

Keystone Project

Set of rules for tabletop RPGs

Author

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Thanks

In no particular order, for inspiration, support between advice and tests, and the great tenacity to keep the gaming community solid: my second home "[Onnigrafo Magazine](#)", the supporter group "[Gioco di Ruolo - Il GDR in Italia](#)" and in particular Marco Cuccu, Giovanni Micolucci of [Vas Quas](#), Prof. Gianmario Marrelli and his [Eduplay](#), [Racconti da GDR](#) and in particular Andrea "Adohorn" Garrone, Luigi D'Acunto, Mauro Bernardi, Matteo Diani, Filippo Gliozzi, [Vittorio Guerriero](#), Marco De Santis, Emanuele Rocchi, Mirko Orienti, Matteo Sanfilippo, [Cristian Sisto](#), Natascia Norcia, [Lorenzo Fossetti](#), Nicol Stocchetti ... and really a lot of other people between groups and associations that a whole page wouldn't be enough (perhaps one day I will name them all one by one).

Community e risorse

This manual and other resources related to the Keystone project are available at the following web address:

<https://madmyrkos.itch.io/keystone-project>

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You will also need to include a link to the official project page, which is currently located at this web address: <https://madmyrkos.itch.io/keystone-project>. Here you will find the official discussions of the community that carries out the project and to which I invite you to join. Whenever a new version is released, the official web references will be updated as necessary.

If you intend to commercialize your work and you are not sure what to do, I suggest you contact a professional in the sector for the best advice.

All that said, I'd love to know what you do with the Keystone Project and if possible it would be great if you shared your ideas with the community!

Finally, I advise you to enter the version of the document you used to develop your work, such as the current one "Version 1.2023184", so as to facilitate understanding for those who will use it.

I want to make a game with Keystone Project

This is the engine and it's at your disposal. Enter the license as above, share your contributions directly related to the content of this document and you will be able to use the Keystone Project.

Everything else is your bag of flour. Remember to specify the rights of other content such as those relating to illustrations, stories and settings, characters, etc.

Premise

If you intend to use this rulebook (or draw on any part of it) to create your own games, I kindly ask you to take the time to read this premise.

Before going any further, I want to say a few words about why I decided to distribute this manual, how I plan to carry this project forward, and finally, what I have set myself to achieve in the future.

I've decided to share this document through an open license because I believe in sharing ideas and our gaming community. I think the Keystone Project has more potential than I, the author, can see; I also believe that each of you out there can give the right boost to this project by making it your own, in the knowledge that it will always belong to everyone. I am sure that sooner or later there will be people who will fall in love with it, others who will hate it, still others who will want to draw on part of its characteristics and others who will want to modify them. Having the awareness of all this, the best thing I could do was to give everyone the opportunity to own this manual, to be able to disassemble this rulebook and to be able to reassemble it at will.

In the future Keystone Project will be updated, it will be enriched and I hope this happens thanks to its ever-evolving community of players and game designers. This document will be updated through the proposals that the community will make after having analyzed its characteristics, through a comparison with the community itself, recognizing from time to time the contribution that each individual has given. I hope to see many ramifications of this project come to life and make it really big. To be able to say that it is a good alternative to other known systems.

In the credits you will always find the exact location of where the community and official documents are hosted.

The main objective that prompted me to create this project was immediately to share something that I believe worthy of being used and consumed by all of you, something that in the last three years has marked more than one sleepless night and that has stimulated my desire to venture something that I have never done before, with the conviction of being able to face a consciously steep and impervious road. The Keystone Project is therefore an experiment that I hope will bring many of us to comparison, which seeks to stimulate a positive revolution in the way of making role-playing games with an eye to the future, but with respect for its origins.

Mirko Biagiotti

Introduction

The “Keystone” represents a fundamental mechanic for the functioning of the system.

In a nutshell, Keystone Project represents a set of tools created in order to allow anyone to develop and manage a role-playing game. In the following sections of this introduction it will be explained what a role-playing game is and what purpose this manual is aimed at, so as to give you a clear explanation of the intentions that led me to write these pages.

The Keystone Project is therefore not only a set of technical or mechanical tools and adequate procedures, but also a meeting point for many ideas and theories that over the years I have assimilated and discussed with a large number of game design theorists, authors, publishers and players.

My intent is to give a complete tool, created as if it were a product intended for the market but distributed with a very open copyleft license, funded by the ideas of other creators and improved by all of us, none excluded, in order to reach such maturity that it can be really a useful starting point for anyone.

What is an RPG

Role-playing includes all those ludic activities in which the motivations that drive the players' actions belong to characters (or alter egos) and to the narrated universe, not to the real one. Role-playing is an activity that can be useful for both entertainment and teaching. I advise you to read this article about: [Cos'è un gioco di ruolo? - Eduplay](#)

By entertainment I mean the whole range of possible experiences in which a playful activity can involve and this depends a lot on the game you intend to create, and therefore on the promise that this aims to keep.

Keystone Project, by its nature, goes well with the action game, exploration and part investigation. In addition to this, it is also well framed between the narrative systems that stimulate the manipulation and sharing of the imagined space by all the participants.

In action games, the focus is on following a story by actively participating in its evolution. Through the characters, the players define part of the scenes that follow in order to resolve a narrative conflict, i.e. nothing more than a potential problem, a challenge or a situation that upsets the life of the characters.

In exploration games, the focus is on... exploring. Players will still have characters at their disposal and will be able to meet challenges, but their goal will not be to overcome a narrative conflict, but instead to be an active part of a discovery, be it material or abstract.

The approach to the investigative game is in part similar to the previous ones, because it integrates some concepts common to the two. It will have both an action and an exploration component, even if it is more appropriate to say, of discovery. At the same time, the narrative involvement part is very high, since playing with this focus, suspense and mystery are the masters.

