - where one party is seeking cover or attempting to flee the shooter, then the weapon needs to be compared to the factors the dodging party has available: cover, range, speed, etc. Usually, ranged weapons are treated as applying no advantage here unless they have some ability to spray an area, such as a machine gun or flamethrower.

Calculate the difference in bonus dice and add to the player's pool with the superior weapon. For example, a battle arm applies a 2d10 bonus versus an unarmed opponent, and a 1d10 bonus versus an opponent armed with a sidearm.

Complications

- *Circumstances:* The ratings for weapons assume an open environment with plenty of room, but there may be circumstances where the bonus is reversed, such as fighting in a cramped tunnel or grappling close up where a knife is more advantageous than a sword. In these instances, apply the bonus dice to the character with the smaller or better suited weapon.
- *Range:* Reduce the rating of firearms and archaic missile weapons when the range of the conflict puts them at a disadvantage compared to their opponent's weaponry. For example, a shotgun and a hunting rifle are both battle arms normally (2d10 bonus), but when facing each other at long range the shotgun would be at a disadvantage (bonus reduced to 1d10) and at close ranges, where the shotguns spread of pellets is an advantage, the hunting rifle suffers a similar reduction in effectiveness. This can also be used to represent situations where a character armed with a close combat weapon is charging down an opponent armed with a missile weapon, essentially at a range disadvantage versus the missile weapon. If the charging character is close enough that they could credibly reach their opponent to land a blow, treat the close combat weapon rating as one die lower than usual.
- *Automatic Firearms:* As well as conceivably altering the fictional limitations on credible actions, for example, spraying a room to attack multiple targets, automatic weapons can unload their magazine to gain a +1d10 bonus to their weapon rating. However, next exchange they will need to have more ammunition ready or switch to a different weapon.

The suppressive effect of automatic weapons can either be deliberately sought as the goal of an attack, i.e. seeking to keep opponents' heads down rather than injure them, or is a common side effect of automatic weapon attacks, used with 'No but' or 'Yes and' results: for example, 'No, you miss them, but they dive for cover to avoid the hail of bullets.'

- *Finer distinctions:* Sometimes you want to distinguish between a long dagger, a shortsword and a broadsword. Is the shortsword a sidearm or a battle arm? In these cases, the weapon acts as a tie-breaker: for example, treat the shortsword as a sidearm, but when the relative difference is zero, e.g. when facing another sidearm such as a dagger, award a 1d10 bonus to the character wielding the shortsword. To denote this, add an asterisk after the weapon bonus notation.

- *Shields:* For medieval or fantasy settings shields will be common items of equipment. A shield provides a 1d10 bonus against opponents armed with low-velocity missiles such as bows, crossbows and thrown weapons, or when used in melee for a purely defensive action – protecting an ally or an all-out defence for example. A shield also aids when used offensively, but only against opponents wielding weapons of equal rank – essentially acting as a tie-breaker as described above under ‘Finer distinctions’.

Shields require a free hand so cannot be used in conjunction with some battle arms and most heavy arms. Finally, shields can be used to ‘soak’ damage exactly like light armour. If used in this way, the shield is destroyed by the blow it absorbs.

Armour

Armour is described as being light, medium or heavy:

- *Light (rating 1):* Light weight, often cheap and sometimes concealable, this armour does not significantly restrict movement. Examples include a bullet-proof or stab-proof vest, or leather or padded jack armour.
- *Medium (rating 2):* Cumbersome in some circumstances, such as sprinting or swimming, this armour is moderately expensive and likely in the hands of professional warriors only. Examples include flak jackets or chainmail and pot helmet combinations.
- *Heavy (rating 3):* Weighty and sometimes clumsy, heavy armour is hot and exhausting to wear for long periods and is usually prohibitively expensive. Examples include door gunner’s vests or plate and mail armour with greaves and full-face helmet.

Sometimes a partial set of armour is worn, for example a mail shirt only. In these instances, treat the armour rating a point lower than usual.

Armour affects how some attacks can inflict damage, but is primarily used to take damage in lieu of Resolve.

Armour Superiority

Some attacks are so effectively blocked by armour that they lose much of their potency, and cannot normally inflict Resolve damage on an opponent. To determine this, compare the armour rating worn to the weapon bonus being faced. If the

armour rating is two levels *greater* than the weapon bonus, the conflict is not a high stakes one for the wearer of the armour, and they do not normally risk Resolve loss.

To overcome this, the player with the disadvantaged character must either:

- Describe a circumstance allowing them to bypass the armour superiority, for example a surprise attack after sneaking up behind their opponent;
- Put their opponent in a disadvantaged position, for instance first successfully tripping and pinning their opponent before attempting a Resolve-damaging attack; or
- By achieving a ‘Yes and’ result on their attack (or a ‘No and’ result if defending against an attacker) and choose to make the ‘and’ represent bypassing the armour to inflict a point of Resolve-inducing damage.

