

CARBON

Game Manual

WHAT IS CARBON?

Carbon is a role playing game system built with the objective of making the hobby accessible to those who could find it intimidating.

WHY SHOULD YOU USE CARBON?

Carbon's name was chosen for a reason. Indeed, the system and the element have a lot in common:

- Carbon is **lightweight**. Players only need one or two 6-faced dice to play, and the rules can be learnt in about ten minutes.
- Carbon is **polymorphic**. Its objective is to be able to support whatever game you may want to play, in whatever setting – from heroic fantasy to science-fiction and dieselpunk, with everything in between!
- Carbon is **organic**. The system leaves a great part to imagination and out-of-the-box thinking: players are given the freedom to role play as they wish without having to always refer to the rules.

WHY SHOULD YOU NOT USE CARBON?

The perfect role-playing game does not exist; thus, Carbon is not meant for everyone. You might be positively surprised – and I recommend you try out the system! – but be wary if you are:

- A beginner Game Master (GM): since it is so simple, Carbon leaves you in charge of many things, which can slow down the game if you are not used to it.
- A huge fan of a specific genre or franchise: while you should be able to adapt Carbon to play out what you want, its simple 2d6-based mechanics may not be sufficient to properly model particular concepts in great detail. A specialized may be more appropriate.
- A looting addict, expecting your characters to equip dozens of magic items at the same time: Carbon has no stat system by design. This has the drawback of not giving you a quick summary of your equipped items' bonuses: you will need to keep them all in mind.

CHARACTER CREATION

Creating a character from scratch with the goal of roleplaying as them during multiple hour sessions can be a daunting task for new players. Carbon thus tries to simplify the character creation process down to its basics.

TIPS FOR CHARACTER CREATION

Before we start talking about technical details, let's review a few tips that may help you to define a good character concept – that is, making your character feel alive and fun to play through their temperament, tastes, story...

This process can be a big hurdle to overcome for some players, for whom character creation may drift towards two extreme opposites: either they have no ideas for their character, or they have too many, and the character becomes too “bloated” with story to be played correctly within the GM's proposed adventure. Thus, here are a few tips to create your character concept:

- A character should generally be designed with their future in mind. When you create a role playing game character, do not write a novel about their story – only write its introduction. The novel will write itself during the sessions! Simplicity is a good practice.
- **Don't be afraid of stereotypes!** Stereotypes and clichés are powerful tools, which make it easy to understand who your character is to both your GM and the other players. If your friends at the table understand your character intuitively, they will have a much easier time playing with you instead of next to you.

Playing a dumb barbarian or a haughty elf is not “too simple”: it is a guarantee that everyone will understand your character, and thus be able to appreciate them. Your character will then naturally gain in complexity as the adventure goes on.

- A good way to make your character easier to play is to briefly explain their **goals** and **dislikes** in their character sheet – that is, what your character wants to do, and what they would prefer to avoid. This is an easy way to get a feel for the morality of your character, and will often help you just as much as a long biography.

TALENTS

In Carbon, characters do not have a traditional spread of statistics (such as dexterity, strength or constitution). Instead, their abilities are represented by **talents**.

Talents are meant to convey a character's competence in certain fields. They can be a job, a hobby, a stereotype or even a particularly marked personality trait; the idea is that a talent will be able to serve the character in certain situations. As an example, a character with the "Actor" talent will find it easier to get away with lying to someone.

Talents range from level 1 to 6. What those levels can represent is summarized in the table below, which should help you figure out your character's talent levels.

Level	Description
1	Novice: the character is better than the average in this field.
2	Amateur: getting as good as the character in this talent requires a significant time investment.
3	Professional: the character is skilled enough that they could make a living out of his talent.
4	Expert: within the community of people practicing this talent, the character is known to be particularly skilled.
5	Master: the character is a reference for most or all people practicing this talent.
6	Godlike: the character's skill is beyond comprehension.

Note that these descriptions do not apply to all talents (you cannot be professionally "brave", for example), but they should give you a solid scale of reference most of the time.

Since not all talents are equally useful, there are no hard rules about their amount or level at character creation. Most often, a character will start with two to three talents of level 1 or 2, but this is up to you and your GM.

