

Venus Engine: 1st Playtest Rules & Procedures (v0.2)

- The game progresses in *turns*, where the FC usually starts by setting a scene and then passes the turn around the table clockwise (or across the screen if playing online) to let everyone interact and play.
 - When it's your turn, you can act and describe your actions and try to do or say anything you like, this may result in performing a check or a task or using one of your attributes to do something special.
 - But this isn't always necessary; sometimes a turn can pass without any rolls or looking up rules.
- Once everyone has had a turn a *round* is said to have passed, and the FC may either continue the scene with another round or cut to a new scene and start a new round.
 - At the end of a scene, any player can offer to introduce and set the next scene.
 - If they do and the FC allows them, then they start the round and similarly pass the turn clockwise (or screenwise).
 - When you do this, you will be rewarded with a meta-currency called 'Ego' if you do not already have it.
- Sometimes not all the player characters are in the same scene together, and sometimes those scenes aren't happening simultaneously.
 - In these cases, it's up to FC to decide whether to:
 - Resolve each scene at a time; putting the rest of the players on hold and then coming back to them.
 - Keep the regular turn order and cut between scenes frequently.
 - Or play a round in one scene, and then cut to the next and play a round in that one, and so forth.
 - Any player can pause the game at any point for any reason, but the FC ultimately decides the pacing by how they edit all of the scenes together in order to spotlight different moments.

When to Roll Dice?

1. Always first, **work out what your agenda is** each turn and how you would like to work towards it.
2. **Roleplay until you reach a point of tension or indecision**, until you attempt something that could have interesting consequences, or until the FC pauses you to discuss the current intent of your actions.
3. Once your agenda is clear to your Peers, **the FC will decide and tell you which *ability* should be used** and then decide with your input whether the roll should be performed as a basic *check* or a full *task*.

Note: Sometimes, no roll is even necessary to do what you want to do; we do not roll when there is nothing at stake. In this case, the FC may pass your turn to keep a good session pace, or you can pass the turn yourself when you're ready.

Who is the FC?

- FC */ef:si/* is short for 'Facilitator'.
- They are one of the other players, a friend, who takes on a different role from you at the table; they most-likely act as your game's organizer (and probably told you to read these rules as well as when your next session starts).
- They direct and moderate play by controlling the pace of each scene and determining which ability should be used when you roll dice.
- They author the world and any characters that aren't portrayed by you or the other players.
- They interpret your actions and intentions and respond accordingly.
 - And they will officiate over new rulings when you try to do something that hasn't already been accounted for by the existing game rules or previous rulings.
 - Though their word should never be arbitrary nor final.
- And in general, they help to guide you through the experience of play, and makes sure that you have a good time.

Note: 'Referee' or 'Game Manager' are also acceptable terms for the FC.

Who are your Peers?

- Your Peers are everyone else at the table, except you. You friends, basically.
 - It's a relative term: So the FC's Peers are all of their players, including you, and another player's Peers include you, the FC, and everyone else.
 - Even then, a Peer may not even need to be a player; they might just be a friend sitting in on the session and listening.
- Peers are expected to help the FC adjudicate the game rules when it's not their turn in the spotlight:

- This reduces the referential and managerial duties of the FC, so that they can focus on creating and enriching the game for you.

Note: 'Jury' or 'Board' are also acceptable terms for your Peers.

No, I've not played Lady Blackbird, but I've played and run other dice-pool-based systems, and I can say as-I-player-and-a-GM of other games that not knowing the stats affects the meta-game experience, even if it doesn't change much of the in-game experience. Sure, my character doesn't know that their odds of jumping the chasm is 33%, but I'd sure like to know that if it means their life could be on the line.

