

MECHANISMS

FOR TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING



THIS IS A LIVING DOCUMENT. It might be updated every week for a month at some point; it might sit dormant for a few years.

THERE'S MORE THAN THIS. Searching for Levi Kornelsen (that's me) on DriveThruRPG will yield other game work, much of which is influenced by or connected to this in different ways. If you're interested in keeping up with me as I make things, search for me on Google+; that's my main channel.

WHAT THIS IS

MECHANISMS IS a set of five simple, adaptable articles on rules pieces you can use in most tabletop roleplaying games, to up the tension, create new options, make fights more engaging, tactics clearer, and character relationships more central.

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THE COUNTDOWN STACK

IF THE CHARACTERS need to hold off the dead until dawn, you've got a countdown. If they're racing to prepare for the enemy assault, that's another one. When they race to stop Dr. Whatever from unleashing atomic devastation on New York city, there's only so much time until the blast. Tracking it narratively, though, often lacks any real power or urgency.

A COUNTDOWN STACK IS a pile of tokens, typically glass beads, candy, or poker chips, plunked down in the middle of the playing space. They drain away at a measured rate, people can spend them (or add to them) for various purposes, and when they're all gone, something happens. The purpose of having a countdown stack is to put pressure on the game to keep things moving, and to act as a visible reminder to the group of "the coming thing". Having the stack out on the table keeps people engaged with that big upcoming event.

BEFORE YOU SET OUT A STACK, there are four things you need to decide:

- ◆ WHAT HAPPENS when the stack runs out? A happy ending for survivors of the zombies? Horrible destruction in atomic fire? The death of the king, planting the best-positioned character on the throne? Your pizza delivery is now late?
- ◆ HOW FAST does it naturally deplete? One token per hour of real time? One token per day of game time? Once per "scene" during the game?
- ◆ HOW CAN TOKENS BE USED OR ADDED? One of the ideas here is that characters can gain benefits by 'hitting' the stack (either adding or removing a token). If the 'thing that happens' is a good thing for the characters, then hitting the stack should add tokens to it; they're moving away from rescue, using up critical resources, or just burning their luck, and the good thing is getting harder to reach. If the 'thing that happens' is terrible, then hitting the stack should take tokens away from it – they're using up precious time!
- ◆ HOW MANY tokens to put out there? This is figured by estimating the results of the above, and how long the actual game session or sessions are intended to run, and making a guess. After using countdown stacks a couple of times, estimating "the right size" gets much easier.



HITTING THE STACK

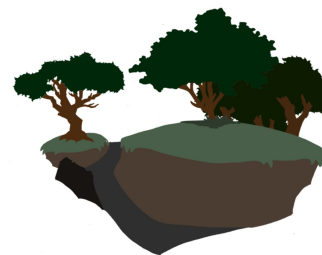
THIS IS WHERE the idea of a countdown stack goes from being a simple timing device to actually making the play itself more interesting. As above, hitting the stack may either add or remove a token, depending on the outcome of an empty stack. Here are some possible uses for hitting the stack:

- ◆ **SUBSTITUTE POINTS:** Many games already have some kind of spend-able points, Fate or Action or Drama or whatever. One of the easiest plug-ins is to simply say that a player can hit the stack and get any of the effect they would get from spending one of those points.
- ◆ **DO-OVERS AND WINS:** If there are a whole lot of tokens in the stack, and they deplete pretty quickly, then allowing players to hit the stack to “do over” some rolls or other small bits can work well. If the stack is smaller, and depletes more slowly, the tokens are more valuable. In that case, saying “hit the stack to succeed at the roll, even if you failed”, might be the right thing for the setup.
- ◆ **REPRIEVE:** In a situation that is a ‘perfect storm’ of bad stuff, it may be useful to let any player hit the stack to get a scene where they can rest, recuperate, reload, all those things. A Guide that wants to really push it can make this the *only* way to hit the stack, remove the natural depletion, and just pound on the characters constantly, letting them set the timing of breaks by hitting the stack. You’ll absolutely be in time to stop the bomb, if you run flat-out. You’ve even got ten minutes to spare! Here they are; ten tokens, ten minutes.

