



GM ADVICE #2

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What is this?

GM ADVICE #2 explores combat in *KULT: Divinity Lost*, offering guidance on how to understand and apply the rules from a gamemaster perspective.



Characters, locations and incidents are portrayed from the metaphorical viewpoint of the *KULT: Divinity Lost* setting.



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DISCLAIMER

This article is not intended to be a thorough guide on maneuvering violent conflicts. It is only advice from one GM to others and builds on the Conflicts chapter (KDL, page 154).

dynamic conflicts

KULT: Divinity Lost is played through a conversation — a back and forth between gamemaster and players where conflicts are brought up and solved constantly, leading the protagonists down a path of horror and mystery. Naturally, it can become confusing and even daunting to remain in control of everything once combat begins, for the Conversation naturally quickens as blows are exchanged and people realize they are in a world of hurt. For some of us that grew up playing traditional rulesets, it can be hard to keep track of everything when there are no extra rules for conflicts, such as Initiative, Turn Order, Action Economy, etcetera. These have been replaced by quick judgment calls, understanding of how to pace the scene, and other subtle techniques that you may have picked up from other games or not. Here are some tips on how to handle combat in PbtA that allowed me as a gamemaster to better understand these concepts, old and new. These are by no means the be-all-end-all techniques, and ultimately it is up to you to twist and bend them in such a way that best suits your style.

Simplify the Conversation

It can be overwhelming to manage everything that could happen in a combat encounter, know which Moves are triggered (Basic Moves, Soft and Hard GM Moves, Advantages that give Edges, Harm Moves, Custom Moves, ...), manage **Wounds** and collateral damage, who does what, in what order, etc. To circumvent this, we have to go back to the roots of PbtA and approach some of its structure in a simplified way.

GM MOVES

At the core of the Conversation, everything you do as a GM is a GM Move. When the spotlight shifts to you and you describe something, roleplay an NPC, or whatever else, you're making a Move. This is true even if you don't have a name for which Move you are triggering, so there is no need to memorize the entire GM Moves List or have it by your side unless you want to be inspired during the game session. Instead, focus on how Soft or Hard a given Move is. The main difference being how much problem you inject into the scene.

If you are to analyze the usage of GM Moves, you will come to notice that Hard Moves are usually full stops in the Conversation — something happens and there is nothing that the player can do about it. They shut down questions and deliver

impactful consequences. Imagine them as a harsh reframe of the Conversation: "You receive a **Wound**", "you're lost", "you're dead".

On the other hand, Soft Moves are the proverbial "no, and", "yes, and", "no, but" and "yes, but". They present an opportunity that can be seized, a challenge that can be overcome, or a consequence that can be avoided.

For example, announcing the hitman is about to shoot a character creates a challenge where players assume they can either evade it or protect themselves in some way, allowing breathable room for a player character to trigger a Move and possibly avoid being hurt altogether. In contrast, announcing that the hitman fires the gun hitting the protagonist twice creates a whole other challenge, violently reframing the Conversation. The first is a Soft Move. The second is a Hard Move. Note that you don't have to either name the Moves as Soft or Hard, nor that you're making a Move at all.

To go a step further, the consequences of rolling **10-14** and **-9** written in each Move are nothing short of GM Moves, too. For example, "You're subjected to a counterattack" from **Engage in Combat** is the same as **Exchange Harm for Harm** (KDL, page 150) and quite possibly **Deal Damage** (KDL, page 151) as well. The difference is, again, that one is an avoidable Soft Move that triggers **Endure Injury**, and the other is an unavoidable Hard Move forcing the player to mark a **Wound**.

This logic also applies to Threat Moves from creatures, artifacts, groups and organizations, Inferno, Limbo, etcetera. If a PC successfully harms a Threat and is subjected to a counterattack, the GM may activate one of its Moves that have its own set of consequences, such as demanding the PC to immediately **Avoid Harm**.

Know What You Want

From novels to games, writers and directors have goals for each scene that is played out. Before combat begins, make a quick judgment call and come up with a statement that best captures your intentions; "I want my PCs to witness that this antagonist is immortal", "I want someone to die", "I want them to understand that it takes more than violence to solve this problem", "I want them to lose the macguffin."

This goal is not written in stone, so vague statements open to interpretation and modification work best. That is because it could be that every triggered Move results in **15+**. Or that everyone rolls **-9** again and again until they're all dead. Playing to find out is just that, watching the story unfold firsthand alongside your players. As a rule of thumb, if your intentions for the scene require that player characters either fail or succeed at a specific task, it is not good enough. Of course each scene is a monster in its own, so there may be a lot of exceptions to this rule. Tackle them thoughtfully and be open to changes.