Armour Soak

Armour also protects the character so that instead of taking a point of Resolve loss as a result of combat damage, an armoured character can spend a point of protection to ‘soak’ the damage using the armour. In addition to preventing the Resolve loss, negative Conditions inflicted on the armoured character can be redefined by that character’s player to lessen their severity one tier of magnitude. For example, a ‘Broken Arm’ (Moderate magnitude) soaked by armour is redefined as ‘Off Balance’ or ‘Bruised’ (Minor magnitude).

The number of times a suit of armour can absorb Resolve is defined by its rating. Once a set of armour has used up its soak rating, the armour is useless until repaired by an armorer during a suitable downtime period, or is replaced completely.

Finally armour can penalise certain actions due to its weight and bulk. A penalty die is applied to certain activities, described along with the other attributes of armour and shields, in the table below:

Armour	Rating	Activity Penalties
None	0	None
Light	1	Swimming
Medium	2	Swimming, sneaking, chasing
Heavy	3	Swimming (2D), sneaking, chasing, leaping, climbing, perceiving

If armour seems to be too great a guarantee of safety from harm, an option is to allow a ‘Yes and’ combat result to be defined as armour piercing instead of adding the usual ‘and’ Condition – effectively the armour piercing aspect is a Detail with mechanical effect. Armour-piercing attacks require two points of soak to be spent in order to avoid taking Resolve damage, and are particularly appropriate when the blow is delivered by a weapon designed to penetrate armour such as high-velocity firearms and medieval maces or warhammers. This option does not apply when trying to overcome superior armour, however: in this instance achieving a ‘Yes and’ result merely allows Resolve damage to be inflicted at all.

Rather than use this armour system for minor supporting characters, consider armour as part of the assessment of the opposition’s general competency, e.g. Challenging, Strong, etc.

The principles above for arms and armour can be easily applied to non-combat conflicts if desired, for example a sheriff’s badge acting as social ‘armour’ or a wizard’s staff assisting with magical duels.

Unique Gear and Supporting Characters

If a player invests one of their character’s Trademark Descriptor in an item of gear or a supporting character, you may consider detailing them further, fleshing out each with the following features:

- Concept
- 2 Trademarks
- 1 Flaw
- 2 Resolve

As usual, the Concept defines the broad abilities of the gear or supporting character. If the gear or supporting character Concept includes expertise that the player character does not hold, then when that gear or supporting character is aiding the character in a conflict they will prevent the character from receiving penalty dice due to the action falling outside of their Concept.

If you invest a second Trademark in the gear or supporting character, add 1 Resolve to the item of gear or supporting character and choose to either add one new Trademark, or two new Trademarks and an additional Flaw.

In some circumstances, the GM might have a character deprived of their gear or supporting character by in game events, but this normally constitutes a complication worthy of regaining a Resolve point. If the deprivation is permanent, for example the

gear is destroyed, then the character is also returned the number of Descriptors invested to be reassigned. A couple of examples:

Jan Stanislaus

- Concept: Surly bodyguard
- Trademarks: Mean as a snake; Stronger than he looks
- Flaw: Hair trigger temper
- Resolve: 2

The *Hairy Dwarf*

- Concept: Smuggler's Sloop
- Trademarks: False-bottomed hold; Hidden deck guns
- Flaw: Known to the King's Authorities
- Resolve: 2

The GM might decide that the player characters share a common patron, resource or piece of equipment, in which case the players can create a separate 'character' to represent this without spending any of their personal Trademarks. In this instance no one player character owns the gear or supporting character, but instead it is created and held collectively. Since no Descriptors were invested in it by the characters, if deprived of the gear or supporting character no Resolve points are regained for the loss.

Goals and Relationship Descriptors are normally dropped from retainers and equipment, but the other Descriptors and details match those of a player character.

An example is a starship used by the party, an important enough feature of the scenario to warrant being detailed as a character of its own:

The *Caliburn*

- Concept: Pursuit-Class Starship
- Trademarks: Speed when it's needed; False transponder; Well-stocked crew armoury; Takes a beating
- Flaws: Outmoded tactical programs; Poorly maintained
- Resolve: 5

The Caliburn is an outdated military starship of a type frequently picked up for cheap by low-rent security firms or space pirates. Poor maintenance and aging programming mean it's no match for a modern military vessel, or in many cases a civilian ship straight out of production, but it will hold its own against anything else.

The false transponder identifies the starship as an innocuous merchant tender, highly illegal due to its popularity among pirates (incidentally, an example of a situation where a Trademark might become a complicating Flaw).