STATUS EFFECTS

Talents define the core of a character, and only rarely change. Meanwhile, status effects mostly describe the context in which the character is acting. A special status can come from the effects of a spell, a potion, an injury... Status effects also differ from talents as they can be positive or negative, and do not necessarily have an associated level.

Status effects are not necessarily temporary: as an example, they can model a character's disability or handicap. Still, characters will most often begin their adventure with a normal status.

Status effects follow the same rules as talents (explained in more detail in the "Actions" section): if your character has a "Blinded" status, they will have a harder time aiming with a bow.

LIFE POINTS

A character's plot armor is represented by their **life points** (LP): a mix of their health, luck, energy reserves and tenacity. Thus, a character put in a bad situation may lose LP without necessarily being injured.

There is no strict rule about the number of LP your character will begin with – discuss it with your GM during their creation. In Carbon, a standard character will have 16 EP, and the game is balanced around this number.

By default, there is no mana system in Carbon, as such a system greatly depends on the adventure's setting. However, the LP box in your character sheet was designed sufficiently big to fit other types of points if you GM so desires.

ACTIONS

You and your GM spent some time creating your character. Now, you need to know how to play them. **Actions** model all the interactions that your character will have with the world around them, and whether they succeed or not will often be decided by dice.

ROLLING THE DICE

When your character attempts an action, the GM first decides whether or not they have any chance of succeeding. If they do, they may either trivially succeed if the action is simple enough, or you will have to roll the dice.

In case of the latter, a number is chosen by the GM representing the action's difficulty level: this number, most often between 2 and 6, is the **floor of the action**. The character's player then rolls two consecutive 6-sided dice. Their results will, in order, become the **success roll** and the **degree roll** of the action.

For the action to be successful, its success roll needs to be greater or equal to its floor. The degree roll then determines **how** successful (or unsuccessful!) the action is. The higher the degree roll, the better the action succeeds, or the lesser it fails.

Notice that the success roll results are only binary: the roll's distance to the floor does not matter.

As a rule of thumb, an action's results will match the following table:

	Success	Failure
Degree roll < 2	Successful action with negative drawbacks	Action failed with additional negative consequences
2 < degree ≤ 4	Successful action	Action failed
Degree roll > 4	Superbly successful action, with additional benefits	Action barely failed, with few negative consequences

POINTS, BONUSES, AND MALUSES

When undertaking a non-trivial action, your character's strengths, weaknesses, and the context they are in should be taken into account. This is done through Carbon's **point system**.

For every action needing a roll of the die, you are given a starting pack of **4 points**, which you may distribute in the slots of the table below.

Success	-2	-1	0	0	1	1	2	3	4
Degré	-2	-1	0	1	2	2	3	3	4

You may redistribute those points **only before rolling the die**. To do so, block out slots of the table from left to right, at a rate of one point per slot - using tokens, stones, bits of paper, your fingers... Your success and degree roll will then be modified according to the **first visible number** of the corresponding table.

The table below shows an example distribution of the 4 points you are given by default:

Succès	●	-1	0	0	1	1	2	3	4
Degré	●	●	●	1	2	2	3	3	4

This choice of distribution will result in 1 being added to the result of your degree roll, but 1 being subtracted from your success roll.

Watch out, tricks like these are risky: if your degree roll reaches 0 or below, your action will always fail, regardless of your success roll's result! And it won't be a pretty failure either - your degree roll will count as a one.

Similarly, if your success roll reaches zero or below, transfer points to it from your degree roll until either reaches one.

Adding to those 4 base points, **every talent level of a character confers one additional point** when attempting an action related to that talent. Whether or not an action is "related" to a talent can be questionable, and will be left to the interpretation of the players and GM. If a talent is only vaguely related to the action, compromise can be achieved by only according part of the points.

If multiple talents are related to a same action, their awarded points stack. After all, if a mechanical trout fishing competition is being held, and your character is a master fisherman with a PhD in robotics, of course they'd win!

Status effects, gear, as well as the situation your character is in will also influence this point total, by decision of the GM; the only rule is for those influences to be **plausible**. Be creative: finding original ways of using your character's specifics may lead to great rewards!