PACING THE CONFLICT

It doesn't have to be hard, fast, and chaotic all the time. When a PC is seriously injured, time may slow to a crawl as life flashes before her eyes. Remember that you are the final arbiter when it comes to pacing the conflict. The result of a Move merely creates a sense of urgency in Players that

may or may not be followed in-fiction. If you want to keep the scene tense, don't allow much room for players to think about the consequences of their actions. If you want players to be tactical and careful, let them ponder on the thousand horrific futures looming on the horizon and dwell on each possibility. Each approach favors a different kind of story and explores different sides of violent scenes. With clever usage of Soft and Hard Moves, you're able to either create, continue, or terminate challenges. **Zooming in and out** (KDL, 154) allows you to both roleplay a series of events spanning large intervals of time and focus on actions second by second. Use these techniques to stick to the interesting parts of conflicts and skip the boring dramaless bits.

REFRAME THE CONVERSATION

Players may lose sight of consequences and established fictional positioning. While it can be fun to see the ramifications of this, no one likes to feel as if they're being cheated on. When players forget an important piece of information that is reasonable their PCs wouldn't, be sure to remind them of it. If you notice this is the case, weave the information back into the narrative as a thundering realization, tell them that it feels like their brains wanted them to forget it, or use other means to heighten the tension and insinuate the supernatural (KDL, page 146) without punishing them for not remembering everything.

This is especially important in combat. There will be times that nuance is fundamental to the atmosphere you want to explore, but when establishing an important truth about a Threat, avoid being ambiguous. Again, use the narrative to deliver the blow as hard as you can to make it a point. Remain true to the information the PCs are able to acquire and avoid implications to favor honesty. Examples:

- ◆ "That's it! You're done! You've killed it! The house is burning, the creature is locked inside, and you're out alive." The GM then allows the players to rejoice in victory before continuing with "But wait!! There is a silhouette inside the fire. All mangled and crooked, it walks with a limp towards you. The creature... It is alive again. Fire isn't enough to kill it! What do you do?" [Note: The GM knows fire isn't enough to kill the creature but doesn't tell the players right away. Instead, she waits for an appropriate moment to better deliver the blow, and shows in fiction that flames alone won't suffice.]
- ◆ "You exhaust two entire 9mm clips against the creature and so far it seems like raining lead has no effect other than slowing it down. What do you do?" [Note: Succeeding at **Engage in Combat** once is enough for the GM to Make A Threat Move and showcase that bullets won't hurt the creature. Because it is new information, the PC deals some damage, but from this point on, bullets will deal no more **Harm**.]
- ◆ "His hands repeatedly crush your head like falling cement blocks. You are so hurt there is no longer pain, only the numbing call of the void. The only way to get an advantage against him is to have a weapon, but you do have an opening to punch him in the throat. What do you do?" [Note: The GM states clearly

that as long as the PC is unarmed, this is a losing battle. However, she decides to tempt the PC to continue this to double down on the "call of the void" aspect as some sort of subconscious deathwish. Essentially, **Give the Possible Consequences and Ask** and **Offer an Opportunity, With or Without Price** rolled into a single Soft Move.]

More than that, the combat ends when it ends. Don't force yourself to power through a series of rolls under the belief that challenge arises when Moves are triggered left and right. Some conflicts can (and often will) be one-and-done while still being hard on the PCs. Drama and excitement blossom when players have to make hard choices at every turn of the Conversation. Should they reload or fight barehanded? Hide or protect someone else? What if they die on a bill they don't really believe in? Is the bloodshed worth it? Whenever you need to inject drama into the conflict, reframe the conversation by asking players difficult questions. Make them choose between the lesser of two evils, offer bittersweet bargains, create and destroy opportunities at each moment.

Diversify the Conversation

When first getting into contact with the ruleset, one might believe violence must be restricted to triggering **Engage in Combat**, **Avoid Harm**, **Endure Injury**, and **Act Under Pressure**. While it is not wrong to do so, these Moves cover only one side of the conflict — aggressive ducking, desperate gunshots, horrific stabbings, and all the other terrible perils of dining in hell.

Some groups, however, want personal horror to be the foremost important aspect of the game. It matters more if PCs are able to pull the trigger than how much damage they deal before dying. Sometimes they realize they cannot fight to death and surrender. Other times, the violence is so insanely difficult to process, they glimpse True Reality. Keep in mind the intentions behind the PC's actions and think about which Moves might apply. Sometimes you will be able to stray away from the usual quartet of violence to focus on other aspects of the conflict.