This could be applied to other aspects of a scenario or campaign, with Descriptors to represent nation states, secret societies, a military squad or the structure, traps and rewards of a hidden temple.

Advancement

New Descriptors are a significant milestone. Use the following as a guide:

- *New Trademark:* Upon successful resolution of a character's Goal.
- *New Flaw:* Upon unsuccessful resolution of a character's Goal.
- *New Relationship:* At the end of a scenario. Player's choice whether the relationship is predominantly positive or negative.

At the player's option, instead of adding a new Trademark a player could choose to remove a Flaw, or conversely rather than add a Flaw, remove a Trademark instead.

Players may also abandon a Goal or rename an existing Descriptor at the end of each session, although Flaws must remain Flaws, Trademarks remain Trademarks and so on. Relationships are usually particularly fluid and subject to being changed and rewritten. Additional Goals can be added if desired, although it's recommended no character have more than three Goals active at once.

If using the option of defining abilities within a character's Concept, instead of gaining a new Trademark the player might choose to expand the character's Concept to include further abilities, usually renaming the Concept at the same time. In this case, for the price of a Trademark the player can add three new abilities within the Concept's expertise. These might include supernatural powers if the option of defining powers within a character Concept is being used.

You can also emulate a level-based approach to reflect a zero-to-hero genre: each time a new level is achieved representing a major milestone in a character's career increase their Resolve pool cap by 1 and use the optional scale rules to give advanced characters a free positive bump in their conflict results when opposing lesser foes and challenges.

This represents a major step change in character ability - think of it as graduating from the 'Basic' red box set to 'Expert' in *Dungeons & Dragons* rather than merely advancing from level 1 to 2.

At the end of a scenario a character's Resolve re-sets to the cap level before the next scenario begins.

Conflicts

Conflicts fall into two broad categories: low stakes and high stakes. The defining difference is whether the character risks losing **Resolve** as a result of losing the conflict.

Most conflicts will be low stakes, stepping stones towards the pivotal conflicts in a scenario. Conflicts usually default to being low stakes unless one of the following is involved:

- A credible threat is actively trying to destroy its target in some respect, whether physically, mentally or socially. This includes an attack with a deadly weapon, mental trauma, reputational or financial ruin.
- The conflict is a milestone conflict essential to furthering a character's **Goal**, or resolving it altogether.

Conditions and Details created by low stakes conflicts tend to be of lesser magnitude, transitory in nature and limited in the scope of actions they affect. By contrast, Conditions and Details arising from high stakes conflicts tend to be more significant and persist longer.

For example, a fist fight might be considered low stakes - although it is violent, it might not be expected to carry long-term consequences or push a player character towards being written out of the game. This is especially true if the intent of the attackers is not to inflict permanent harm, for instance roughing up a character as a not-so-subtle warning to leave town. A Condition associated with such a conflict might be a 'Bloody Nose' - inconvenient, but not life-threatening. On the other hand, a sword duel might be high stakes, with **Resolve** at risk and longer-lasting Conditions such as 'Slashed Tendon' on the cards.

This will always be genre-dependent: in a very gritty game, fist fights might carry the risk of serious injuries while a larger-than-life genre might treat sword duels as mere inconveniences unless the heroes face a worthy foe.

Note that even if negative Conditions are inflicted, **Resolve** points are only lost on 'No but', 'No', 'No and' results - a 'Yes but' might result in a smashed rib Condition, but the player character does not lose any **Resolve** points.

If the high stakes conflict is combat, so two or more participants are trying to injure one another, **Resolve** points are normally lost by one side or the other: if the player

character gets a variation of a ‘Yes’ result, then their opponent loses a point of Resolve; if a variation of ‘No’, then it’s the player character losing Resolve.

Determining Opposition Strength

Opposition can either take the form of GM characters or as a static obstacle to be overcome, such as a treacherous bog. In some cases, opposition might be a hybrid of the two, for instance a group of GM characters that is best treated as an obstacle, like an angry mob to be swayed.

Determining opposition strength for a conflict can be done two ways: by creating either a ‘mini’ character or a fully-detailed character representing the opposition; or by applying a shorthand difficulty rating for the opposition.

Creating a mini-character or fully-detailed character is a straightforward process, applying the character creation method for the GM character or even static obstacle – a mighty mountain to be climbed gets its own Trademarks like ‘Steep Slopes’, ‘Prone to Avalanches’ and Flaws like ‘Hidden Valley Shortcut’ which might be discovered and exploited for advantage.

This is a good approach to take when the opposition is intended to be recurring or the focus of a climactic encounter, and allows you to put some thought into the opposition and how it’s characterised prior to the game.