Checks are Binary, *and use a single d20 and up to four d6's*

1. Your Peers will give you a target to meet or exceed with your roll, based on your actions as you've described them:
 - This number starts with *absolute difficulty* between 5 and 25, evaluated in four increments of 5; as judged by your Peers.
 - ie. Routine = 5, Simple = 10, Tough = 15, Challenging = 20, Absurd = 25.
 - The FC may then add up to four *relative difficulty* factors — such as environmental hazards, your wounds, the aid of anyone working against you, or the attributes of a particular opponent — each increasing the target by +1.
 - If it feels like more than four factors need to be added, then the FC should start over and raise the absolute difficulty.
 - Thus the maximum target possible is 29.
2. Then pick up and roll a **d20** and add your ability score to the result (the positive number next to the ability caliber):
 - You pass the check if the sum meets or exceeds the target number, so *try to roll high!*
 - If your ability caliber is Silver and the die naturally landed on a 20 (a 5% chance), then you automatically pass the check and succeed at your task *regardless of the actual target*.
 - Similarly, if it's Gold or Platinum then you auto-pass on a 19 or 20 (10%).
 - But Bronze dice have no auto-pass conditions.
 - Conversely, if you get a natural 1 (also a 5% chance), then you automatically fail the check *despite what your sum total may have come to*.
 - And only Platinum abilities avoid this auto-fail condition.
3. If you've fallen short of the target, then do not despair, you can make up the difference with up to four of your own relative bonus factors:
 - In the form of environmental benefits, your own relevant attributes, spending Lots, and help from your allies.
 - Check with your Peers that each factor is valid and add to the narrative before rolling them.
 - For each factor, pick up and roll a **d6** and then add only the *highest number rolled* to your sum total to see if you now meet or exceed the target.
 - So if it's clear that even the best possible roll (of +6) wouldn't help you succeed then you must skip this step, unfortunately.
4. If your total still cannot meet the target, then alas, you fail the check.
 - The consequences of failing a check should either be implicit from the nature of your actions, or be clearly stated by the FC before you commit to the roll.

Notes:

- Checks are supposed to resolve basic actions quickly and easily, while also adding to the drama.
- If you or any of your Peers feel you are digging too deeply for bonuses, or that your agenda has shifted, then you or the FC can cancel the check and discuss what to try instead.
- Similarly, if you fail a check and the consequences are unexpected or unclear, you should pause the game and talk about it and perhaps even re-wind and use a task instead of a check if it turns out that more was at stake than you first expected.

Caliber vs. Score

Caliber represents your potential to succeed as raw talent, whereas **score** represents your training and growth.

- Caliber is determined by a combination of your tier and special attributes; and does not typically change very much after character assembly, unless you accomplish incredible feats through play, or are suddenly bestowed with great power.
- Score is determined by your age, archetype choices, and experience; and typically only changes when a lot of time passes in game, when you get very badly wounded, or between story arcs during development sessions.

- So advancement in this game comes predominately from acquiring new attributes — assets, features, and merits — that can be applied to a broader array of checks and tasks, or by making new friends and allies who will lend you their aid or give you access to new places.
 - And by levelling up your jobs by performing tasks and earning **exp**.
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Tasks are Variable, *and use a pool of D6s*