THE GM CAN ALSO MAKE UNIQUE OFFERS, and say things like “You know, I’ll give you that roll, if you hit the stack” and “Sure, but it’ll cost you a token.” If the players are cautious about hitting the stack, but enjoy the idea, a Guide can have a lot of fun making such offers. However, when offering such temptation, the Guide should be careful to make offer mostly evenly among the group, or make them to all of the players at the same time.

WHEN THE RESULT OF THE STACK running out is a good thing, it’s good to set a limit on how much players can delay that thing for benefits. Making this limit easy to see and judge is best done with another colour of token. If, for example, the starting stack is ten white poker chips, and hitting it adds more, it might be declared that all hits add a red poker chip, and white ones come out first. When the red chips outnumber the white ones, players can’t hit the stack from there on out.

VARIATIONS ON A COUNTDOWN include tracking the path of invaders towards town (see the pictures below), placing civilian tokens on a map when the enemy is running free and violent. A truly awful variation is to write the names of everyone the characters know on poker chips, one apiece, as they search for the cure to the plague in town. The name on the top chip of the stack is sick! When that chip is removed, they’re comatose or dead. *Are you sure you want to rest tonight?*



TEMPTATION DICE

ROLL AN EXTRA DIE, a blue one, when you try something. It doesn't count, though; just ignore it. Unless it comes up great, and you want to swap your regular die (or one of them) for it. Then we'll talk... ...Huh. It looks like you missed the bandit with that roll, but your extra die would be good enough to make the grade, if you switched to it. Is it worth paying a point of your health, strain a little harder, and do that?

TEMPTATION DICE work just like that. They aren't (necessarily) there to tempt the character. They're there to tempt the player. Including such dice gives you an extra option when you want to mess around with rolls a little, or want to have that little voice in the back of a character's head. They can also be helpful in situations where the failure rate is a irksome factor that characters should be able to overcome more often, but which would take more work than it's worth to remove from the system.

TO ADD TEMPTATION DICE to a game, there are a number of decisions you'll need to make about how they will appear and be used.

- ◆ **WHICH ROLLS?** Depending on the game and the use you want, it may be best to use temptation dice only on combat rolls - or only on skill rolls, or every roll, or something else entirely. Decide what kind of rolls they'd help on.
- ◆ **HOW MANY?** A game that uses a pool of dice and counts successes may only benefit strongly from temptation dice if two or more are used; a game that only uses a single d20 will do quite well with just a single such die.
- ◆ **WHAT COLOUR?** It's rather important that temptation dice be a different colour from 'regular' ones, to avoid confusion..
- ◆ **ADD OR REPLACE?** When someone 'gives in to temptation', do they add in the dice, or swap out other ones? In single-die systems, the best answer is usually 'swap them', but this can vary. In die pool games, the best answer is often to add them in, but again, this can vary..
- ◆ **COST:** You'll need to decide if there's a standard cost to 'activate' these dice and use them. If there is, this might be a normal spendable resource (points of some kind) or it might be something that's usually not spent in such a way, such as health. Or getting the dice might mean accepting a condition that you can later shake off (panic dice, for accepting fear conditions, is fun). Whatever the case, it must avoid creating "Wait, what?" - that is, if characters can make a grunting physical effort, burning health to get the die, being able to do so while picking a lock is a "Wait, what?" moment.



SOME GAME ALREADY USE BONUS DICE of various kinds, notably including “stunting dice” that are granted to a player for good description. In games that already do this, it’s possible to simply state that *those* dice are temptation dice - you get to roll them in the normal way, but they only count if you pay the temptation cost. This is not necessarily recommended; the usefulness and fun factor of this kind of application varies wildly by rules system.

