What is Caltrops?

Caltrops is a rules light TTRPG framework, with an emphasis on being easy for a DM to implement their own world on top of.

Caltrops is not designed to cater to a specific setting, and so it is up to the DM to provide an implementation - which includes **skills**, **powers**, and **equipment**. A reference implementation 'Bludgeon' will be provided and used for examples.

The following are core principles of Caltrops:
- It should only take a minute to create a new character or monster.
- Receiving and treating wounds can make HP more immersive.
- Equipment management is important, but should not be a chore.
- Player power should increase gradually. 20 goblins should always be a hazard.
- Social encounters should be accessible to every character. A fighter should be able to use their strength when bragging to another fighter.
- Most actions should be resolved with a single roll.
- Math is evil. Number manipulation should be kept to a minimum.
- Players should be rewarded for creative descriptions of their actions.
- Rolling a handful of D4's is fun.

Optional rules: Here you will find some optional rules. These are suggestions to add some more brutality to your table.

These rules are a bit over-the-top. Consider playing without them first.

A reference digital character sheet can be found here:
https://caltrops.tlembedded.com/?sheet=8bb70348-8874-4fbe-8693-31c3cb401abc
This will not be in the final document - but replaced with a blank character sheet in a printable format.

A modest handful of D4's is all you will need to play caltrops. Fun themed dice are not required, but are very easy to create from blank dice and a ritual sacrifice.

Player characters

Levels

Increasing player level is based on milestones. The DM shall declare when the party shall level. This should be after completing a significant quest or looting an impressive relic. Returning home empty handed shall not be rewarded.

Players that have a level less than the party's highest level shall receive two levels.

When levelling up, each player increases an **aspect** and gains **skill points**. Level 1 includes these increases, as if the player had started from level 0.

Classic rule: The players shall level up by spending gold equal to their level times 1000. Let the players describe the lavish parties or exotic treasures they spend this wealth on.

Next week they shall return back to the blackened pit - the narrow line between life and death. It is no wonder then that tonight they drink, gamble, and dance, into the late hours.

Attributes

Players have 4 attributes. These attributes are assigned at character creation. Each attribute should be assigned a value of 1 to 3, with a total score of 8.

These attributes are:
- Strength
- Dexterity
- Intellect
- Willpower

These form the general outline of your character, and are not used in gameplay except to set the base value for **aspects**.

Aspects

Each **attribute** has 2 aspects. Each aspect starts off with the same value as its parent attribute. Every **level**, you may increase one aspect by 1. An aspect may not exceed the parent attribute plus 3.

Strength	Violence	The world doesn't have to be complex. Everything can break.
	Control	Controlling one's own body is the first step to controlling your surroundings.
Dexterity	Reflex	Strike first. Strike last.
	Precision	Thread the needle. A fine craftsman, and a finer marksman.
Intellect	Wit	Think of novel solutions to unfamiliar problems. Nothing is out of your grasp.
	Knowledge	Recall the workings of the world, gleaned from years of experience.
Willpower	Presence	Bend the world to your will. The real fight occurs within the mind.
	Focus	Stop. Breathe. Some things are best done with patience and care.

Skills

These represent the domain specific knowledge of the character. Each skill starts at zero, and may be incremented with a point buy system. At each *level* you gain 3 skill points. The following table shows the *skill point* cost of incrementing a *skill level*:

Level	Point Cost	Cumulative cost
0	0	0
1	1	1
2	1	2
3	2	4
4	2	6
5	3	9
6	3	12
7	3	15
8	3	18
9	3	21

In 'Bludgeon' the following list of skills is described:

Skill	Description
Athletics	Ability to run, leap, and dodge
Craftsmanship	Creating items and trinkets. Discuss your specific craft with the DM when incrementing this skill.
Diplomacy	Convince people to see your perspective via truth, lie, or intimidation.
History	Recall information on places, people, and artefacts.
Marksmanship	Shooting with a ranged weapon or throwing an object.
Medicine	Application of bandages and medicines to treat wounds in the field.
Melee	Slay foes in close combat.
Observation	Looking for objects and avoiding ambushes.
Stealth	Avoid drawing attention to oneself.
Thievery	Bypass locks and disable traps.
Rage	**Power skill**. Smash and destroy with uncommon strength.
Pyromancy	**Power skill**. Conjure fire to burn foes or scorch terrain. Requires a staff.
Cryomancy	**Power skill**. Conjure ice to freeze foes, or create icy constructs. Requires a staff.
Occult	**Power skill**. Gain impossible knowledge, or conjure wretched allies. Requires a relic.
Divine	**Power skill**. Smite your foes or heal wounds. Requires a relic.

Powers

Some *skills* are Power skills. These skills are not used for free, but instead consume one of their respective *power pips* per usage. Powers are much more flexible in their use, and may allow a player to replace an unfavourable roll with a favourable roll. Each power gets 2 pips per *skill level*. These points are refreshed after *resting*.

Power skills may also have additional constraints based on the implementation. In Bludgeon, these powers require the user to wield a staff or relic. The exact capabilities may even vary from player to player. The players should discuss this with the DM before taking these skills.

```
Wizard: Can I leap over that ravine?

DM: It's a long jump. Roll control-athletics.

The wizard realises that this would give him a dice pool of 2 - likely to end
poorly.

Wizard: Hmm. Can I instead use cryomancy to form a bridge out of ice?

DM: Sure. Roll wit-cryomancy.

The wizard removes one cryomancy power point, and rolls his new dice pool of 6
dice.

Wizard: I got 2 successes.

DM: An icy structure grows to span the gap. Frigid white air forms around it
and sinks into the ravine. Not only does it allow you to cross, but it seems
safe enough for the whole party.
```

Brutal rule: Instead of refreshing *power pips* at *camp*, try refreshing them only when the party returns to rest at *town*.

Enough of this wizarding tomfoolery. This is a table for grit and wits!

A player may choose to **overcast** in a crucial moment. The player may spend extra *power pips* to add +1 **success** for each additional pip spent. A player may not overcast using more pips than their powers *skill level*. The decision to overcast must be made before the roll is made.

Wounds

Wounds describe the various damages that players encounter throughout their adventure. These are intended to make each hit feel significant and serious. Players are encouraged to consider not just how they will fight foes - but also how they will deal with the aftermath.

Wounds are not limited to physical damage. These can also be the result of exhaustion, plague, or psychological trauma.

Characters have 5 *wound slots*. When dealt a wound, the DM will inform the player of its *wound size* and give it a description. When dealing wounds to players, the size is limited to two slots.

Wound size	Wound slots
Minor	1
Major	2

Each wound starts as a *fresh wound*. This means it has the opportunity to be treated. A player may attempt to treat them using their skills and appropriate items via a *check*. On a *success*, the wound becomes a *locked wound* of one size smaller. For a *minor wound*, this means that the wound is removed completely. On a *failure*, the wound becomes a *locked wound* with no size reduction. The *check* threshold is typically moderate (1), but may be greater for specific wounds.

A *locked wound* can no longer be treated by players. They must return to *town* for treatment.

The wound description should be used not just for flavour, but also as guidance for what sources of healing are appropriate. A poisonous bite may require medicines, and **exhaustion** may be cleared automatically once the player *rests*.

Fresh wounds should be treated by players before or during *camp*. If they ignore them, they shall automatically become *locked wounds*. This may not apply to non-physical wounds like plague or psychological trauma.