RULES OF COMBAT

During their adventures, your character will probably have to fight battles – even though Carbon is fairly appropriate for the rare pacifist campaigns. In combat, the objective will most often be to reduce the life points of your ennemies while keeping yours as high as possible. To that end, the action system needs to be expanded to support numerical results.

COMBAT ACTIONS AND CATALYSTS

A combat action follows the same basic rules as a standard action. However, while the GM decides on the interpretation of a standard action's result (such as, “your character successfully bashes the door open, making a loud entrance into the room”), having to come up with numerical values for each combat action would be very bothersome.

This is why the results of combat actions are determined by a **catalyst**. A catalyst is anything that the character uses to perform the action: a spell, a weapon, a martial technique... Catalysts feature a predetermined floor for the action, as well as a formula which transforms the degree roll into a numerical result. Thanks to those fixed formulas, GM fiat is reduced while keeping the game flexible.

The table below gives a few examples of catalysts as you would find them in a character sheet. In it, the "°" symbol represents your degree roll.

Name	Floor	Effect	Notes
Dagger	4 5 (throw)	Inflicts 2+ ° Inflicts °	
Crossbow	4	Inflicts 3+ °	Requires one turn of reload
Fireball	4	Inflicts 2 °	Sphère of 2m radius
Lay on hands	3	Heals 1+ °	

TURNS

Fighting in Carbon is organized in turns. Each turn, every character (playable or not) involved in the fight has the opportunity to play once. This requires establishing a playing order to determine which character will have the opportunity to play early in the turn.

To this end, at the start of the battle, every fighter rolls a 6-sided die. Applicable talents may influence this roll: a character with the “Pinball Wizard” talent will have the quick reflexes necessary to seize the initiative, and thus could add their talent level to the initiative roll.

Fighters are then ordered in the turn from the highest score to the lowest; equal scores are settled either amicably or through secondary rolls between the involved fighters (for which talents do not apply)

This playing order is fixed for the entire duration of the battle. However, any fighter can choose to delay their participation at will, at any turn during the fight. Indeed, it is sometimes useful to play after an ally for optimal teamwork. This delay is temporary and does not affect the character's turn order on subsequent turns.

TURN DURATION

During a player's turn, their character can move and act on the battlefield. The amount of usable actions is not limited; the GM chooses when the turn ends for the action to stay realistic. The duration of a fighter's turn is decided by the GM depending on the type of battle; it might be 6 seconds as in a certain popular heroic fantasy system, or tens of minutes if the players are generals deciding maneuvers for massive armies.

FIGHTING GROUPS OF ENEMIES

When an action affects a group of fighters, the player attempting the action rolls the dice as usual, only once. Still, individual bonuses or maluses may make the degree and success of the action may differ for different targets. In this case, the MJ will announce them before the player chooses their point distribution.

As an example, if a character is shooting a group of bandits with a blunderbuss, and one of the bandits is equipped with an iron armor, the success roll may be lessened by one only for this specific target. It is thus possible for an action to succeed against certain characters, only to fail against others; this result's interpretation is left to the GM.

UNCONSCIOUSNESS AND DEATH

However much you may like your character, keep in mind that they are (usually) still mortal.

Once a character's life points reaches 0 or less, they receive an **Unconscious 3** status once their life points go down to 0 or less. They can then keep losing life points without necessarily dying, but are put in a really bad situation: indeed, an unconscious character cannot attempt any action, and most actions performed against them will get bonus points from this status.

An unconscious character is in one of three states of unconsciousness, depending on the amount of negative life points they have, compared to their maximum life points (abbreviated as Max below):

- If their life points are greater than or equal to $-\text{Max} / 2$, the character is in **stable unconsciousness**, and will recover to 1 LP after 10 minutes of in-game time.
- If their life points are greater than or equal to $-\text{Max}$, but less than $-\text{Max} / 2$, the character is in **unstable unconsciousness**, and will die after 10 minutes of in-game time.
- If their life points are less than $-\text{Max}$, the character simply dies.

If a character has 17 max LP, they will thus be in stable unconsciousness starting from 0 LP, in unstable unconsciousness from -9 LP, and dead from -18 LP.

Depending on the adventure's setting, death can be permanent, reversible or just a formality; but it is almost never a good sign!