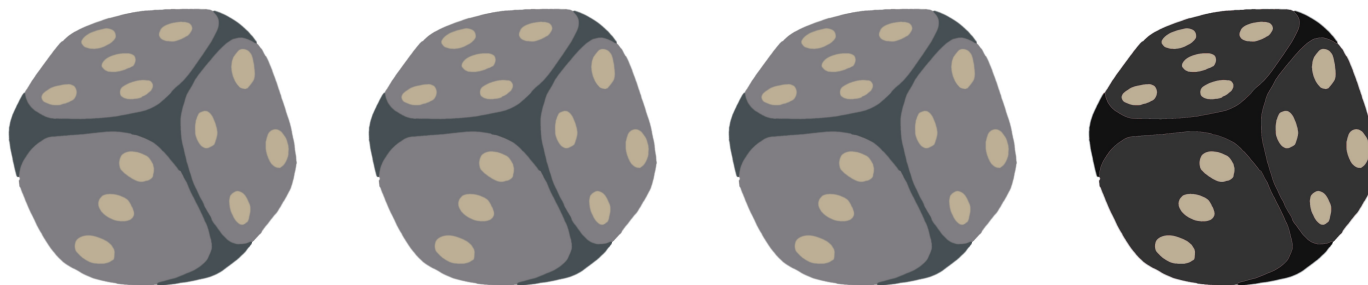
IF TEMPTATION IS SPECIFIC TO SET TASKS, or the Guide doesn’t mind creating lots of options on the fly, it’s possible to leave off the standard cost of activating the dice altogether. If this is done, anytime the player wants those dice, the Guide can tell them what will happen if they take them. So, if temptation dice were only used for mystical affairs, they might be ‘side effect’ dice; if you want them, you’ll need to accept some strangeness.

THE HALFWAY POINT between “unique offers every time” and “standardized cost” is to give the dice a theme, and negotiate around that when someone wants to use them.

In a game of sudden but inevitable betrayal, you might have Traitor Dice; if you want them, we need to talk about how you’re screwing over the guy next to you.

TEMPTATION CAN ALSO BE UNNATURAL, and directed at the character. In a game filled with laser swords (ahem), temptation dice might represent the darker side of things. This can be combined with temptation on demand; in a game where every character has voices in their head, or a horrible monstrosity lurking within them waiting to make them large and green, those voices might actually be offering real help. Of course, the price can be steep.

RECIPROCAL TEMPTATION is an option for groups that don’t mind giving players extra roles. In this case, each player might act as “the tempter” to one other. Or you might roll a white temptation die and a black one with each roll, with the player to your right offering you noble self-sacrificing costs (and the white die), while the player on your left offers you depraved and awful side effects (and the black die). Reciprocal temptation concepts can be structured many different ways, but all of them require a group of players that will gleefully make offers that elicit a wince and a thoughtful pause. In addition, if temptation is going to be reciprocal and player-managed in this way, it’s often a good idea to have a list of common, recommended temptations on hand for inspiration and to act as guidelines for what is ‘about right’.



ACTION SCENERY

DESPITE THEIR ACTION-FANTASY ROOTS, many roleplaying games could use a bit *more* when it comes time for derring-do. This article aims to add a few more options for getting into the action of rope-swinging, statue-tipping play, lined up in a way that will hopefully be easy to adapt to your game of choice.



THE CORE of this article is a set of seven actions, shown next page. These are things characters might try to do. With each action are listed some automatic, good, and bad things that might happen when a character attempts that action; how to apply this to your system is discussed after those actions are given. Here's how they look:

EACH ACTION comes with a description, going over what the action is and the kinds of scenery involved in making it happen.



AUTOMATIC elements are things that can most often *just happen* when the action is attempted, regardless of rolls or other actions. These are listed with an exclamation mark.