1. Choose a job that can 'inherit' the ability chosen by the FC for the task, and pick up as many **D6**'s as it's level.
 - If you have no appropriate job for the task, either because none of your currently known jobs inherit the given ability or because none of the ones that do correspond to your current actions, then you'll have to start learning a new one (see below).
2. The starting threshold is always 1, and then your FC will then count up to four *relative difficulty* factors, including:
 - Environmental hazards, a caliber or size difference between you and an opponent, the aid of those working against you, whether or not you're using a suboptimal job to perform the task, or any other contextual disadvantages based on your actions or limitations.
 - The FC should announce and choose only the most pertinent and effective factors, given your agenda.
 - Each factor adds +1 to the threshold.
 - This threshold determines the 'price of success' — that is, the cost of meeting your intentions or completing your primary objective (see step 5).
 - And the FC should make clear at this stage what failure would mean, if it's not already implicit.
3. Up to two allies may hand you one of their dice as aid if they have an appropriate or relevant job:
 - They will get to mark an **exp** for their chosen job, regardless of your success or failure.
 - But, this will tie them to the consequences of your actions; so it's up to you whether to accept them.
 - Their dice will also inherit the caliber of their ability.
 - So this can be a major advantage if someone with a Gold caliber ability aids your measly Bronze dice, for example.
 - Also, for this reason, it's useful if everyone at the table uses different colored dice or else rolls separately.
 - So then you can also see which allies *actually* helped you, and that can be good grist for roleplaying.
4. Now roll the dice and count the 'successes' based on each die's caliber:
 - With Bronze dice, a success is struck for each that lands on a 5 or a 6 (about a 33% chance *per die*).
 - Silver dice get successes on a 4 or more (50%), Gold successes on a 3+ (~67%), and Platinum on 2-6 (~83%).
 - These successes represent both your margin of success for the task and a narrative success within the moment of the scene.
 - If any of the dice disappoint you, you may 'KISS' them — using Kismet, Insights, Stunts, or Specialties — to re-roll them (see below).
 - Each die can only be KISSed once at most, and you can only do one round of KISSing.
 - And you must collaborate with your allies to KISS any aiding dice, rather than just acting alone.
5. Then, you may spend your successes to work out the consequences of your actions:
 - The price of success is the task's threshold — the *primary consequence*, as set by the FC (in step 2) — and costs 1 to 5 successes:
 - If you do not or cannot buy the primary consequence then you fail the task
 - But you at least earn 1 **exp** for the job you performed the task with, as there's always something to be gleaned from your mistakes.
 - All of these *secondary consequences* cost 1 success each, and may be interpreted literally or metaphorically:
 - "I am not abashed or injured..."
 - "My actions were performed with grace or efficiency..."
 - "No one I care for is compromised, disturbed, or jeopardized..."
 - "Nothing else is unintentionally lost or destroyed..."
 - And each of these *tertiary consequences* also cost 1 success each, but they must either appended onto another consequence for them to make sense, or they should be appended to the main failure condition as a silver lining if you did not buy the primary consequence:
 - "...and / but I seek an additional prize..." (a material asset)
 - "...and / but I learned something new or interesting..." (a bonus **exp**)
 - "...and / but my true intentions are now revealed..." (earn a Lot back)
 - "...and / but something unexpected but not unwelcome happens..." (decided by your Peers)
 - The choice of how to spend these successes is entirely yours, though your allies may want to advise you:

- Or they may have even *made a demand* of you before offering their help, so now it's up to you whether you uphold your end of the bargain.
 - Still, even if you are not able afford the price of success you can probably still get *something* out of the task.
6. Finally, once all successes are spent, the FC may subvert a *secondary consequence* that you did not choose and invoke it's opposite against you.
- For example, if you did not buy "I am not abashed or injured..." then the FC may interpret and subvert this and say "Your actions bring shame to your family name..." or "You are harmed because of this..."
 - The FC does not *have* to invoke this last step, and should only do it if it *makes sense* within the context of the scene, but it means that it's almost impossible to complete a task scot free when they do.

Personalized Consequences

As they are bought, you or your FC can interpret the consequences and offer bespoke descriptions fill in the elipses '...' with — or may take suggestions from the other Peers when struggling to think of anything apt — adding to the scene with each success, as you go. These descriptions should always be based on the context of the action and the drama itself, and always at least tangentially relevant to your original agenda.

And certain attributes may offer you special secondary consequences when you perform certain tasks that are more specific or rigidly defined; but these are quite rare, and should be written somewhere on your character sheet to avoid extra lookup time.

Learning on the Job

While performing a task, if you do not seem to have an appropriate job (see above), then your Peers will decide for you which job is appropriate and you must start learning the ropes:

1. Add the job to your sheet at level 0; this indicates that you are still learning the job.
2. Instead of using the level to determine how many dice you roll, use the ability score that the FC chose for your given agenda.
3. Then use the job like any other with the following exceptions:
 - You cannot offer aid with a level 0 job.
 - The FC gets to add the fact that you're learning the ropes as a relative difficulty factor.
 - So the base threshold is effectively 2, but the maximum threshold is still 5.
 - After performing a task — regardless of success or failure — mark an **exp**.
 - This is *in addition* to usual **exp** you'd get from failing to buy the primary consequence, or the bonus **exp** you may buy with successes as a tertiary consequence, so it can take 6-16 tasks in total to learn a new job.
 - *Unless* the job has specific qualifications to be learned: Then you cannot mark *any* **exp** until those conditions get met, which can potentially keep you at level zero indefinitely.
4. Once you have filled the bar with a total of 16 **exp**, then you can finally clean the slate, and the job advances to a level equal to the *lowest* of the two ability scores that it inherits.