The interpretative game, on the other hand, prefers the ultimate goal of telling a story through, precisely, the interpretation of a role, often through dialogue mechanics. Every other tool used by the players, regardless of their chosen role, has no weight except in terms of the purpose of creating an interesting story for all participants. The best way to conduct a game of this kind is to give everyone the opportunity to enrich the story with their own ideas, their own interpretation of the imagined space.

After this simple, and certainly not exhaustive, roundup of definitions, I want to specify that Keystone Project has all the tools necessary to create games that fit into the macro categories that I have just described and that, with the help of the community, it aims to extend its potential also to those categories of game in which it is decidedly more lacking.

How to play

Keystone Project is a system that uses dialogue to work. Conversing with other players and telling your own part of the story, the actions that your characters do or intend to do, and sometimes the description of the places you imagine, are part of the mechanism that creates the game.

Having said that, I would like to make a clarification: there is no right or wrong way to play an RPG. There is no school that teaches the right way to play. There is no "good game" or "good players". The role-playing game is not a game of skill, it is not a sport or a competitive competition. We call it a game, but that doesn't mean it has to be fun. Play can entertain and in some cases educate or even educate. Through the game you can have experiences of various kind: exciting, funny, moving, terrifying, etc.

So to the question "How to play?" There is no single answer, as it depends on multiple factors. From the procedures that determine how to behave during the game itself and from the type of interaction, involvement and experience that the role-playing game promises to live.

The part dedicated to the game rules explains how to do it using the Keystone Project tools. There you will find a description of the processes that make up the heart of this system, the approach with which these procedures were designed and the mathematics (a little, I assure you) that allows everything to work efficiently.

Game approach

Keystone Project represents a set of procedures that will allow you to play your adventures, guiding you in the creation of a game with an approach that I like to define as cinematic. Each game will be identified as an *Episode* which will in turn be divided into *Scenes*. Several Episodes in sequence define a *Series* and the combination of all these elements give life to the *Narrative Arc*.

Players will be able to move game elements through specific roles explained later.

Reading Guide

This manual has been written with the aim of making it easier to read. As you read it you will find that I have tried to keep the language simple and as little redundant as possible.

Every now and then during the explanatory text I have inserted some examples. The examples are identifiable because the text has an indentation space, is in italics and is preceded by a number in round brackets which identifies the position of the example within a single chapter. Sometimes, to the right of the number, there may be some short text that specifies what the current example is about. The following are examples:

(1) This is an example.

...

(2) This is a second example within the usual chapter.

(3, specific thing) This is an example with reference.

Within the text there are also acronyms that refer to the various elements of the text that you will also find in the tab at the end of the document. I have tried to insert a definition when one of these references is first encountered.

Actors and roles

All characters and creatures in a scene are called Actors. The characters moved by the players have the role of Protagonist. All the others can have the role of Co-Protagonists, Antagonists, Opponents and Minor-roles.

Among the players, before starting the game, it will be necessary to decide who will have the role of Director.

Antagonists

The Antagonist usually represents that element which opposes the Protagonists and which tries to get rid of them or to corrupt them. An Antagonist should have his own file and, like a Protagonist, he must have a story behind him and clear objectives, his actions must be driven by strong motivations. Usually his story and his purposes are intertwined with the Narrative Arc of the story and in many cases they should coincide with challenges or conflicts in which the players can collide. An Antagonist, regardless of the relationship with the Protagonists, does not necessarily have to reveal his intentions and in the same way the Protagonists do not necessarily have to know of his identity or existence. The Antagonist is an Actor moved solely by the Director.

(1) The players play a group of detectives and are in search of a serial killer, who, despite everything, is very clever and always manages to be one step ahead of them. The Protagonists are unaware that their Antagonist plays the role of the federal agent who assigned them the job. The Protagonists in this case do not know their Antagonist.

(2) players play adventurers seeking fame and glory at any cost; due to their often deplorable actions, an inquisitor of the kingdom in which the Protagonists are making a name for themselves has decided to hunt them down, in order to try and inquisitive them as they deserve; this ordered a bounty and publicly proclaimed them as outlaws. The Protagonists in this case know their Antagonist.

Variant: playing the Antagonist

The Director, during the game, can ask the players if they are willing to play one or more of their Antagonists. You will wonder why. Well the answer is that the actions and motivations of the Antagonists are not always obscure and sometimes it is really intriguing to be able to give life to an Antagonist, allowing everyone to define a part of it through the game. To do this it will be necessary that all players agree.

Playing an Antagonist means opening a sub-plot, changing the approach to the game and finding yourself guiding the actions of a single character, in cooperation with the other players. The rules for doing this are identical to those described in the Sharing the narrative chapter.

Opponents

Adversaries can be of two types: Helpers or Independents.

The Helpers have a direct connection to at least one of the Antagonists; in this case they will have a purpose that coincides with that of the Antagonist or they have been commissioned by him to do something for him.

Independents, on the other hand, distinguish themselves from the others since their goals will be personal or linked to a need shared with other individuals like them.

(1) a group of mercenaries attacking the Protagonists are Adversary Adversaries, and may have been hired by an Antagonist to kill them.

(2) a pack of hungry wolves that attack the group of Protagonists inside a forest, are instead Independent Adversaries, moved by the need to get food.

The Director can transform the Opponents into Antagonists or Minor-roles, to do so he will have to establish a Keystone (see Keystone) describing how this change takes place and with what motivations.

Minor-roles

The Minor-roles are all those Actors who do not have a decisive impact on the story, but who serve to enrich the narrative and make it plausible. The crowd walking among the stalls of a market, children playing in a square, wolves howling in the distance, a group of travelers proceeding along a road, etc.

However, the Minor-roles can be transformed into Adversaries or Co-Protagonists, to do this it is necessary to establish a Keystone describing how this change takes place and with what motivations.

Co-Protagonists

The Co-Protagonists are almost like second characters for the players and can be controlled by them and in some cases even played as if they were Protagonists.

When creating a Protagonist it may happen that he has some helper, a friend, a lover, a follower, etc., who could have a decisive impact on the story we are preparing to play.