DANGERS are bad things that could happen if the character fails a roll, doesn't prevent them, or however things go wrong in your system. These are listed with a minus sign.



OPPORTUNITIES are the good things that the characters can *make* happen by succeeding on a roll, by 'spending successes', or however things go right in your system. These are listed with a plus sign.

ACTION SCENERY

RESOLUTION:

GRAB A RIDE

You slide down the banister, swing on the chandelier, going from here to there quickly using scenery.

- ❗ You arrive near your destination, moving from here to there.
- ➡ You land hard, taking damage as dictated by the Guide; if going *up*, you're now hanging off the edge.
- ➡ The Guide picks an enemy on the way; they get in a free shot on you.
- ➕ You land precisely where you meant to, without variation.
- ➕ You have the chance to take a swing at an enemy on your way.

TIP & DROP

You knock down the statue, shove the boulder off the edge, trying to crunch a foe or make a bridge.

- ❗ The thing you're aiming to drop comes down *somewhere*.
- ➡ You are a bit hurt or tired by the extreme effort; the Guide states the rules specifics.
- ➡ You or an ally are hit by the weight or debris; numbers from the Guide.
- ➕ You hit the spot you're aiming for; hurt foes, bridge gaps, make ramps.
- ➕ The dropper stays *solid*; hit foes may be pinned, bridges are stable.

MAKE A HAZARD

You kick over the brazier of coals, punch a hole in the grease barrel, shatter the fish tank, ignite the sails.

- ❗ You create a hazard on the scene, of about the kind you're aiming to.
- ➡ You are an early 'splash' victim of your hazard, and need to deal with the effects of it immediately.
- ➡ Things gets a slow start, and need extra time to affect the *whole* area.
- ➕ You catch *one* target with the action; it takes the effect right now.
- ➕ You direct the effect, placing the whole hazard to the extent possible.

FLOOR COLLAPSE

You shoulder-rush the support beam, cut the line holding up the cargo container, to collapse a floor.

- ❗ You jar or slice the target support; it's going to come down.
- ➡ You are hurt or tired by the effort or hit by a snapping line; the Guide states the rules specifics on the hurt.
- ➡ The collapse will go slowly, as the line unravels or the floor sags away.
- ➕ You manage to direct the angle of the collapse as much as is possible.
- ➕ You keep hold of the line cut or the beam removed.

CARPET PULL

You reach down and yank at the floor covering, attempting to upend opponents.

- ❗ You grab and pull, and enemies (who aren't warned) are off-balance.
- ➡ You telegraph your move, and enemies who can see you sidestep off, dodging the effect.
- ➡ You fall back, carpet in-hand, making yourself an easy target.
- ➕ Unbalanced enemies are tripped and fall down instead.
- ➕ You're now holding the carpet, which might be useful?

DRAPE DROP

You hack or pull hangings off a wall, aiming to drop them over a target you're near.

- ❗ You get the hangings off the wall; they can't be used for this again.
- ➡ Your hand or weapon gets tangled up; you need a moment to free it.
- ➡ More comes down or gets hit than you meant; the Guide decides what.
- ➕ You hit your target with the hangings, tangling them a bit.
- ➕ The flying cloth fills the air for a moment, creating a brief pause in the conflict to act (or flee!) in.

SHOVE 'EM OFF

You rush at an enemy, aiming to knock them off a ledge or precarious perch.

- ❗ You get close up with the enemy and the edge.
- ➡ Your enemy grabs or shoves at you; *you're* going over the edge.
- ➡ You're vulnerable as you charge, and an enemy (maybe the target) gets a hit on you as you rush in.
- ➕ You connect with the enemy, and send them over the edge.
- ➕ In the charge, you get in a hit on your enemy, doing damage.

GETTING IT IN YOUR GAME

TO APPLY THESE ACTIONS TO YOUR GAME, you'll need to decide how they're resolved, exactly. For play, print off the reference page, fill in the resolution bit with your chosen mechanic, and be ready to decide on the fine details of "So what does that mean in numbers?" on the fly.