Only players can perform Tasks

Because of both the time and emotional investments required of performing tasks, we almost never care about seeing non-player characters performing them. Instead, NPCs can perform checks but even then *this is rare*. Generally the scene should be re-framed so that a player leads the roll and the NPC helps or hinders them. So when fighting, for example: you would perform Finesse checks to hit your enemies, and Swiftess checks to dodge or parry.

KISSing dice

- When performing a task you may 'KISS' any dice that disappoint you using kismet, insight, stunts, and specialties:
 - **Kismet** — Spending your meta-currencies, Lots and Ego:
 - 'Kismet' is a Turkish word derived from the Arabic 'qisma', meaning one's share in destiny.
 - Each Lot can KISS a die with no questions asked and no need to consult your Peers.
 - You have up to 10 Lots, at any given time.
 - You can earn one back during play by spending a success to reveal your true intentions, or during the debrief at the end of each chapter for portraying your character well or accurately playing into your asethetic attributes.
 - If you earn more than 10 Lots in a single session then the excess is converted to **exp** for any jobs of your choice.

- Ego is special and can either be spent to KISS *all* the dice that disappoint you, with no questions asked; or it can be used to make all 6s rolled *get a second success*, including those rolled after being KISSed.
 - Ego is something that you either have or you don't, at any given time.
 - It is earned during play by introducing your own scenes, or during the debrief by upholding your principles.
- **Insight** — Using special knowledge, secrets, or established facts:
 - This may be things that you've discovered through play, or may draw on wisdom that your character should already know anyway.
 - Or it could be new information that you or someone else has pre-established with a Wits or Resolve check before the task.
 - Either way, your Peers must approve that the insight is relevant to your current task and agenda, and each separate insight may KISS a die.
- **Stunts** — Describing your actions with extra flair or roleplaying diligently:
 - When describing or roleplaying a stunt, you may add to the drama of the scene or raise the stakes, but always try to frame it in a way that still leaves the window open for failure.
 - The dice won't decide if what you described really happens, but rather how the world reacts to what you've done.
 - Thus, the stunt doesn't need Peer approval, but you can only KISS a single die per task with it.
 - Though each ally that is aiding you may separately perform a stunt themselves to KISS and reroll their own die.
 - However, the FC may veto a stunt before you roll if it is *too far-fetched* or simply doesn't make sense.
- **Specialties** — Pointing to attributes that would help you:
 - Up to four appropriate attributes — most commonly assets, disciplines, and natural merits — can each KISS a die.
 - But each needs approval by your Peers.
- Each die can only be KISSed once per task, and you should try to do all your KISSing in one go.
 - Once you have chosen which dice to KISS, pick them up and reroll them.
 - Count any new successes using the same criteria as before; based on the ability caliber of your own and any ally's dice.
 - Then spend those successes as described above (in step 5).

Note: The phrase 'dice that disappoint you' is meant to refer to any dice you rolled that did not get a success. But if you are perhaps relying on getting 6s and spending Ego, or you have magic or advanced technology that causes the dice to explode, then even a 5 may 'disappoint you'. However, if you KISS any dice that had already struck a success and then they do not get again on the re-roll, you must keep the worse result. Such is fate.

Tables and Statistics

Bronze % Chance of getting...

Dice	1 Success	2 Successes	3 Successes	4 Successes	5 Successes	6 Successes	7 Successes	8 Successes	Avg. Successes	± <i>Sigma</i>
1D	33.33								0.3	0.47
2D	55.6	11.112							0.7	0.69
3D	70.3	25.93	3.704						1.0	0.82
4D	80.2	40.74	11.112	1.234					1.3	0.94
5D	87	53.9	20.98	4.527	0.411				1.7	1.08
6D	91	64.9	31.96	10.014	1.783	0.137			2.0	1.15
7D	94	73.7	42.94	17.33	4.527	0.686	0.046		2.3	1.25
8D	96	80.5	53.2	25.86	8.794	1.966	0.259	0.015	2.7	1.35