However, this can be a taxing approach when determining opposition on the fly, in which case you may be better served by assigning a simple difficulty rating. This is particularly the case when the conflict is unexpected or against opposition not central to the scenario. For this approach, use the guide table below:

Opposition Strength	Opposing Dice Pool Size
Weak	+1D10 to player’s pool
Routine	3D10
Challenging	5D10
Strong	7D10
Overwhelming	10D10

So when facing weak opposition – whether in the form of a static opposition, such as an easily-scalable wall with numerous handholds, or in the form of amateurs in the field of conflict, such as members of an untrained, angry mob – the player character gets a bonus die to his or her pool.

When determining how difficult to make opposition, consider the following:

Weak opposition is useful for giving the player characters an opportunity to look good, and spotlight how competent they are against lesser foes or obstacles. This is a useful level to assign to undisciplined or untrained mobs, or easily-navigable obstacles that just might get lucky and inconvenience the player characters. However, in a lot of cases you might decide that weak opposition doesn't serve the story well and is better handled by allowing the players to narrate a victory over the opposition without picking up the dice.

Routine opposition represents a competent foe, one that will challenge a player character who has not specialised in that type of conflict, but which will be easily overcome by an experienced professional in the field - town militia might fall into this category, a real problem for characters without a Concept or Descriptor that encompasses physical fighting, but less so for the professional warriors in the group. This kind of opposition is competent in the chosen field of conflict, but little more; think of the opposition as equivalent to a player character whose Concept covers the sphere of conflict, but has no applicable Descriptors.

Challenging opposition is a cut above the average, equivalent to a player character with a relevant Concept and two supporting Trademark Descriptors. Rather than town militia we're talking professional soldiers, people who know their way around a fight.

Strong opposition will provide a serious challenge for any player character not specialised in this field of conflict, and things will get dicey even for those who are. Ideally, player characters should be stacking the circumstantial advantages before taking on opposition at this level, attacking from ambush, building up a caseload of condemning evidence, etc. - anything to bring in additional dice on their side.

Overwhelming opposition will be difficult for anyone, and expect Resolve points to be spent on re-rolls if player characters are to hope to win with any certainty. Ganging up or some serious planning are called for.

Remember that a source of opposition will be of varying strength depending on the field of conflict - if an ogre is a Strong opponent in a toe to toe scrap, it may be better to try to bamboozle or bluff him instead, where he'll be a Routine or even Weak opponent.

The fictional circumstances should be applied as well - the Queen's personal bodyguard might be Strong opponents normally, but ambushed in their barracks without armour or arms might render them merely Challenging or Routine opponents. Similarly, ganging up and outnumbering an ogre might be a valid tactic

improve the player characters' odds, but might have no advantage when surrounding a dragon.

Another consideration when determining opposition is whether to use the optional scale rules when either the skill of player characters or their opposition outclasses the other altogether.

If the player characters are part of an ongoing campaign you may find that their abilities increase so that presenting a challenge to them requires sterner opposition than described above, meaning opposition needs to gradually increase over time to continue to present a credible obstacle.

Equally, the reverse is true and throwing Overwhelming opposition against the player characters will be tough: unless they can bring otherwise-unused Conditions or Details into play, only expenditure of Resolve for re-rolls is going to give them any real chance of pulling through to victory. If the conflict is spread over multiple rolls, as described below, then the difficulty is even more pronounced.

Conflict Length

Generally, conflicts are resolved on the outcome of a single roll. However, in some cases more climactic conflicts might be resolved over a series of related rolls.

To create a more durable opponent or challenging static obstacle such as a treacherous mountain to traverse, assign the opposition with its own pool of Resolve points. Until these points fall into the negative, while they may have suffered a setback, the opponent or obstacle remains active in the scenario.

GM characters or static obstacles only lose Resolve during high stakes conflicts. If the conflict is low stakes, it probably does not warrant drawing out the resolution over multiple rolls – if this is desirable, break the conflict up into a series of distinct procedural steps, where each contributing success represents progress towards overall victory.

Standard GM characters and mundane obstacles are considered to have 0 Resolve, defeated on any 'Yes', 'Yes and' or 'Yes but' conflict result. A villain's lieutenants might have 2 Resolve and recurring major villains 5 Resolve, just like a player character. Really robust opposition intended to present a challenge to a party of player characters, for example a dragon, might have as much as 8.

Usually, each roll will only ever inflict a single point of Resolve loss. However, with the GM's agreement, a character might engage in an aggressive, high-risk approach in order to inflict greater injury on an opponent or obstacle. If the player describes

an appropriately-risky approach then if they are successful in the conflict roll 2 Resolve is inflicted on the target; conversely, if the character is unsuccessful, he or she loses 2 Resolve.