IF YOU'RE RUNNING THE OUROBORS ENGINE OR INFECTED, no further work is needed. Just write "as usual" in the resolution section, and go.

FOR A DICE POOL GAME, where you roll multiple dice and count up successes, the easy rule is "each success means you avoid one danger or seize one opportunity". Then, you spend your successful dice, with each die removing a danger or making an opportunity happen. If the dice pool is very large, you may need to adjust things so some items cost multiple dice. If very small, you may want to give "one pick" up front, with more good dice giving more hits.

FOR MOST GAMES, where the dice generate a number, you'll need to set up degrees of success. These can then be listed in the resolution box in a format something like: point.

- ◆ 10 or less: Choose and cancel one danger or choose and seize one opportunity; all unpicked dangers occur, all unseized opportunities are missed.
- ◆ 11-15: Choose a total of two dangers and opportunities.
- ◆ 16-20: Choose a total of three dangers and opportunities.
- ◆ 21-25: Choose a total of four dangers and opportunities; if the action is used as-is, this is a perfect result.

COMBINATIONS

SOME SCENERY can be used in multiple ways. If you're standing next to the end of the rope where the chandelier is anchored, and you grab it and cut, are you grabbing a ride or dropping a weight? Both!

When this is the case, the Guide will chose how to combine those dangers and opportunities, which to leave out, and which to put in. It's possible that *all* of them will be used, creating a massive pile of things that can go wrong and right. Which may be exactly right; sometimes doing crazy things invites disaster!

STRANGE OPTIONS?

The layout of the dangers and opportunities, especially the inclusion of *automatic* elements, may strike some readers as odd. The big trick behind them, for those wanting to alter those pieces:

The outcome of a roll can never contradict itself.

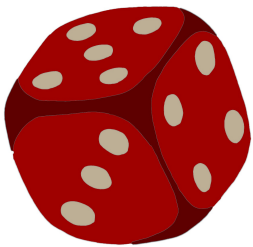
Which seems obvious, but it's entirely possible to come up with a list of cool outcomes, pick from among them, and then realize that they do – that this thing happened because the boulder fell, and this other thing happened because it *didn't* fall. Be careful to check for this if you decide to rewrite some of the pieces.

THE WRATH COUNT

THE CHARACTERS ARE engaged in a pitched battle with a gigantically powerful foe. The knightly hero has been carving it to ribbons, and the beast turns and... splatters the thief all over the wall.

....Wait. No, that's not right. The knight's wrath counter is showing a "5", and the die the thief has shows only "1". It goes for the knight, and hits; he tosses away a wrath token. Next round, with the knight wounded, his squire takes a desperate gamble; she scoops up a gem the size of an egg and starts sprinting, hoping to draw fire away from her mentor; the Guide checks her current Wrath (4!), and agrees that her actions push her up one more point, making her the main target.

WRATH IS A NUMBER TRACKED with a counter (a big die, a token pile, whatever) placed in front of each player, as a note of "how much are they drawing the ire of the big bad". When there's only a single foe, or the enemies facing the characters attack as a mob, wrath sorts out targeting and allows tracking of tactics for 'drawing fire' and the like.



HERE'S A BASELINE application of this idea; it's one that you'll likely want to hack a bit to fit your game, but it gives us a starting point.