(1) The knight's squire, the detective's informer or the King's advisor are co-protagonists.

So even the co-protagonists should have their own sheet that summarizes who they are, what they do and what their main characteristics are. Co-Protagonists can be killed or in some cases they can become Protagonists, such as following the death of the Protagonist they were helping.

Protagonist

This role is very important in the story, as it identifies a part of the point of view through which it is told. The role of Protagonist is assigned to each character to which a player shifts his focus. Players can have more than one character each, share the narrative of a single character, or a combination of these possibilities.

Each Protagonist has its own card which shows its particular characteristics and which defines the tools for using the character, for moving it and for interpreting it.

The player will be able to move his Protagonist, his Co-Protagonists and some Extras. He will also be able to insert elements within a Scene and partially control the evolution of the Narrative Arc.

Director

This role is held by a single player and allows a story to unfold, scene by scene. The Director can set up the scenography and the script of a story, then define the place, the environmental details, the ongoing events, the challenges that the players will have to face during it and the objectives to be achieved. He can join several Scenes together defining Episodes and a set of them thus defining a Series.

The Director has part of the control over the Narrative Arc, i.e. the set of all the events linked to one or more Scenes, Episodes or Series.

The Director can move Co-Protagonists, Antagonists, Opponents and Minor-roles as he prefers; he can also ask the players to change the point of view of their game, shifting the focus between the Protagonists and some of their Co-Protagonists, indicating from time to time the objective of the Scene or Episode they will be playing.

The Director's role is therefore to contribute to the narrative together with the other players, in order to create a dynamic flow through the right shots in introducing a scene or in moving the actors within it.

The Director should try, like the other players, to give depth to the story, but through an impersonal point of view, as an external spectator would do with a broad overview of the dynamics of the story.

Share the narrative

During the game it may be necessary, as well as interesting, to focus attention on a story that concerns a specific character; often it will be one of the Protagonists, but it could happen with other roles as well. In the case of the Protagonist, to avoid that the other players get bored waiting for the evolution of the story, if everyone is in agreement, it is possible to shift the focus from the main Story Arc to a specific sub-plot of a character.

In doing so, the approach to the game changes and players will find themselves playing a single Aspect of the character in question. The Protagonist will be only one, but all the players will be in his shoes.

We will therefore use a slightly different system from the canonical one described throughout the rest of this manual. Before starting the sub-plot, the roles that the individual players will have to play must be defined. These represent a character aspect of the Protagonist, they could be tenacity, aggressiveness, fear, selfishness, courage, etc.

Once this is done, the Director will introduce the story of the sub-plot by defining the Keystones, in an amount equal to the number of players present.

One of the players will move the Protagonist, the others will be the voice of his "conscience"; what the subconscious will suggest to do, prompting the Protagonist to act in a way congruous with their Aspect. When the player in control makes his choice, he will also have to fix a Keystone by integrating one of the options suggested by one of the other players. For each scene the player will have only one Keystone available.

(1) During the Story Arc a player feels the need to delve into a juncture of his Protagonist's past and asks the other players if they are willing to play this sub-plot. Everyone agrees and the Director guides the game so that everyone prepares for this new experience. First every other player other than the one who controls the Protagonist (there are three) selects a specific Aspect, the following are chosen: Courage, Fear and Selfishness. The Director then introduces the story of the sub-plot and the player who controls the Protagonist begins to move in this new Scene. (...) After a few narrative sequences, the Protagonist whose narrative the players are sharing finds himself having to choose whether to save a friend or leave him to his fate. The situation is agitated and all the players give their opinion, following the most congruous logic with the Aspects they represent. The player playing Fear suggests running away so as not to witness the bad end of the person in danger; those who play Courage propose a very risky but undoubtedly daring and heroic Action Sequence; Selfishness proposes to leave the person to his fate by taking advantage of this situation to save his skin and gain a significant advantage later. The Protagonist decides to follow his Egoism by fixing a Keystone on this part of the story.

In the event that the sub-plot of an Antagonist is being played, the Director can decide to interrupt the sub-plot at any time, above all in order not to reveal certain details that could subsequently enrich the gaming experience. To do this, it is necessary for this to define a specific Keystone to close the sub-plot.

The game Settings

The game setting is necessary to understand how to integrate the Keystone Project procedures and ensure that each piece fits perfectly. It is not necessary to write an entire world right away, but you will have to decide on some key points that will be useful for later defining the narrative peculiarities of the game and the characters that players will be able to use.

Imagine a place and a time for your story, imagine the people who live there, imagine a range of situations and potential challenges that the players might face. Try to decide now whether there will be a supernatural, mystical or sci-fi component. Try to decide the type of experience you would like to convey to the players, action, investigation, exploration, etc, and connect all these points to form a basic structure.

Draw a map

Places, Things and People are the pieces you have at your disposal. Get a pen and paper or a digital sheet that you can draw on. When you define a Place, a Thing or a Person, mark it on your map. Try to join these entities with one or more segments and write what they represent: these are the Keystones and are part of the game system. They are not only a tool for creating the environment, but also one of the central mechanics for playing. You will learn how to use them in detail later.

Going on like this for a while, at a certain point, you will find yourself having created a story, there will be relationships between the various entities and you will be able to define a main path marked by events and situations that will involve the players.

Don't decide how the Episodes will unfold and don't focus too much on the details of the Story Arc, instead try to give depth to the various elements you have defined in your map and leave the players the freedom to decide their own destiny.

When during the game the actors meet antagonists, adversaries, extras and co-protagonists, the map will be enriched with what is told. This process will allow you to always have everything under control and not lose the thread of the story being created.

When one or more players give space to a Milestone on the map, enriching the plot and connections, the Director should set a Keystone in favor of the chronicle.

Lights, camera, action!

The following mechanics represent the basic tools to play, this regulation follows the logic of the "specific beats generic"; this means that if you find a specification relating to one of the basic procedures, in the description of a certain chapter or a character, a creature, an event, etc., the specific rule overrides the generic one.

