Tasks

Tasks are more complicated than Checks. They are a measure of your training and expertise, and can be used to achieve multiple things at a time, or many things sequentially: After some initial discussion and rolling dice, you then get the opportunity to show off and re-roll some dice using a special mechanic called 'KISSing'.

Tasks can be broken into 3 phases: the set-up, the rolls, and the outcomes.

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1. The Set-up

This is the discussion phase, where you must state your agenda and describe how you want to achieve it in game. Then your Peers talk with you about how that agenda translates into objectives (to spend successes on), what the consequences of failure will be, the difficulty of the Task, and how many dice you'll roll.

Objectives

Objectives (sometimes called 'obs') are a distillation of your agenda into loose verbal list of things you want to achieve. *They are the 'what's and 'when's*, not the 'how's and 'why's. For a standard Task, **each objective will cost one success to complete**.

Therefore, **the number of objectives you try to accomplish per Task depends on how confident you feel**, the number of dice you expect to roll, and the nature of your agenda. Your FC may decide that something you want has to be broken into two or more objectives[1], each costing a success, and then you might not feel so bold.

Difficulty and Consequences

Difficulty represents the obstacles that the character must overcome to get a shot at their agenda, and consequences represent what will happen if they fail.

These topics are explained briefly below, but there is more advice for Facilitators on *how* to make decisions about the difficulty and consequences in the Determining Difficulties and Consequences article.

There are *two kinds of difficulty* that can affect Tasks, called '**absolute difficulty**' and '**relative factors**'.

Absolute Difficulty

Absolute difficulty works like it does for Checks, where the roll is said to either be *'standard'* or *'challenging'*. **A challenging roll requires two successes per objective**, whereas *normally you'd only need one*. Therefore, declaring a roll as challenging *effectively doubles* the difficulty.

If one of your objectives is challenging, then they're *all* challenging. *There's no in-between*. So you may want to redact an objective once you learn how it affects the difficulty.

Important: Each job in the jobs list comes with some example objectives and their absolute difficulty, to offer some guidance to the players.

Relative Factors

By assessing the current situation and how it reacts to your stated actions, or based on what you're attempting and how, your FC may declare *any number of relative factors* from a big list[2].

Some *examples* from the generic list include:

- "An opponent is mighty, cunning, or ominous...
- "An opponent's size disadvantages you...
- "The consequences of a previous failure now rear their head...
- "The environmental conditions do not favor you...
- "You're in uncharted territory or an unfamiliar situation...
- "You are being actively hindered by someone...
- "You're injured, abashed, hungry, drugged, or tired...

Each difficulty factor removes a die from your main pool *before you roll*.

Arbitrary Difficulty Factors

Additionally, if the FC wants to make this more difficult, for whatever reason, but *can't point to a specific factor* then they can spend a Lot to subtract another die.

Consequences

Should your character fail in their Task, by not meeting a single objective, then you — the player — deserve to know what's in store for them. We sometimes call this the 'stakes', because **Agora** **is ultimately about making narrative gambles**.

So as a player, invested in your character, you should always get to know what you stand to lose; what the (approximate) chances of success are; and even be offered the opportunity to back down or change your agenda.

That is: **You only commit to the consequences when you roll the dice.**

The *consequences should always be proportional to the agenda*.

> Injury or death should never be on the table, for example, unless you're doing something that could put your life in danger or unless the action is more hazardous than it seems (from your character's point of view).

Gathering Dice

Pick up dice equal to the 'level' of an appropriate job, and bonus dice from any other sources of advantage (usually from using an asset or a gambit). **Then subtract any difficulty factors** discussed above. This is called your 'main pool'. These dice *take on the rank* of the ability or capability your FC chose for the Task, for the purpose of counting successes.

Your main pool's minimum size is equal to your current Health.

Using Help

If you were offered help: The helping die typically uses a different rank from the main pool and **isn't affected by the difficulty**, so should be *rolled separately* (or rolled with a different colored die).

2. The Rolls

Roll all your remaining dice and **count successes** for each face that lands on a number **equal to or greater than** your rank

No dice? No roll

If you're gravely wounded and the difficulty factors have knocked you down to zero dice and you haven't received any help, then you will *automatically fail*.

KISSing dice to re-roll them

If the initial roll represents your raw talent or natural intuitions, then so-called 'KISSes' represent techniques and skills *that you only use if you need to*, or the spending of cosmic favors for another shot at success.

KISSing has it's own article of advice for players to browse — which makes up the majority of this phase — but the short version is that 'KISS' is a double-acronym that *simultaneously* stands for '**Kismet, Insight, Stunts, and Specialties**' as well as '**Keep It Short and Sweet**'.

- Mechanically, **each KISS lets you re-roll a die and count more successes** to potentially achieve another objective.
- Narratively, *each KISS adds to the drama by raising the stakes, revealing new information, or letting you show off*.

You must accept the results once the dice have been KISSed, even if they're no better than the initial roll.

3. The Outcomes

Once the rolling is finished and you have counted up all your successes you should have a pretty good idea of what's coming: Either you've completely failed, gotten everything you wanted, or are about to get *something in-between*.

You spend successes to accomplish objectives, so if you have fewer successes than you wanted then you'll need to make some final decisions about *'what's most important to you?'*.

The 'spending process' in this final phase of the Task should be fairly implicit. The FC may ask you to describe what the outcome of the Task looks or sounds like, and you can say which things you want to happen.