- ◆ AT THE START of a battle where Wrath is used, each character on the scene that looks like a combatant gets a wrath counter – a big red die set at "2" (characters that appear to be total non-combatants start with their die at "1" - and as long as it doesn't change, it can be an imaginary die easily enough). Six wrath is the limit.
- ◆ AN ENEMY WILL always choose to act against a target with more wrath than an enemy with less if it reasonably able to do so, and if it can only reasonably attack another character, it suffers a one-point (or die, or whatever) penalty.
- ◆ A CHARACTER GAINS three wrath each time they damage the foe (up to the maximum of six). They gain two wrath for harassing the foe or aiding others in attack (up to a maximum of five). And they gain one wrath for healing, hiding, or otherwise giving benefits to those that have more wrath than they do (up to a limit of three). The Guide may add other actions to this list as desired, and ad-hoc in play.
- ◆ EACH TIME AN ENEMY attacks a character, that character steps down their total by one wrath. If the attack does damage, their wrath die is instead turned to showing "1"...
- ◆ A CHARACTER CAN increase their die by two wrath, or reduce it by one, as their turn, if the player describes a suitable action – taunting, withdrawing, and so on.

IN A FIGHT WITH MANY FOES, fighting independently, all enemies generate and reduce wrath, and the die is compared with how many attackers are 'on' the holder - any character with more wrath than attackers is a valid target, and the one with the biggest gap between wrath and attackers is the most valid target. So, if your wrath die is "4", and there's two enemies on you, you're attractive to foes at an effective "2". Your pal with a die at "3" and no enemies on him is the target of the moment, not you.



HACKING TO FIT

THE BASELINE OFTEN WON'T FIT YOUR GAME PERFECTLY. You'll need to refine it into shape for the system and the campaign you're thinking of. Here are some of the important considerations:

- ◆ **LIMIT OF SIX?** Ranking wrath from zero through six is simple, and generally easy to remember, as well as being 'coarse-grained' enough that an enemy will still be able to pick between aggressive targets fairly easily. Squeezing it down to an even smaller range, such as from one to three, creates more choice for the enemies while still keeping the basic functions. Enlarging the range is more 'fine-grained', but can also mean that enemies rarely get to make tactical decisions at all, and are basically 'robotic'.
- ◆ **HOLDING AGGRO?** If characters can take a lot of hits, you might want to weaken or remove "Your wrath count drops if you are attacked, and resets if injured", so really solid characters can keep their wrath nice and high to draw away enemies.
- ◆ **MONSTER QUIRKS?** It is possible to give different kinds of foes different (or simply longer) lists of 'what enrages them'. Dragons might consider a theft as bad as an attack; gangsters would likely take note of anyone shouting "Hello, police?" into a cell phone, undead might be enraged by the energy of healing magic, and so on. Some units might be specially trained to go after certain behaviours first - to always take down the ritualist, or the medic. Others might be blinkered enough that only damage to them will really get their attention..
- ◆ **EXISTING ABILITIES?** Some games have existing abilities, skills, or other such rules items that might be applied differently, or have new uses entirely, when these rules are used. A bodyguard's ability to shield someone might become the capacity to automatically have one more wrath than their charge; the brute that spits in the face of his foes might find that their skill instead allows them to gain wrath at a remarkable rate. Defences that provide sanctuary or calming effects might reduce wrath; the ability to bluff might allow an assassin to make it seem as if someone else was the source of their attack.

ESCALATED

PLAYER CHARACTERS CAN HAVE MESSY RELATIONS. They aren't necessarily a team of plain friends. Sometimes, the drama between them is just as interesting as the drama provided by the world. The tension between characters in many zombie movies provides one model for this; troupe shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, when some of the bad guys are sort-of-kind-of good guys provide another. If you want that kind of intense dysfunction, and want it to get more and more dysfunctional as play goes on, then this is for you.

TO START, FIND A CENTRAL RESOURCE for your game that that has a lot of uses, and which sees regular use (or would, if characters could just get more of it). Things like luck and fate points, as measures of willpower, are ideal for this purpose. Look at that resource, and note down the normal ways to regain it easily and in significant quantities (including 'downtime refills'). Now, any of those methods that don't actively and constantly drive play for you aren't part of the game anymore. If this means that the only methods for getting the resource now require working for each point, that's about right.