Fiction Dice

The Fiction Dice (FD) determine, between the lines, a sort of economy that you need to pay attention to. Through Fiction Dice all players will be able to declare (and fix) the Keystones. In addition, Fiction Dice also play an active role in Trials.

Details on how to use Fiction Dice are described in the specific parts that use them.

At the creation of the character you have 4FD available to use to define the Background and, consequently, the first Aptitudes.

Design note

I consider it appropriate to specify that when setting up a session it would be necessary to devote some time to discussing with the players the minimum amount of Story Dice that should be used by the Director during an Episode. This value must never go below the number of players at the table. However, be careful how many Story Dice you use because these determine how the game and the characters will evolve.

Keystone

The Keystone is a narrative device that serves to fix a very specific situation. It represents the central or supporting element of something, around which a series of events revolve. Through the Volta Keys the foundations of a story are defined, both in purely descriptive and situational terms and can also be used to advance the character. To define a Keystone it is necessary to spend 1FD.

(1) The Director introduces the scene "the south wind is hot and sticky; the rocky valley, stained by sporadic dry brushwood, falls on a promontory overlooking the Inland Sea. Two moons stand out in the sky, a line of grazing animals is led by a herdsman towards the tip of the promontory where there is a city of red stone, perched on the outermost tip. Here the Director defines a Keystone.

All the elements of a Keystone can never be modified except by the player who outlined the parameters. However, the changes can only be temporal or collateral, i.e. consistent with what happens during the game.

(2) The director, after some exchanges between the players, continues the narration "time passes and the two moons disappear behind the mountains; it will be two hours. The sultry wind subsides ..." Now the Director has made some time pass and some elements of the game have changed with the Scene.

The Keys of Volta are the tool par excellence that allows the character to grow coherently with the environment that surrounds him and with the interactions and with the other Actors of the news. They can also be represented as connections between two or entities, be these people, things, places or events. When you interact with one of these entities, you can develop bonds that get stronger over time, or even degrade until they break.

Since this is one of the fundamental mechanics, every time a Keystone is fixed it will be necessary to pin it in a similar way as described in the chapter "Draw a map".

Use the Keystones

As already mentioned, the Keystone is a tool with such high potential that it shifts the needle of the balance of narrative authority, from the Director to the Actor who uses it. The following explains how to use a Keystone correctly and what are the limits of use.

When an Actor makes use of a Keystone he can enrich the details of a scene that has to do with the context or he can use the Keystone during a rehearsal to succeed in it, again adding narrative details .

Only through the Trials is it possible to decree the end of an Action scene, while the Volta Keys are allowed to enrich the details of how it ends or of the new situations it generates.

In Action scenes, the Keystones cannot be used to defeat opponents without using the Trials mechanic, nor is it possible to change the dynamics of the events that led to the clash, if this has already begun.

When you want to fix a Keystone, always talk about it with the other players at the table, so as to understand if everyone agrees with the possible impact that this could have, both in situational terms related to the context and on the setting.

Creation Keystones

The history of an individual is determined by the union of the events that formed him. Each Milestone defines one of these events and allows you to have a coherent and well-defined story, helping to understand how your character approaches his reality and, consequently, how it will be possible to play him best. The Backstory determines the four initial moments of an individual's evolution and each of them defines a Culture Modifier.

Plot twist

When an Actor fixes a Keystone the Director will add 1FD to the Plot Twist reserve. The Director will then be able to spend all or part of the FD to implement important changes in narrative terms resulting from the Actors' actions. The more FD will be spent, the more incisive the twist will be.

*(1) **Marco** is determined to face his adversaries despite their numerical superiority, so he decides to use one of his History Dice to fix a Keystone: "it is true, we are outnumbered and it is also true that these big space dogs are each twice us, but since I have come into contact with beings of the fourth dimension an immense power is hidden within me. They have given me something, an ability that just moments before flowed through my veins, and which now explodes with the energy of a supernova. The glow is incredible and space dogs are blinded by the flare, they are stunned at the mercy of our weapons."*

*(2) **Director**: Your power manifests vehemently on every creature opposing you, the battle is won. When everything seems over, however (Colpo di Scena, 3FD) a dimensional fracture opens for an instant a few meters from you. You distinctly see the energy of the fourth dimension coming out and attacking reality all around like a spore, contaminating matter until it is annihilated. You don't know what you did or even why, but apparently the power that the four-dimensional creatures have given you is not entirely free from contraindications.*

Attraverso il *Colpo di Scena*, arricchendo la narrazione, si va ad aggiungere nuove sfide e potenziali problemi che gli Attori dovranno affrontare e, dove possibile, risolvere.

Play a scene

When the game starts, after the Director has introduced the environment and the main events, the players will be able to start acting arbitrarily, describing what they intend to do with their Protagonists. To avoid overlapping when describing a certain situation it is possible to decide a word priority among all the players. This translates into an alternation between descriptions and the introduction of details. Regardless, you can agree if and how players can interrupt the speaker to ask for clarification.

Various types of play can occur within a scene. These types are commonly called Sequences:

- ❖ Action Sequence
- ❖ Narrative Sequence

Action Sequence

In the Action Sequence the Protagonists find themselves having to overcome a challenge, which could be surviving a firefight, escaping from a collapsing cursed temple, making an emergency landing, etc. The Action Sequence is usually an exciting and daring event. Players will have to speak one at a time declaring the action to be taken. This time frame is called Ciak. Each Actor may only perform one Rehearsal during the Clapperboard.

At the end of the Clapperboard, the action is resolved on the basis of the results obtained by each Actor and we continue with the narration or with another Clapperboard, if necessary.

Narrative Sequence

In the Narrative Sequence all the players can describe the place where they are, enter details about them, move their co-protagonists, if any, and declare the presence of extras. Players can also declare some global details such as weather and time of day, unless they have already been introduced by other players.