The GM might also rule that a player's 'Yes and' result inflicts 2 Resolve on opponents or obstacles instead of a single point and a Condition or Detail. This is more for convenience than anything else, and is entirely a matter of taste rather than a hard rule.

The GM does not have the option to apply this to a player character, however - a single attack cannot inflict more than 1 Resolve on a player character *unless* the player has chosen a risky approach to the conflict and failed.

For example, Drayt has intruded upon the Temple of the Sun, a fiendishly-trapped treasure house considered a high stakes conflict. Rather than resolve his exploration of the temple in a single roll, a significant challenge is warranted. The GM gives the temple a Resolve pool of 2 to represent its secrets and traps.

Drayt enters the eerily quiet tomb, casting his torch before him and searching the floor and walls for pressure panels. He gains a 'Yes' result, removing one of the temple's Resolve points as he bypasses the Temple's poison dart trap.

Wanting to get to the heart of the Temple quickly, Drayt's player argues that rather than circumventing each trap one by one, a bold charge through the final section and dodge or outrun the remaining traps would get him to the Temple's inner sanctum more directly.

The GM agrees: in exchange for risking the loss of 2 Resolve if he fails, if Drayt succeeds he will reduce the Temple's Resolve points to -1 and defeat the Temple's hazards. Drayt's player accepts and rolls, gaining a 'Yes but' result.

The 2 Resolve inflicted is enough to defeat the temple, Drayt running full pelt past flying blow darts, dodging deadfalls and leaping pit traps. He skids to safety in the Temple's inner sanctum, panting for breath. With a sigh of relief he is about to relax but (and remember there was a 'but'), hears in the distance an ominous thud as a huge boulder drops to block the Temple's main entrance. Getting out again may not be so easy...

Conceding Conflicts

Not all conflicts need to be fought to the bitter end. If a character is on the losing side of a conflict and the outcome looks grim, either the player or GM can propose

that the character concedes the conflict, losing but on more favourable terms negotiated by the conceding party.

If a character concedes a conflict and it is a high stakes one, i.e. Resolve is at stake, then they receive 1 Resolve in exchange for accepting the conflict concession.

For example, Brutus and Cicely are duelling, a high stakes conflict. The conflict has been running for a few rolls already, and Brutus is down a point of Resolve and is nursing a 'Deep Gash to the Arm'. Cicely is a challenge at the best of times, and Brutus has no great desire to fight the duel out to the death on the off-chance he can turn things around for a victory.

Instead, Brutus' player suggests that Brutus flings down his sword and runs. He is clearly losing the conflict, but on his own terms rather than at the mercy of a victorious Cicely, who might very well slit Brutus' throat if he wins. The GM agrees to the concession, Brutus runs away to fight another day and gains a point of Resolve into the bargain as a consolation for his less-than-heroic departure.

Managing Powerful Threats

There are a number of ways of bolstering the threat posed by an opponent or obstacle. For example, a dragon could be made into a formidable foe in the following ways:

- Its armour and natural weaponry are potent, making all but the most powerful player character attacks ineffective and the dragon's attacks rendering mundane armour ineffective. This is context dependent, and relies upon assessing the credibility of the actions against the fictional portrayal of the dragon. If the dragon is merely horse sized, then swords and the like may be effective. However, if it is the size of a building, then maybe only siege weapons are capable of doing any Resolve damage.
- It may have a considerable number of helpful Descriptors applicable to the conflict, or be considered a Strong (7d10) or Overwhelming (9d10) opponent.
- It may employ the optional scale rules discussed later, making success in conflicts against the dragon less likely and its successes more devastating.
- It may have a large Resolve pool, perhaps as high as 8.

If all four above are used, you have an extremely potent foe. Instead, it is recommended you use some, but not all, to create difficult challenges for the player

characters. If you have decided that normal hand weapons won't have a significant effect on the opponent or obstacle, then you probably do not need a large Resolve pool, as the two techniques model a similar fictional effect. Similarly, if you are using the scale rules, then the dragon should not have Trademark dice reflecting its size as an advantage, or you are double counting the advantage.

Assisting

In some situations a character may seek to assist another character to achieve a goal. This can generally be handled one of two ways:

- Where the task allows more than one individual to directly assist in the activity, such as trying to push open a heavy door, each character involved can add any relevant Descriptor to the pool before it is rolled.
- Where the conflict is aided by complementary but separate actions to set up another character for success, for example providing cover fire or creating a distraction to help an ally sneak past defences. In these instances, the set up conflict is resolved ahead of the main conflict and if successful, the number of dice the conflict is succeeded by (up to a maximum of 3) are added as bonus dice to the subsequent attempt.