LET PLAYERS KNOW THEY HAVE SEVEN "SLOTS". One for each of the listed relationships at the end of the article. Each character may have one other character each in one of the 'slots'. So, a character can have one Exemplar, one Keeper, and so on. These other characters must be named characters that appear regularly in play; they may only be the main characters of other players if those players give permission for this to be so (in a really brutal soap opera game, permission should usually be given for this). A character can't be duplicated across slots; if someone is Randall's Exemplar, they can't also be Randall's Keeper. These slots can start off filled, or empty, as desired.



My ANATHEMA is _____

MY EXEMPLAR is _____

MY KEEPER is _____

My PARAMOUR is _____

My PROTEGE is _____

MY RIVAL is _____

MY WARD is _____

THE RELATIONSHIP RULES

YOU CAN FILL AN EMPTY RELATIONSHIP at any time, but usually right after an interaction which prompts it. If someone saves the life of your character, or turns on them, or otherwise does something memorable at or near them, that's a great time for a relationship to arise. By gaining a new relationship, your character refreshes their resource pool (either filling it to the maximum, or, if there is no maximum, jumping up to a 'refresh level' set by the Guide). When first taken, a relationship is "implied".

THERE'S NO REQUIREMENT FOR RECIPROCALITY. A character can absolutely have a Paramour, and that Paramour can think of the character as their Rival. Such mismatches are typically awesome.

RELATIONSHIPS ESCALATE from Implied to Overt to Abusive to Murderous (note that the target of the relationship is not necessarily the one being abused or the target of murderous intent, and that many, even most, relationships won't get to 'murderous'). This escalation is not a question of realism, but of drama! After you have played out a relationship at a given level for at least three scenes, you can escalate it to the next level up and refresh your token pool again. You are never required to escalate a relationship; you can keep it at the same level for a long time; keeping a positive relationship at the overt level is how the system represents healthy relationships. Unexciting, but healthy.

REMOVING A RELATIONSHIP can happen in two ways. If the target of a relationship is effectively eliminated from regular play for some reason, they may be removed from your list for free. Otherwise, you must spend a number of resource points equal to the level you refresh to when gaining or escalating a relationship in order to remove it. These points can be spent over an extended "mourning" or "breakup" period, rather than all at once.

YOU CAN REPEAT. If you have an empty relationship slot, you can use it to gain a relationship to someone that you have already related to. However, if you have already had one or more relationships (as described by these rules) to a given target, the second relationship you take grants you one less token than normal for taking it and escalating it. So if you break off your Paramour, and then get them as a Rival, you get one less point each step.

ROLEPLAYING GUIDELINES are given with each of the relationships. You should play to this level in any scene where the target of the relationship is present, especially in the scene where you add the relationship to your sheet, and when escalating. If others at the table note that you're not doing so, and have the opportunity, they can call for you to do so – give us some drama! Note that you can always play above this level of intensity; what's described is intended as the minimum level of drama, not the maximum.

AN INDEX CARD can record these relationships, like this:

My ANATHEMA is <i>Llew</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My EXEMPLAR is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My KEEPER is <i>Alla</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My PARAMOUR is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My PROTEGE is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My RIVAL is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My WARD is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Implied – ✓✓ Overt – ✓✓✓ Abusive – ✓✓✓✓ Murderous				

RELATIONSHIPS (1 of 2)

YOUR ANATHEMA is someone you want to *destroy*. This is an enemy that your character wants to see reduced to nothing. While this relationship is merely implied, minor jabs and snarky witticisms, or just boiling glares, are sufficient for you. Once it has become overt, you will need to actually work to undermine them socially. At the abusive level, you begin looking for opportunities to hurt them physically (and get away with it), to mess up anything they care about deeply, to turn others against them. When this relationship becomes murderous, you'll begin looking for a way to end their life. These acts need not be direct, immediate violence; sabotage, 'accidents', and even serious challenges to honourable fights all express this level of relationship.