At this juncture, the Director has only the task of integrating the details or directing attention to some situations, whether these have been introduced by him or by other players. He could also ask the player for clarifications based on what he has described or done, enriching the story with new elements. There is a system to regulate this type of Sequence and to prevent the narrative from sliding too quickly into a disorienting or frustrating game.

Using the History Dice (FD) it will be possible to fix those events and details that you intend to modify or integrate into the setting itself, through a Keystone (see Keystone).

Not all players will initially have FDs at their disposal, but they will be able to earn them during the game in various ways. In this paragraph it will be explained how the narration makes use of it. We must first of all consider the FDs as a reserve. The Director will have an infinite number of FDs at his disposal, furthermore he will be able to make use of the FDs from the Plot Twist reserve, as explained in the same paragraph.

When it is the Ciak of the other players, in telling their Narrative Sequence, they will in turn be able to consume their FD to define some Keystones, but only 1 per Scene.

Areas of effect and duration

When moving in a scene and carrying out actions, you often come across the need to define spatial and temporal limits, but using common methods can often become unnecessarily cumbersome and slow for the purposes of the game flow. For this reason I have created two schemes to refer to to manage this kind of more "crunchy" dynamics.

The Areas of Effect are divided into three levels:

- ❖ **Adjacent (or Touch/Personal):** you must touch the target or the target must be yourself.
- ❖ **Sensorial:** you must perceive the target through at least one of the senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste or touch).
- ❖ **Extrasensorial:** a target must be known, even if it is far from us in time and space.

(1, Adjacent) Yari decides to frame one of his companions by putting evidence of involvement in a crime in his pockets. To do this you will have to come into direct contact with your target.

(2, Adjacent) Marko is about to cast a powerful protection spell, but the effect will only target himself.

(3, Sensorial) Omar is trying to locate his attacker, the night is too dark to allow him to see within a few steps of him. Fortunately, his keen hearing will be enough to perceive the breath of his target.

(4, Extrasensorial) Nicole has just finished projecting her consciousness within the psychic network that permeates the entire world and in a few moments she manages to travel to the place where she was born, sees the days spent in that place and relives part of those same sensations.

Term limits are also divided into three levels:

- ❖ **Instant:** the effect ends in an instant.
- ❖ **Maintained:** the effect can be kept constantly active as long as you have the ability to stay focused on it.
- ❖ **Conditional:** the effect takes place or doesn't as long as a specific condition is met, without the need to remain focused on it or be present during its occurrence.

(1, instant) Jakob throws the red clay powder while with his hands in position recites an incomprehensible dirge, the clay ignites and a blast of fire explodes in front of him hitting his enemies, the fire then vanishes in an instant, leaving behind only the wounds and pain.

(2, retained) The ship's bulkhead needs to be sealed and Omar is busy doing it with an improvised welder, while the battle rages all around with their attackers.

(3, conditional) Evelynn had only one chance to defeat Arden the immortal once and for all; only one occasion in one moment: his death. Her spell was ready to be triggered when the century-old vampire, intoxicated by the blood of the young sorceress, would lower her defenses. Evelynn's blood would become fire within the monster's limbs and it would finally be destroyed shortly after her.

Character

Each character has narrative peculiarities, which are represented by a certain number of descriptors: Name, Physical Details, Culture, Activities, Backstory.

Name

Each character must have a name; it could be the one he was given at birth or the nickname he is commonly called. Assign a Milestone to this peculiarity.

Physical Details

The protagonist's unique attributes are captured through their physical details. When describing them, it's unnecessary to create a detailed identikit; it suffices to define what makes them distinctive—such as eyes of different colors, a notably pronounced nose, an unattractive scar on the mouth, a hand with four fingers, a prominent tattoo, and so on

Culture

Culture identifies the roots of the character, encompassing the place of their birth, their origins, and the teachings that have shaped them as an individual. While culture serves as a foundational element, it's also plausible that, during the character's evolution, they may assimilate ideologies and characteristics from other cultures. Cultures can offer modifiers to be applied to your protagonist through the development of their backstory. The applicable Culture Modifiers are as follows:

- ❖ An Aptitude with a specific Condition;
- ❖ Alteration of wound recovery cost Aggravating;
- ❖ Stress Alteration per Episode;
- ❖ Alteration of Fiction Dice at the end of the Series;

Backstory

The set of details that make up a character's story is called *Backstory*; this is divided into Milestones, that is, fixed points that define the past of a certain event or occurrence. It is necessary to create the character with at least four Milestones in order to identify each of the following moments: origins, childhood, adolescence, maturity. During the game it will still be possible to enrich the *Backstory* with new Milestones.

Origins describe the place where the individual was born and the peculiarities he inherited from those who contributed to his creation. The definition of this depends a lot on the Setting of the game we are developing.

Childhood describes the period between an individual's birth and adolescence. During this period of time, some of the peculiar aspects of his behavior and his first significant experiences are defined.

Adolescence describes the period immediately following childhood, the individual has become aware of his culture and begins the path that will lead him to focus on his first objectives. In adolescence, the predispositions, first interests and passions that will form the basis of the individual for the rest of their life manifest themselves.

Maturity identifies the final stage of an individual's development, both physical and psychological. An individual who reaches maturity has clear his life goals, his passions, remembers his past experiences and uses them to face the present. He knows what he wants from his future and fights to achieve his goals according to his ideals.

Aptitudes

At character creation, through the definition of the Backstory, you gain access to Aptitudes that reflect the character's growth up to that moment. In the future, continuing to use the Keystone system, the character will grow and can create or improve their own Aptitudes. When assigning a Keystone to an Aptitude, it acquires a Condition. An Aptitude always grants an additional 1d10 when applied to a Test.

Conditions are descriptive elements that enrich the Aptitude and provide benefits. This decision must be made at the moment the Condition is added and cannot be changed in the future.

(1) The Swordsman Aptitude could have the 'Ambidextrous' Condition, allowing the character to wield two weapons, switch the weapon between hands, or even use the free hand for other actions.