Multiple Participants

When multiple participants are involved in the same conflict but each is seeking a different outcome, the overall winner is responsible for narrating the results. However, this player must take into account all other outcomes generated by other characters' actions during the conflict.

*For example, two adventurers **Kaled** and **Vernox**, are grappling with a seriously dangerous ogre in a high stakes conflict. **Kaled** asks 'Do I keep it from escaping?'' while **Vernox** asks 'Do I steal the mysterious potion from its belt?'' As neither **Kaled** nor **Vernox** are describing deadly attacks, the ogre is not at risk of losing *Resolve*, but both **Kaled** and **Vernox** are due to the ogre's violent nature.*

*The pools are assembled, and the dice rolled. **Kaled** fails in respect of the creature, getting a 'No but' result and **Vernox** succeeds with a 'Yes and'. **Vernox** narrates that his character nips in and plucks the potion (the 'Yes') from the ogre's belt and **Kaled**'s efforts distract it (the 'and') from noticing the theft. However, the ogre swats at **Kaled**'s attempts to contain it (the 'No'), knocking him to the ground and*

smashing through the door. The ogre escapes, albeit suffering a broken hand (the 'but') in the process.

Since it's a high stakes conflict, Kaled loses 1 Resolve from being swatted.

If the characters are aligned in support of the same outcome, e.g. both are trying to prevent the ogre's escape, then both characters roll separately as above but will normally gain an extra die each to represent their numerical advantage. However, the outcome of either a 'Yes' or 'No' result will always be the same for both characters, since the question asked is the same.

For example, Kaled and Vernox are both asking 'Do I keep the ogre from escaping?' They both add 1d10 to their pools, since they are both working in concert, and roll. Kaled gets 'Yes but' and Vernox gets 'Yes'. Vernox narrates, since he achieved the best result: Kaled and Vernox surround the creature, Kaled getting between the ogre and the door. Snorting in rage, it lashes out at Kaled and while distracted Vernox manages to trip the ogre. It hurtles forward, Kaled leaping atop it and pinning it to the floor (the 'Yes' outcome) but getting a dazing smack to the head from the creature's flailing fist (the 'but' for Kaled).

In this instance, no one loses any Resolve, but Kaled suffers from a 'Seeing Stars' Condition due to the ogre's flailing fist.

If Kaled had succeeded and Vernox failed, then the better result would remain as the final outcome ('Yes but') in respect of the ogre, with Kaled's narration describing the creature prevented from escaping by Kaled, but after having brushed aside the unsuccessful attempt to hold it back by Vernox, inflicting 1 Resolve damage to the hapless adventurer.

Scale

In most cases scale is easily handled by applying contextual restrictions on the seriousness of Conditions inflicted and when assessing whether Resolve is credibly at risk. Before a character undertakes an action, the credibility of that action needs to be assessed so that the outcome does not break suspension of disbelief for the other players. For example, before allowing a player character to attempt to beat up a dragon with his fists, everyone needs to be comfortable that this is a credible possible outcome. If not, the description needs to be modified or a new approach taken to allow the player character to achieve their goal.

However, in some settings, particularly the more fantastic ones, issues of scale come up more frequently and the contextual credibility approach may be unsatisfactory. In superhero genres for example, or ones involving demi-gods tangling with normal people, a more robust approach may be warranted.

In this case, each time someone tries to achieve a conflict success against an opponent or obstacle deemed of greater scale, for each level of difference in scales the greater party can bump the result a step in their favour.

For example, Kaled and Vernox are facing an ogre, a large and formidable foe, and considered one level higher in scale compared to the two heroes.

Kaled moves in to attack, achieving a 'Yes but' result. However, since the ogre is a scale level greater, this result is bumped a step in the monster's favour, to 'No but'.

This can mean that in conflicts involving outmatched opponents the lesser party may have no chance of success. Such are the risks of tackling challenges outside your weight class.

Conditions

Some Conditions are more significant than others, lingering longer and introducing greater influence on the game's fiction and the types of actions characters can perform credibly. To reflect this, Conditions (and when it makes sense, Details) are categorized into three 'tiers'.

Minor Conditions are transitory and circumstantial in nature, disappearing by the end of the scene or sooner, such as 'Off Balance', 'High Ground' or 'Dazzled'.

Moderate Conditions are temporary but significant inconveniences or bonuses, with occasional limitations on character action - if a character is carrying a 'Broken Arm', climbing a rope might be considered impossible, at least without some kind of clever thinking or assistance.

Major Conditions persist longer and will affect a wide range of actions. For example, a 'Punctured Lung' or gaining 'a King's Ransom' in jewels.

Beyond Major Conditions are permanent effects, character Descriptors rather than temporary Conditions, and most often gained as a result of character advancement or dropping below 0 Resolve points and choosing a new Flaw instead of being written out of the game.