Then your turn concludes, but *the consequences of your actions may haunt you for many more turns to come*, and the game continues on as the dice are let to lay where they fell.

Earning 'exp'

In addition to anything else you might get from a roll, **you may add one experience point to the job you used on a Task** (ie. $exp : \diamondsuit \rightarrow \blacklozenge$), *regardless of success or failure*.

Other avenues for earning 'exp' are provided in the jobs article.

Making Compromises

Tasks are designed this way to make *partial failures* and *compromised successes* the most common result of play. *It turns every important roll in the game into a narrative bargaining process*.

The odds are generally stacked against you in this game — at rank 4, each die still only has a 50% chance of success, and dice pool sizes are kept deliberately small — meaning that mixed success is the most likely outcome.

There's almost always *something* that bites you in the end, and getting away with a Task scot-free is supposed to be a rare and celebrated event.

Another way of thinking about it, since Checks are so 'easy' by comparison, is to think of Checks as being success-oriented and Tasks as being more failure-oriented. They are two styles of play that interweave over the course of a session, creating a tapestry of results over a whole campaign.

Opposed Tasks

The Player Characters may sometimes find themselves at odds with one another — either by getting argumentative or by literally fighting, or competing in some other way — and will begin to take sides. At some point this will come to a head, and the FC should declare that a roll needs to happen to settle the matter.

Assuming that the opposition is complex enough to warrant a Task roll, and can't simply be resolved with a Versus Check, then you must decide if the Task is **symmetrically opposed** or **asymmetrically opposed**.

Forming Sides

If two or more characters already agree or want to work together to achieve the same objective against the others, then one player should lead the roll and the rest should help.

Symmetrical Opposition

This is where each sides of the conflict have basically *equal but opposite* agendas; where victory for one side means a total loss for all the others. A so-called zero-sum game. Each party simultaneously takes actions to get what they want while also trying to prevent their opponents from getting the same.

> **Examples:** Two characters are fighting and they each want to subdue or injure the other. Or racing to see who will finish first. Or each is trying to persuade a neutral third party of something with arguments for and against the other positions.

Start by working out what the opposed agendas are, and which difficulty factors apply to each side. *The set-up and rolling phases are largely the same as a normal Task*, except that you go through it with all rolling parties at once. Each side may have different 'side-objectives' but still have an opposing 'main-objective'.

Important: If the roll is considered 'challenging' for one party, then it's challenging for all parties.

When you get to KISSing be careful to **declare all KISSes on all sides *before re-rolling***, so that no-one gains special knowledge about the other's fate before committing to the roll.

Finally, for the outcome phase: The side with the lowest roll goes first, deciding where they want to spend their successes; effectively 'bidding' on their different objectives[3]. Then the next lowest goes, and so on, up to the best roller, until everyone has spent their successes.

To win the main-objective you must be the highest bidder by at least one success, *or two successes higher if it's challenging*, otherwise the roll is considered a tie.

Breaking ties: Win–Win or Lose–Lose

If the final bids on the main-objective are equally matched, then you must *decide as Peers* what kind of outcome makes the most sense: Either the tied opponents all get what they want, at the expense of each other; or no one really gets what they wanted, a compromise is found, and the opportunity to try again is removed.

> **Re-Examples:** The two characters fighting both subdue and injure each other at the same time. The racing characters finish simultaneously, and are awarded a joint prize. The third party in the

> argument decides to weigh each position equally and find the middle ground.

Using opposed Tasks to resolve in-game character conflicts can be incredibly useful and satisfying, especially for group decision-making: It forces the players to really formulate their arguments *in character*, giving them a fair chance to voice their opinions in a structured manner where everyone can respect the final result.

It might seem strange at first, but it can speed up play to just roll dice over a disagreement, accept the results, and move on; instead of arguing out of game for hours and getting nowhere.

Out of game conflicts still need to resolved in an *out of game manner* though, by talking as Peers, usually in between sessions or in a development session.

Asymmetrical Opposition

This is where one side wants something, and another side wants to stop them but doesn't want to achieve anything for themselves in return. One party is a clear aggressor, and the other is a clear defender.

> **Examples:** Two characters are fighting, but one is trying to hurt the other and the other is just trying to dodge and parry. Or one character is trying to persuade the other of something, but the other isn't trying to persuade them of the opposite case.

Defender's Advantage

In this instance, the opposed Task works almost identically to a normal Task, except **the defending side's players take the helm from the FC to decide the difficulty and the consequences for the aggressor**.

They can even spend Lots to count arbitrary difficulty factors against the other side, or spend Ego to force the Task to be challenging.

The purpose of this is to **let the defending player set the conditions to which they would accept defeat**, and committing to the result.

This may seem unreasonable at first blush, but it's basically a consent mechanic: Once the opposing side has heard the conditions, they may backs down, and if they do then the game moves on without a roll; but if they accept the challenge, then it goes to a roll and all parties can agree to the outcome.

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1. Facilitators should be careful not to 'double-dip' when splitting up a players objectives and counting difficulty factors. It should only really be done when it's clear that one objective is conditional upon another objective being completed first.
2. A more experienced FC may begin to set more arbitrary factors once their Peers trust them. New players of this game should try to get a feel for the *approximately equal weight* of each factor first, before making up new ones.
3. Though this bid doesn't work like in a conventional auction (where only the winner is the one who spends); the action of bidding means spending your successes. And if the roll is challenging then each bid costs two successes.