There is no maximum number of Conditions that can be applied to an Aptitude. Additionally, every 3 Conditions applied to an Aptitude result in a difficulty modifier of -1; however, the Difficulty cannot, under any circumstances, go below 5.

The benefits applicable to a Condition are as follows:

- ❖ **Extra Die:** Adds +1d10 during the check.
- ❖ **Wound Category:** Increases the minimum wound inflicted by one category.
- ❖ **Special Effect:** Refer to the Special Effects paragraph for details.
- ❖ **Protection:** Ignores or reduces the wounds taken in the scene by 1.
- ❖ **Area of Effect:** The type of area in which the Aptitude can have effects increases based on the number of Conditions applied to this benefit, as indicated below: 1 sensory, 2 extrasensory.
- ❖ **Duration:** The duration of the effect increases based on the number of Conditions applied to this benefit, as follows: 1 sustained, 2 up to condition.

Unless the setting mandates specific Aptitudes, it will be the players' responsibility to create suitable ones for their Characters.

Special Effect

Special effects are unique benefits that empower players to shape situations relevant to the tests they are conducting. This element grants a degree of authority over the unfolding narrative and story. Players are encouraged to propose their own Special Effects in harmony with the actions they are performing.

The Director can counteract a Special Effect by establishing a Keystone, but only once per Ciak.

Design note

If you desire the gaming experience to faithfully reflect your story or setting, I recommend investing time in crafting specific Aptitudes and Special Effects to avoid excessive disruptions and unexpected events.

The Trials

In order to succeed in a trial, players must roll a specific number of 10-sided dice (d10). Rolls of 8 or higher (8, 9, and 10) are considered successes. This value is known as the difficulty and can be adjusted by the Director using Stress. Players can also modify it by having at least 3 Conditions in any relevant Aptitude. During a check, a minimum of 1d10 is available. If the actor performing the trial has a pertinent Aptitude, they can add 1d10 and any additional benefits determined by Conditions that align with the action being performed.

(1) Stefano is confronting an opponent with his curved blade. His character is equipped with the 'Swordsman' Aptitude, which includes two Conditions: 'Ambidextrous' and 'Shot.' Opting to apply both Conditions to his trial, 'Ambidextrous' introduces the 'Extra Die' benefit, while 'Shot' contributes the 'Wound Degree' benefit. For this challenge, Stefano will have at his disposal: 1d10 base + 1d10 from the Aptitude + 1d10 from the 'Extra Die' benefit. If he successfully completes the trial, dealing with an Adversary target means he will inflict Critical wounds instead of Impairing ones.

There is an additional parameter known as the Threshold, representing the required number of successes to pass a trial. Each test begins with a minimum Threshold of 1. Players will determine the Threshold for their trials, and each player can seek advice from the Director on how to approach a trial.

Depending on the number of successes, different outcomes are possible. The Minimum Result is achieved when the successes meet the minimum required Threshold. Exceeding the Threshold by 1 yields an Optimal Result, while exceeding it by 2 results in an Exceptional Achievement.

- ❖ *Minimum Result: the action is successfully performed.*
- ❖ *Optimal Result: the action is successfully performed, and you gain 1 Fiction Die (FD).*
- ❖ *Exceptional Result: the action is executed flawlessly, and you obtain 2 FDs.*

If the number of successes is fewer than 1 than the required Threshold, there will be an Unsatisfactory Result. If it is fewer than 2, a Debilitating Result occurs, and if it is fewer than 3, a Failing Result ensues;

- ❖ *Unsatisfactory Result: The action is performed, but the Director adds a Setback.*
- ❖ *Debilitating Result: The action is performed, but the Director adds a Setback. 1 Stress accumulates.*
- ❖ *Failure Result: The action is NOT performed, but the Director adds a Setback. 2 Stress accumulates.*

Increasing the Threshold of a trial enables the player to earn Fiction Dice (FD) upon success. For every threshold point beyond the first, you earn 1 FD.

*(2) The protagonist, attempting to escape a pack of hungry wolves, finds himself facing a precipice that drops steeply onto a lake. His only chance of survival is to dive in, hoping the wolves won't follow. The player opts to utilize the 'Athletics' Aptitude, rolling 4d10 (1d10 base + 1d10 Aptitude + 2d10 from the Diving and Acrobatics Conditions). The dice results in 10, 8, 5, 5; achieving 2 successes and obtaining an **Optimal Result**. Among the Conditions within the Athletic Aptitude, the player had also chosen a 'Special Effect' Benefit. Thus, upon confirming success, the player declares, 'the wolves will not follow*

me.' The protagonist executes a flawless dive, escaping unscathed, while the wolves remain at the precipice's top, daunted by the significant height.

Variant: Increased Difficulty Level

If the notion of "The protagonist rarely makes mistakes" doesn't resonate with your gaming preferences, we offer a variant of the Increased Threshold Trials.

When elevating the Threshold value to enhance the likelihood of gaining FDs on successful outcomes, extreme results of 1 and 10 (0) on the die introduce two distinct effects.

- If the result is 1, the die with the highest value transforms into a failure (below the difficulty).
- If the result is 10, the die with the lowest value transforms into a success (equal to the difficulty).

Furthermore, obtaining an Unsatisfactory or Debilitating result does not allow you to pass the test.

The Setback

When an Unsatisfactory, Debilitating, or Failing Result occurs, the Director must introduce a Setback to the test outcome.

Typically, these setbacks resemble Conditions, represented by brief descriptions that outline unfavorable situations for the involved Actors, impacting subsequent Tests. Refer to the list below:

- ❖ -1d10 in the next Trial
- ❖ +1 to Difficulty on the next Trial
- ❖ +1 Threshold in the next Trial
- ❖ +1 Category for the next Wound suffered
- ❖ -1 Category for the next inflicted wound (minimum "scratch")

Dice Fiction in trials

Spending 1FD automatically validates a check without the need to roll the die or follow a failure. The action confirmed by the FD will be executed as if an Exceptional Result had been achieved, without receiving the FD as a reward.