YOUR EXEMPLAR is someone you want to *follow*. This is someone that your character believes is somehow better, wiser, or simply greater, and that their greatness should be acknowledged by everyone else. At the 'implied' level, you may content yourself with small acts of admiration, possibly carrying a picture of them or trying to find opportunities to be near them. Once this relationship becomes overt, you should defend them against slanders in your presence, and will be plainly ready to do what they say when they're present. At the abusive level, you'll be ready to heap scorn and calumny on those that disagree with your Exemplar, and their enemies become yours. When this relationship becomes murderous, you'll be ready to kill to get them into a position of strength. (Note: Your Exemplar need not actually desire power. At all.)

YOUR KEEPER is someone you want to *escape*, without leaving your own life. A keeper has some hold on your character - whether or not they know it; a man you are jealously obsessed with can be your Keeper just as surely as the serial-killing sister that your guilt won't let you stop taking care of. At the implied level, this may simply mean trying to interest others in them (in hopes of foisting them off). As this becomes overt, you'll begin making small attempts to eject them from your life, while still remaining in the realm of the socially acceptable. At the abusive level, you will likely begin to actively live in a way that you hope will repel them. And, finally, at the murderous level, you'll be ready to kill them - or to kill someone and frame them.

YOUR PARAMOUR is someone you want to *obtain*. Your paramour is someone that doesn't fill the role that your character wishes them to in their life (a role which should, eventually, turn out to be one that the other will object to, even if it seems wonderful at first). At the implied level, this involves no more than significant and thoughtful looks and attempts to attract their attention. As it becomes overt, the first signs of how you want them to relate to you should be expressed, often with small attempts on your part to entice the other to take on that role. By the abusive stage, you will be entirely willing to harm or browbeat the person to act the way you wish towards you. And finally, by the time the relationship turns murderous, you'll do anything, however vile.

RELATIONSHIPS (2 of 2)

YOUR RIVAL is someone you want to *defeat*. This is a character that your own character sees themselves as competing with in some way, trying to gain something (or someone). Implied, you just view any competition (of any kind) that both of you are in as more intense, and may give small signs of just who you feel you're competing with. At the overt stage, you're obviously ready to take them on, anytime. Once the relationship becomes abusive, it's not enough to just contest with them and try to beat them; you want to rub it in, for them to grovel at your feet - and it's plain that you want this. In the end, once the relationship becomes murderous, the desire becomes such that you want them dead, and want everyone to know that you're the one who did it. A rival differs from an Anathema in that the desire isn't about annihilating them so much as it is about 'counting coup'.



YOUR PROTEGE is someone you want to *mold*, someone that you think has great potential to be someone (preferably, someone that they don't really want to be), and that you are the one that can make them into that person. Like a Paramour, you want them to fill a role; unlike a Paramour, this role doesn't need to relate to you. At the implied level, you may simply be offering occasional advice or introducing them to 'the right people'. As the relationship becomes overt, you should be mentioning the role you want them to fill to them, and explaining why this is perfect. At the abusive level, you'll happily resort to blatant manipulation of the target, to teaching them 'hard lessons' through dirty tactics, and the like. Finally, by the time this relationship becomes murderous, you'll be ready to excise from their life the people that don't fit who you want them to become, by whatever means are necessary.

YOUR WARD is someone you want to *protect*, someone that you believe is endangered in some fashion by something (typically, by one or more of their relationships, or by the whole world), and whom you wish to keep safe. Of course, your ward should not want to be protected in the specific ways that your character will eventually choose to employ. At the implied level, this is the most innocuous kind of social presence and interference. Once it becomes overt, stern warnings to both the target and simple actions against whatever you think may harm them are the order of the day. At the abusive level, you'll act to drive off the malign influence - or even shove extra work on your ward, get them briefly detained, for their own good. By the time this becomes murderous, you'll shoot that boy if he comes around one more time.