If all 5 of a character's *wound slots* are used, they are on *death's door*. If they receive a wound that would place them at 6 or more slots, then they are *Dead*.

```
Thief: I will try to disarm the spring trap.

DM: Roll precision-thieving

Thief: Zero successes.

DM: That required two. The trap snaps shut on your arm, giving you a major
puncture wound.

The rogue notes a major puncture wound on his wounds list, which occupies
two wound slots.

Thief: Uh oh. That puts me at one wound slot left. Can someone treat this
now?

Fighter: I sit him down and wrap his arm with one of my bandages.

DM: Roll focus-medicine.

Fighter: One success.

DM: Good - that wound has been treated.

The rogue reduces the puncture wound to size one, and notes that it is
locked.
```

Brutal rule: Raise the wound limit for players to "mortal". This would use 3 *wound slots*, and is reduced to 2 when treated.

Death is random and sudden. No point making friends in this line of work.

Death's door

While a player has all 5 of their wound slots occupied, they are on **death's door**. While in this condition, they cannot **move** or take any **action** on their turn. At the end of their turn, their oldest **fresh wound** automatically becomes a **locked wound**.

A player leaves this condition once a wound has been successfully treated, placing them back on 4 or less **wound slots**.

If all of the player's wounds become **locked wounds**, then they are **dead**.

> Cowards rule: Allow players on death's door to make a **check** on their turn to avoid the automatic **locked wound**.
>
> *He lay there, hands pressed on his throat, desperately trying to keep the wound closed. It seemed to be working. For now.*

Death

When a player's character dies, it is absolute and final. There are no second chances. It is time to create a **replacement character**.

Replacement characters

When a player character dies, or otherwise retires and leaves the party, the player should create a new character. This new character's level shall be equal to half the party's highest level rounded down.

> Brutal rule: Start new characters at level 1.
>
> *Fresh faced and eager for adventuring experience. More flesh for the grinder.*

Equipment

Characters are intended to carefully plan their equipment.

Each player has 5 **equipment slots** on their person, and 5 **equipment slots** on their pack. Items each use 1 **equipment slot**. Many consumable items such as torches and ammunition can stack, up to some limit. Ammunition is typically tracked on a per encounter basis - ie, 1 unit of arrows shall be consumed after a single encounter that required the use of arrows.

Items in the 5 personal slots can be used arbitrarily by the player. Items in the 5 pack slots require one **action** to retrieve.

Small non-consumable items are considered trinkets. These do not need to be tracked. It can be assumed an appropriate party member may have such an item on their person. Such items might include:

- A small knife
- Flint and steel

In general, no allowance is made in the rules for differentiation between weapon types. This weapon variety should be allowed for in the following two ways:
- Specific damage types may be required to bypass **foe resistances**
- The player's description of how they use their specific weapon to their advantage can lead to **bonus dice**.

In 'Bludgeon' the following list of equipment is described:

Equipment	Stack	Description
Sword, Axe, Mace or Spear		An instrument for dealing slashing, bludgeoning or piercing damage.
Staff		A stick to aid in balance, or a powerful instrument with which to channel your power.
Shield		When appropriate, can be discarded to avoid a single wound.
Bow or Crossbow		Deal piercing damage from range. Consumes ammunition.
Ammunition	4	Enough arrows or bolts for a single encounter.
Torches	4	Enough for an hour of adventuring.
Rations	4	Bread, nuts, dried meats. Enough to sustain an adventurer for a day.
Rope		50ft of rope, conveniently coiled.
Crowbar		A long piece of iron with a hooky bit at the end.
Shovel		A tool for digging or clearing debris
Small tools		A small set of hand tools, including drivers and chisels.
Lockpicks	8	Picks and tensioners for opening locks and other mechanisms.
Bandages	4	For treating the cuts and punctures of adventuring.
Medicines	4	For treating poisons, blights, and other exotic trauma.
Artefact		A precious artefact from an ancient culture or religion worth 500 gold.
Gemstones	8	Large raw gemstones worth 100 gold each.

Player rolls

Player rolls start with the player describing the outcome they desire and how they plan to achieve this. The DM then decides what *aspect* and *skill* the player is using. The DM may also include **bonus dice** for any favourable conditions. The player will have preferences as to which *aspect* is selected by the DM, and so they are encouraged to cater their description to match their character aspects.