The table below gives some examples of negative Conditions of different tiers:

Severity	Physical	Mental	Social	Resources
Minor	Off Balance, Bloodied	Angered, Stunned	Speechless, Dazzled	Broke
Moderate	Broken Arm, Concussion	Hysterics, Recurring Nightmares	Humiliated, Seduced	Bad Debts, Impounded
Major	Internal Bleeding, Unconscious	Breakdown, Temporary Catatonia	Shunned, Laughing Stock	Evicted, Credit Cancelled
Permanent	Amputated Limb, Sickly	Committed, Serious Phobia	Outlawed, Reputation Ruined	Debt You Can't Pay Off, Bankrupt

Equally, Conditions can be positive and the examples above can be used to gauge the narrative benefit implied by the Condition - winning a low-stakes card game might net a Minor 'Beer Money' Condition while a higher-stakes game might result in a Major 'Overflowing Riches!' Condition, allowing much greater leeway when describing fictional positioning. As a general rule, the greater the risks stood to be lost, the greater the gains that are on offer to the victor.

Establishing Magnitude

When a Condition is placed upon a character, the magnitude of the consequence needs to be established. This will often be guided by the source of the Condition or fictional means by which it was received: if caused by a dragon a Major Condition is likely, whereas a Condition resulting from an attempted stabbing by a pixie might inflict a Minor Condition; a social humiliation in front of a crowd of peers is going to be a higher magnitude Condition than a private dressing down (usually).

The underlying magnitude of Conditions also needs to be informed by the genre being explored. Being knocked unconscious will be a routine event in a pulp genre, but a serious injury in a gritty setting, and the benchmarks above should be adjusted to suit your genre and the desired tone of your game.

Conflicts aided by tools will often add a bonus die to the character's pool rather than affect magnitude, although they might escalate a conflict from low to high stakes - or in the case of protective tools, like armour, reduce it to low stakes.

If the circumstances of the game's fiction do not indicate a logical magnitude, the severity of negative Conditions can be gauged by how Resolve was affected:

Resolve Effect	Condition
None, a low stakes conflict.	Minor
Resolve lost (high stakes) and remaining Resolve pool > 1.	Moderate
Resolve lost and Resolve pool reduced to < 2.	Major

So if no Resolve is at stake, i.e. it is not a high stakes conflict, associated Conditions tend to be of Minor magnitude. If Resolve is at stake, and if the loss of the conflict reduces the character close towards being written out, then the Conditions inflicted tend to be Major.

In the case of positive Conditions, knowing which magnitude to apply is more of a judgment call, but generally the greater the risk for failure, the greater the reward for success.

As a rule of thumb, Conditions resulting from a ‘but’ result are often a little lower in severity or import than arising those from ‘and’ results. For example, in a fist fight, a ‘Yes but’ result might involve your opponent getting an ‘Off Balance’ Condition while a ‘Yes and’ result gives them a ‘Bleeding Nose’. Both are broadly Minor magnitude Conditions, but one is a little more lasting and feels more significant than the other.

Once you have established the magnitude of Conditions, you need to consider two principal impacts on the game: any implied changes to what a character can now credibly attempt; and how lasting the Condition is.

Restricting/Enhancing Possible Actions

One of the roles of Conditions is to inform the fictional options available to characters during the game. An unconscious character cannot carry on a conversation, a broke character cannot buy a new car, and a character with a newly-minted reputation as a sex symbol can turn the heads of those who would have previously ignored him or her.

The principle is that although higher tier Conditions still affect dice rolls by +/- 1D, exactly as their lower-tier counterparts, the range of activities that this applies to is greater, and the fictional constraints or freedoms implied broader.

Removing Conditions

Removing Conditions depends on the magnitude of the Condition, with general guidelines given below:

Tier	Negative Conditions	Positive Conditions
Minor	The Condition is transitory and will disappear by the end of the scene, if not before.	The Condition is transitory and will disappear by the end of the scene, if not before.
Moderate	The Condition will not usually worsen without treatment and will remedy itself over time. Specialist	The Condition is short-lived, lasting for a few days or less, and will disappear much sooner if it is abused,

attention will hasten the recovery, but even without it a full recovery can be expected in a few days or less.

Major	The Condition must be treated or will worsen, but is usually not required immediately. Trained or specialist attention is often required and a full recovery can take anything from several days to weeks.	The Condition is passing, lasting for several days through to a few weeks, somewhat shorter if it is abused, used heavily, or contradicted by the character's subsequent actions.
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As a Condition ages, its magnitude shrinks by a tier. A 'Broken Arm' (Moderate) becomes a 'Battered Arm' (Minor) and a reputation as 'Hero of Hanging Rock' (Major) becomes 'Decorated Veteran' (Moderate), then 'Served his Country' (Minor) before finally disappearing. The way to avoid this and make a Condition permanent is to buy it as a new Descriptor.