(1) Mario finds himself in the corporation's data room after successfully infiltrating it. The critical moment has arrived to retrieve as much information as possible. Despite lacking expertise in technology and specific skills for bypassing security checks, Mario is well aware that failure is not an option. Armed with only one die and facing slim chances of success, he decides to expend 1FD, ensuring the success of his mission.

Health

In the course of a conflict, actors may sustain various injuries; however, a Protagonist cannot meet demise unless the controlling player explicitly desires it.

Weapons lack numerical values to specify the location and impact of inflicted damage. Instead, the severity of wounds an Actor can endure is determined by their type: *Scratch Wound*, *Crippling Wound*, *Critical Wound*, *Mortal Wound*.

Items can bestow Conditions similarly to how an Aptitude would.

Co-protagonists and Opponents can suffer Crippling, Critical, and Mortal Wounds; Extras are limited to Mortal Wounds only.

The targeted Actor in any attack will always suffer the least severe wound available to them.

During a test in a conflict, if the attacker achieves an Optimal Result, they can choose to escalate the severity of the inflicted Wound by one type. If the result is Exceptional, the severity increases by two, reaching the maximum allowed by the targeted Actor.

Hence, striking an Antagonist with a Minimum Result results in a Scratch Wound, an Optimal Result causes a Crippling Wound, and an Exceptional Result leads to a Critical Wound.

(1) Andrej takes action, achieving 3 successes against a Threshold of 2. Having surpassed the threshold by 1, he opts to elevate the minimum damage of his weapon by one type. Before him stand 4 Adversaries susceptible only to Serious or Mortal Wounds. As a result of his enhanced successes, each of them is now afflicted with a Mortal Wound.

Andrej: "I sprinted down the street, firing my Glock 17 at the gangster's henchmen I'm pursuing. These hollow-point bullets are truly lethal. One shot, one kill."

(2) Andrej continues his frenzied sprint toward the large, remotely controlled drone. This formidable machine is classified as an Antagonist. With remarkable precision, Andrej takes aim between the joints of the mechanical components, delivering powerful strikes. Leveraging the 'Piercing Shot' capability of his 'Gunslinger' Aptitude, he elevates the severity of inflicted Wounds by 1. The test proves successful, yielding 3 successes against a Threshold of 1, resulting in the imposition of Mortal Wounds. The drone, battered by a volley of devastating shots, plummets to the ground in a cloud of smoke.

Each type of wound corresponds to specific statuses that can accumulate each time a wound of the same type is sustained.

Scratch Wound: Endures a -1 die penalty until the next "Ciak." In a conflict scene, if an Actor repeatedly suffers graze wounds, each occurrence increases the duration of this penalty across subsequent "Ciaks," though the dice penalty itself remains constant. After this event, the character can easily recover and resume the fight. If the number of dice for a test drops to zero, the character can still roll 1d10, but the temporary difficulty of the test will increase by 1.

Crippling Wound: Raises the minimum threshold by +1 for the entire scene. The discomfort from these wounds lingers, creating challenging situations throughout the scene. Up to three crippling wounds can accumulate, after which the character directly gains critical wounds.

Critical Wound: Imposes a +1 difficulty for the entire episode. With one or more critical wounds, the Actor may struggle to complete the ongoing scene, requiring extensive resources to navigate. Additionally, assistance will be necessary for the remainder of the episode. A critical wound can be downgraded to a scratch wound by spending 1FD but at the cost of suffering Aggravating Damage. If two critical wounds accumulate, they can escalate into a mortal wound if not healed by the end of the scene.

Mortal Wound: Leaves the Actor incapacitated on the ground, unconscious, or at death's door. Suffering a mortal wound deprives the Actor of the ability to save themselves through personal resilience.

As mentioned earlier, a Protagonist cannot meet their demise without the player's consent. In the unfortunate event of a Protagonist's death, the Director must establish a Keystone. Together with all other players, they will determine the fate of the aforementioned Protagonist. Death is expected to be a truly epic event, serving as a pivotal moment that catalyzes both positive and negative changes across the entire Narrative Arc.

(1) Masha unleashed all her magical power against the army charging towards the capital of her world; hundreds of fiery arrows set fire to the limbs, scorched the earth and the air, a wall of fire reduced tens of thousands of undead to ashes in a few moments and with a final flash mortally wounded their lord, the dark vampire archon. But the power of the latter was too great even for Masha and by seizing that arcane projection with a final gesture, he retraced the plot of magic up to the sorceress' soul, finally ripping it from her body.

Masha falls to the ground, emptied of her life, and while the dark archon tries to feed on her to reinvigorate, she consumes him from inside her, reducing him to a statue of ash.

The archon's destruction reverberates far and wide, and every single one of his servants is destroyed, as if in a ripple effect, leaving behind a statue of ash. In a few minutes the world, doomed until a few moments before, is now free.

Masha will be remembered as the heroine who saved the entire continuum at the cost of her existence: for centuries statues will be sculpted and palaces and squares will be built in her name.

Aggravating

In the event of spending FD to regress a Critical Wound into a Scratch Wound, the latter is assigned an Aggravating condition. This condition functions akin to a benefit but operates to the detriment of the character. There is no limit to the number of Aggravators that can be applied to a category of injuries.

Protections

Protections, regardless of their nature, prevent you from suffering the initial wound during a fight or reduce its severity. This effect can only occur once per scene, unless otherwise specified in the protection.

(1) Meelluh took a brutal slash and initially thought his fate was sealed, but his chainmail absorbed the blow, ignoring the Scratch Wound for this attack.

(2) Unfortunately for Meelluh, his assailant is highly skilled with the sword, and after the initial failed strike, manages to land a second blow, resulting in a Scratch Wound.

After a fierce battle, it's common for the protection to become entirely ineffective.