Combining **aspects** and **skills** in novel ways is how caltrops aims to create a diversity of approaches without a large number of disconnected skills. Players may roll control-diplomacy to intimidate an NPC, presence-diplomacy to move him with speech, or wit-diplomacy to bluff.

The player rolls a number of four sided dice equal to the sum of the **aspect**, **skill**, and **bonus dice**. The result of the roll is a number of successes - with each dice that rolled 4 equal to one **success**.

Roll results can be interpreted in 3 general forms, **check**, **attack**, and **defence**.

Checks

Checks are when a player **rolls** against a threshold.

Difficulty	Threshold
Easy	Automatic success
Moderate	1
Difficult	2
Extreme	3
Impossible	Just say no

In general, if failing a check would not result in a serious injury or setback, then the player should automatically succeed without any roll required. The DM is encouraged to share the check difficulty before the roll when appropriate.

The check is a **success** if the roll meets or exceeds the threshold. Consider giving them an extra reward or knowledge for each extra success above the threshold.

The check if a **failure** if the roll is below the threshold. In this case, the player suffers a setback for each missing success die. Normally these failures are converted into a wound.

```
DM: Before you is the treasure chest. Ancient cold runes are inscribed upon
it.
Wizard: Do I recognise the symbols on these runes?
DM: They look like cryomantic runes - set to encase the chest in ice if the
passphrase is not spoken.
Wizard: Bah. I use my pyromancy to envelop the chest in flame - hopefully
that negates it.
```

> *The DM determines the threshold for this foolish action shall be 2.*
>
> DM: Roll wit-pyromancy.
>
> *The wizard sums his pyromancy (3) with his wit (4), and so rolls 7 total dice.*
>
> Wizard: One success.
>
> DM: The room explodes in a fiery burst of steam as fire and ice clash. Take a minor burn wound.

Group checks

A special case of a regular check, where multiple players are simultaneously rolling checks for the same event. This usually occurs when attempting to hide or fleeing foes.

During a group check, a player with excess **successes** may donate them to other players. The players should be encouraged to describe how they help their friends when they do this.

Attacks

Attacks are when a player rolls simply to maximise successes. Generally these successes are being converted directly into **wounds** dealt to **foes**. These successes may be converted to other desired outcomes, such as knocking a foe prone, disarming them, or applying some **power skill** effect. If more wounds are dealt than are required to kill an individual foe, the DM may decide that excess wounds are applied to adjacent foes.

> DM: Six goblins charge forward, but stop at the causeway. Players turn.
>
> Fighter: I run forwards, and hack as many as I can.
>
> DM: Roll violence-melee.
>
> Fighter: Two successes.
>
> *The DM observes the goblin stats, noting that they have a single wound each.*
>
> DM: You have cut down two goblins in a single bloody arc. Rogues turn.

Preparation

Players may wish to prepare or make other cautious actions which may not yield immediate effects. This may include effects like keeping watch or defending yourself in combat. Each success is converted into a **prep pip**. These can be used at a later time like **successes** to deal or prevent **wounds**, or achieve any other outcome.

The DM may use **prep pips** on the players behalf. Often the player may not know that their prepared successes can be used, such as when laying traps or keeping watch for an unknown enemy. If a player requests to use their prep pips, the DM has final say on whether their described preparation can be used in this way.

In combat, prepared successes must be spent before the next **player turn**, or they will expire.

> DM: Four goblins remain. They continue to charge up the stairs and make it to the doorway. It's now the players turn.

```
Fighter: I run up and defensively hold the door. I want to prevent them from
getting past.

DM: Ok. Roll control-melee.

Fighter: Two successes.

DM: You have two prep pips. Rogue, your turn.

Rogue: I fire bolts at the first goblins up the stairs.

DM: Ok, roll precision-marksmanship.

Rogue: One success.

DM: One goblin is slain, a bolt through his head. Ok. Goblin's turn.

DM: Goblins all attack the fighter, trying to push their way through. Two
successes - that's a major stab wound.

Fighter: I have two prep pips.

The DM recalls that the fighter gained these pips by an appropriate defensive
action, and removes two successes from the goblins attacks.

DM: Ok. No wound. It's the player's turn again.
```

In combat, it may be appropriate to split rolled **successes**, some into offence and some into **prep pips** for defence.