Track this where it's interesting and makes sense, ignore where the added book-keeping adds little to the game's fun.

Appendix

Alternatives to Resolve

The default assumption in *FUBAR* is that spending a point of **Resolve** for a reroll or convenient coincidence should be a relatively rare event, weighing the importance of the conflict's outcome against the longer-term survivability of the character - **Resolve** should be voluntarily spent when the character is engaged in something of pivotal interest to the player.

Generally speaking, a character with more than 3 **Resolve** should be able to comfortably spend any excess points on convenient coincidences and rerolls, while a character with 2 or less **Resolve** remaining is likely to think hard about such expenditure given how much closer this pushes them towards being written out of the game.

However, for some gaming groups and certain genres this balancing of a character's 'hit' points against their 'be awesome' points is not desirable and may encourage hoarding of **Resolve** as insurance against character death or retirement.

Two options are offered as solutions, either splitting **Resolve** into two pools or replacing **Resolve** with a pool of *FU* points and using **Consequences** to track health.

Splitting Resolve

Instead of starting with 5 **Resolve**, each character starts with 3 **Life** points and 2 *FU* points.

Life points are lost as follows:

- Losing a 'high stakes' conflict, whether one involving deadly physical force, sanity-threatening effects or dire social consequences.

And gained as follows:

- Describing a downtime scene in recovery or relaxation.
- Conceding a high stakes conflict.

FU points are spent as follows:

- Re-rolling some or all dice in a roll just made.
- Creating a convenient coincidence or useful fact about the world.
- Activating an extremely powerful supernatural power.

And gained as follows:

- Making significant progress towards your character's Goal, or accomplishing it.
- Suffering a significant complication or limitation due to one of your character's Flaws.
- Acting in a genre typical or genre reinforcing way (optional).

Life points are capped at 3 but *FU* points are not limited. Between scenarios Life points regenerate fully and at the start of each session, anyone with less than two *FU* points automatically resets to a pool of two points.

Replacing Resolve

Each character starts with a pool of 2 *FU* points, similar to how they function in the previous option. *FU* points are spent as follows:

- Re-rolling some or all dice in a roll just made.
- Creating a convenient coincidence or useful fact about the world.
- Activating an extremely powerful supernatural power.

And gained as follows:

- Making significant progress towards your character's Goal, or accomplishing it.
- Suffering a significant complication or limitation due to one of your character's Flaws.
- Conceding a high stakes conflict.
- Acting in a genre typical or genre reinforcing way (optional).

Instead of a Life pool, characters can sustain up to three Consequences of a type, for example, physical, social or mental, before being on the verge of forced retirement or death. If they take a fourth Consequence of that type, the character usually either dies or is otherwise forced from the game.

So if a character sustains physical damage during a conflict they might initially receive a Minor Consequence. If they are injured again in a subsequent conflict, the next Consequence escalates to a Moderate one, and so on until hitting the Permanent tier - at this point the character is out of the game unless a Trademark is exchanged for a new Permanent Flaw.

A slightly more sophisticated approach is to give each character a number of Consequence slots - for example, 2 Minor, 1 Moderate and 1 Major slot. Any Consequence received from a 'high stakes' conflict occupies one of these slots. When all slots of a type are filled, the next Consequence of that magnitude escalates to the next available slot. Some conflicts might skip the Minor or Moderate slots and escalate straight to Major - although unless the character subsequently takes another Major Consequence, later Consequences fill the lower slots appropriate to their magnitude. In this option, Consequences need not be of a similar type - all high risk conflict-resulting Consequences fill a slot, so a character 'Bleeding' (Minor) and a 'Laughing Stock' (Major) is just as close to being written out of the game as one 'Bleeding' and with a 'Punctured Lung'.

GM characters or obstacles will usually have a variable number and type of Consequence slots, depending on the level of their opposition. A villain's foot soldier might have none, going down on a single hit, whereas a villain's lieutenant might have a single Minor and single Major slot, with no Moderate slot.

If the character trades a Trademark for a permanent Flaw, all Consequence slots immediately clear.

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The 'Buckets of Dice' system can be found in the Adept Press' *Sorcerer* and Contested Ground Studio's *Hot War* and *Cold City* RPGs.

The optional scale rules are the idea of h131v from the Fan Made FU Yahoo Group.

The text also owes a big debt to other RPGs, particularly *Fate*, *HeroQuest*, *Sorcerer*, *Hot War* and *Dead of Night*.

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