As long as you endure Scratch Wounds, the protection remains relatively unharmed. However, when you sustain wounds of a higher degree, the protection starts to deteriorate until it eventually breaks.

With a Crippling Wound, the protection intermittently guarantees its functionality every two scenes. With a Critical Wound, it occurs every three scenes, while a Mortal Wound shatters the protection, rendering it nonfunctional

Beyond death

Upon the demise of a Protagonist, the player has the choice to create a new character to continue their journey. If there are co-protagonists, one can be elevated to the role of the protagonist. Any FDs possessed by the former character will seamlessly transfer to the new Protagonist.

Additionally, the Group can collectively decide whether to allocate a portion of their shared FD pool to assist the new Protagonist in reaching a level comparable to other characters in the game.

Recovery and care

When an Actor sustains injuries, their well-being becomes critical, potentially jeopardizing their life. Recovery from injuries necessitates rest or, in severe cases, therapeutic measures or interventions to prevent deterioration of health. The restoration of wounds is contingent upon the actor's overall health, as outlined below:

Scratch Wound: All superficial wounds are naturally healed at the conclusion of the Scene.

Crippling Wound: One wound is recuperated at the end of the Scene. All wounds can be restored by enduring 1 Stress or utilizing a Keystone.

Critical Wound: One wound is regained at the end of the Episode. Complete recovery of all wounds requires enduring 1 Stress and using a Keystone. Optionally, one can choose to endure 2 Stress to forgo using the Keystone. Additionally, other Actors can aid in the recovery process by suffering Stress on behalf of the injured Actor.

Mortal Wound: Recovery from a mortal wound involves enduring 2 Stress, using a Keystone, and the assistance of at least one other Actor, who must endure 1 Stress

(1) Marko, injured by a grenade explosion, survived but incurred two Crippling Wounds. Full recovery would take 2 Episodes unless Marko opts to use a Keystone and endure 1 Stress.

(2) Fortunately, Ysail witnessed Marko's fall and swiftly applied first aid using a medical kit, successfully healing 1 Crippling Wound.

Stress

Stress is a negative state that hampers a character's capacity to act. It accumulates as a score with no predefined limit.

The Director can use these points to increase the difficulty of a test. Each Stress point can be spent to raise the difficulty by 1, up to a maximum difficulty of 10.

(1) In an attempt to persuade a merchant to buy his goods, a character has 5d10 available for the test and decides to elevate the Threshold to 2 to gain an FD. However, the Director knows that the Protagonist has accumulated Stress 2 and decides to spend 1 point to increase the difficulty of the test by 1. The dice results are 9, 8, 7, 5, 2; due to the heightened difficulty (9+), the test is completed with an Unsatisfactory Result.

The player can release some of their Stress into a Cognitive Wound, as described below.

Keystones cannot be used to eliminate Stress.

Cognitive Wounds

There are wounds that simple bandages and healing agents cannot heal, those of the psyche. By accumulating a certain amount of Stress, a player might decide that it's time for their Actor to change things, but often this leads to consequences. At the end of the Episode, if your Actor has accumulated too much stress to continue their life peacefully, you can choose to get rid of it at the cost of a Cognitive Wound.

The most common ones manifest in daily habits, covering small obsessions, until they lead to evident compulsions. Others could cause phobias, panic attacks, sudden mood changes, schizophrenia, multiple personalities, self-harm, etc.

But not all harm comes without benefits; in fact, every time you give in to a pre-existing Cognitive Wounds, you can release half of your Stress (minimum 1) in that specific action.

The Protagonists group

This system encourages collaborative play, allowing players to create a dedicated framework to manage aspects often taken for granted when coming together for a mission.

Feel free to name the group as you wish: organization, clan, lobby, society, association, party, coven, guild, etc. The key is to establish common or aligned objectives..

(1) All protagonists share the goal of enriching themselves through looting, aiming to become the primary receivers of stolen goods in the area and establishing an extensive network of contacts throughout the country. The group is named "Bay Greasers" and operates in the Chicago Bay area.

The group can begin already organized during character creation or decide later; for the game to start with a pre-established organization, all players must agree. At this point, each of the following Group Characteristics will be assigned a Milestone:

Location: Identifies the meeting place of the group, which could be a basement, a house, a park, a nightclub, etc.

Extension: Determines the extent of the group's dominance, covering a neighborhood, a small provincial town, a city, a region, etc.

Resources: Describes the amount of resources available to acquire goods and services of various kinds.

Reputation: Indicates how well-known, respected, and feared the group is in its operational area and beyond.

The assignment should involve defining an entity representing the characteristic itself.

(1) Location: "Family home," "School basement," etc.

(2) Extension: "Station area," "Red district," etc.

(3) Resources: "Safety Deposit Box," "Loot from the Bank Heist," etc.

(4) Reputation: "The Horn of the Red Dragon," "The 1 Million Bounty," etc.

These characteristics can be modified by establishing Keystones, reinforcing the Bond of a specific Stronghold, or creating new ones.

(5) The "Bay Greasers" have carved out a reputation in the countryside of the area (Milestone, Strong Connection). With the proceeds from their heists, they acquired a fish warehouse in a neighboring area (New Milestone, Weak Connection). Their sphere of influence, once confined to a warehouse conglomerate in the center of Chicago Port, now extends to an entire neighborhood.

A Group enjoys the advantage of utilizing Group Characteristics during narration. When choosing to use them, the context must justify their relevance to the action, and if all players agree, the test will yield benefits based on the degree of Connection of the Milestone decided for exploitation. Only one Group Characteristic can be drawn upon during an Episode.

Character Sheet



NAME AND PHYSICAL DETAILS	FICTION DICE	BACKSTORY

APTITUDES	CONDITIONS AND BENEFITS

Trials: 1d10 + Aptitude (1d10) + any Benefits

WOUND GRAVITY	QUANTITY	AGGRAVATING
Scratch		
Crippling	□□□	
Critical	□□	
Mortal	□	

KEYSTONES