Bonus dice

The DM may assign bonus dice when players make any rolls. These should be rewarded for intelligent and creative play. Typically a single bonus dice should be given per favourable condition.

Examples of favourable conditions within combat may include:
- Flanking
- Attacking a stunned or prone opponent
- Use of high ground
- Identifying and targeting an opponent's vulnerability

Bonus dice may also be negative. Examples include:
- Attacking a foe without clear vision
- Using a weapon at an inappropriate range

In general, both in and out of combat, players who can describe their actions in a creative and detailed manner should be rewarded with bonus dice when practical. Players are encouraged to mention any favourable conditions as part of their action.

```
Rogue: I shoot a bolt at this goblins head. I have highground on them, and I
think this is a surprise attack.

DM: That's right. Roll precision marksmanship plus 2.

Thief: Three successes!.
```

```
DM: That bolt goes clean through the first goblins head and kills a second.
Good shot. The remaining goblins begin to panic - it looks like they are
about to rout!
```

Repeating checks

Outside of combat, players are discouraged from freely repeating rolls. A failed roll represents the inability of the party to overcome this issue. If players wish to persist on an issue, they should instead come up with novel approaches which may use alternate *skills*, *aspects*, or create significantly favourable conditions. For appropriate tasks, reattempting a roll may trigger a **passage of time**.

```
Thief: I search the study for any precious artefacts.
DM: Roll focus-observation.
Thief: Zero successes.
DM: Nothing. You search every nook and cranny, but find nothing that looks
of any value.
Barbarian: I toss the place. I flip the tables and break the shelves. I
begin to tear up the carpet.
DM: Alright. Roll violence-observation.
Barbarian: One success.
DM: After laying waste to the shelves, and flipping the desk, you notice a
distinct square depression in the floor where the desk once was. It looks
like the wizard's secret stash!
```

Exertion

A player may decide to exert themselves for a pivotal roll. This must be decided before the roll is made. In this case, the player gains +1 *success* to the results of their roll, but takes a minor *wound* of *exhaustion*.

Combat

Initiative

Combat is run in **team turns**. In the player **team turn**, each player may take their turns in any order. In the foe **team turn**, the foes all move and attack simultaneously.

The DM determines which team starts first based on who initiates combat. In the case of an ambush, or situation where both parties may reasonably be ready to attack, players who succeed an appropriate **check** may participate in the first **team turn**.

Player turns

On their turn, players may make a **movement** and an **action** in either order.

Player movement

While in open space, players can move 30 feet on their turn. While in the confines of a dungeon, players can typically only navigate one obstacle per turn. Obstacles may include things such as:
- Opening or closing doors
- Jumping a short fence
- Climbing through a window

Player Actions

On their turn, the player shall describe their action, and the DM shall determine the nature of the roll. The roll shall fit into one of the following categories: **check**, **attack** or **preparation**.

Foe turns

On foe turns, the **foes** make simultaneous movement and attacks. All attacks against the same player should be rolled together. The successes shall be converted into a **wound** as per the **attack** roll rules. Foes may have **foe features** that allow them to convert successes into other effects instead. Remember that **wound sizes** for players are capped.

Foes are not limited to attacking, they may use their action to instead make any action that a player might.

Rest

Like most creatures, the party will need to settle down and rest to recover strength. This may be done via **camping** or resting at **town**. They must rest periodically or face **exhaustion**. After resting, the players may refresh their **power pips**. Resting takes a single **day segment**.

Any physical ***fresh wounds*** that are left untreated during a rest will fester and become ***locked***.

Camping

When players need to rest outside of a ***town***, they will rest in a makeshift camp. This can be hazardous, and they should be careful to select a safe location.

Camping triggers an additional ***passage of time***. The effect of this is that a ***passage of time*** roll is made when starting **and** ending camp.

Town

Inside a friendly town is the only true safety that the party will know. Here they can rest without risk of a ***foe*** attack.

At town, players can have most kinds of ***wounds*** treated, including ***locked wounds***. This may require meeting medical specialists, paying sums of money, or spending weeks recuperating.

Exhaustion

Player characters need to rest at least every 4 ***day segments***. If they do not, they receive 1 ***wound*** of ***exhaustion***, and again every subsequent 2 ***day segments***.

When characters rest they may clear 1 ***exhaustion wound***.

Time

Day Segment

Time is tracked into the following segments: Morning, Afternoon, Evening, Night. Tasks like **camping**, travelling, waiting, ect; should be handled in day segments.

At the end of each day segment, a **passage of time** roll is made.

Passage of Time

Time is against the party. Every moment they waste is an opportunity for peril.

The **passage of time** is a trigger for the DM to roll on an event table. If the rolled event is not applicable to the situation, simply treat it as no event. The DM may freely ignore these rolls when the party is in a safe environment.

Roll (d4)	Event
1	No event
2	Light sources are extinguished, or weather turns for the worse. (Or something else appropriate for your setting.)
3	A random player receives 1 **wound** of **exhaustion** unless they consume 1 ration.
4	Wandering monster or environmental hazard.

The following events may also trigger a **passage of time** roll while in a hazardous area (such as a dungeon):
- Backtracking (once per destination)
- Stopping to treat wounds
- The party otherwise halts exploration for 15 or more minutes.

Wandering monsters and environmental hazards are considered an essential part of caltrops. See the **dungeon design** for more information.

Foes

Foes have the following components, *dice pool*, *wounds*, *features*.

Foe dice pool

Foes usually have a single *dice pool*. This dice pool is used whenever they make an *attack* or other kind of *action*. The DM may increase or decrease this pool depending on how capable the creature is at making the specific action.

Foe wounds

Foes have a number of *wounds* required to kill them. Foes do not need track wound types or sizes. There is no limit to how many wounds can be inflicted in a single *attack* to a foe by a player.

Foe features

Aside from the way the DM chooses to run them, *foe features* are what makes one foe unique from another.

The following is a sample list of features that may be applied to foes:

Feature	Description
Horde	4 horde foes may share the same space.
Mighty	+1 *success* added to roll if roll already results in a hit.
Disabler	Can spend 1 *success* to disable a player for their next round.
Trapper	Can spend 1 *success* to prevent a player from moving. Ends when the player makes a *check* to escape.
Grappler	Can spend 1 *success* to grapple a player. This player automatically moves with the foe. Ends when the player makes a *check* to escape, or the foe dies.
Blighter	Dealt *wounds* are difficult to treat, and take 2 or more *successes* to treat.
Leader	Can spend 1 *success* to mark a player. All *attacks* against the player will be made with +1 dice against the target next round.
Rapid	Gets 2 *actions* per turn instead of 1. It should not attack the same player twice in a round.
Protector	May convert *successes* into *prep pips* used to protect allies.
Area of effect	May roll an attack against each player in its area. You may choose to roll these all at once and distribute the

	wounds or effects to players in order of distance.
Armoured	Ignores 1 *success* from player *attacks* with a specific damage type. (for example, armoured vs slashing/piercing)
Summoner	May spend 1 *success* to summon a 2d *foe*.

Foe notation

Foes can be minimally described using the minimal notation below. Wounds can be omitted if the foe has 1 wound.

Bog jelly: 3d, 2w, trapper, blighter (bog rot).

Is a bog jelly with:
- Dice pool of 3 dice
- Two wounds
- Trapper feature
- Blighter feature, which results in the "bog rot" wound.