GIVE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES AND ASK

The GM simply informs the player of what consequences their character's actions are likely to have, giving the player an opportunity to change their mind. This ensures there's no miscommunication and the player is fully aware of the situation before committing, or allows the player to double-down on a risky course of action.

OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY, WITH OR WITHOUT A PRICE

The GM describes an opportunity, as well as the potential obstacles or dangers associated with the opportunity, and then provides the PC a choice of whether to accept it or not.

Referenced from KULT: Divinity Lost Corebook, page 152.

MOVES DURING COMBAT

Engage In Combat is triggered when the PC fights an able opponent that is willing to fight back or employ defensive tactics. Point-blank shooting someone, attacking from the shadows, and otherwise having a clear shot that potentially neutralizes the Threat hardly ever configures as engaging in combat — instead, try other Moves that, if failed, prompt the PC to **Engage In Combat**. This Move can be used when Zooming Out to portray an entire combat as well.

Avoid Harm is triggered when the PC uses their spotlight to duck, dodge, parry, or dive out of harm's way. The most common bargain when rolling **10-14** is to exchange something in order to emerge unharmed. It can be a weapon, the macguffin, depleting or losing armor, exhausting possible covers, etcetera. Threats that are relentless, trained to fight, or visibly more dangerous than the average human flailing arms, might completely block the option to **Avoid Harm**. When it is not

reasonable that the Threat would miss their attacks, go straight to **Endure Injury** as seen in **Exchange Harm for Harm**.

Endure Injury is triggered whenever the PC suffers **Harm**, with the exception being when the GM deals a **Serious** or **Critical Wound** as a part of Hard Move. Same as **Avoid Harm**, the common bargain when rolling **10-14** is to sacrifice something to stay unharmed, be it a tactical advantage or object.

Keep It Together is triggered when something in the scene prompts the PC to do something else other than what they initially wanted, and they choose to fight this urge. For example, they have to avoid being paralyzed by fear, gather courage to pull the trigger or go back to the scene, fight their inner demons, remain in control of their thoughts, etcetera. **10-14** allows the PC to follow through with their actions mostly blinded by a condition (in a fit of rage, crying and screaming, desperate, distracted, ...). If you don't want to be harsh about the consequences of a **-9**, just make it less crippling. They may suffer emotional trauma because they are unable to stop attacking, freeze for a moment before being prompted back into combat, and other effects of being a witness to violence.

Act Under Pressure is the catch all Move that is used to connect minor actions — reloads, tackles, drawing a weapon, and other assorted actions that create openings — with precision and grace when they are of utmost importance.

Influence Other is triggered in those moments that opposing sides decide to either give their dying speech, surrender, pick at each other, plead for mercy, or else. Rarely ever does someone fight to death, and should a PC decide to cry their heart out and make promises in exchange for remaining alive, this Move is triggered.

See Through the Illusion is often abandoned during conflicts even though part of the trigger is "When you suffer shock, injuries, ...". Witnessing extreme violence, being badly hurt, suffering emotional trauma, and inflicting terrible harm, surely are fast ways to pierce the veil and see the world for what it is. These visions don't have to be drastic, nor make sense at the moment. PCs may see their terrifying divine self, glimpse the real face of a Threat, call forth another Threat enticed by the violence and trauma, be shifted in Time & Space, end up in another "world" such as Inferno, or whatever other fantastical twist you want to use.

Helping or Hindering is a Move of shared spotlight and works wonders when well placed. It benefits conflicts with multiple characters as long as you have established challenges and clear possible consequences

Read A Person is triggered when the PC takes the opportunity to quickly analyze the Threat to better decide what to do. Again, this is another Move that may naturally trigger when opposing sides catch a break and to speak up their minds. If you are to bend rules a little, PCs with high **Intuition** and low **Violence** may have a chance at fighting back if they act on the answers from: "What are you about to do?", "What do you wish I would do?", and "How could I get you to [...]?"

Observe A Situation is triggered when PCs stop and look around, breathing in their surroundings to assess the possible outcomes of certain actions.

My House Rule

My personal approach to **Endure Injury** is making it the only passive Move along with **See Through the Illusion**, meaning that the PC doesn't have to actively do something to trigger it. Know that this goes well against the original rules, but serves me nicely when keeping scenes "realistic". This also balances out the fact PCs with high **Reflexes** and **Fortitude** have double the chance to emerge unharmed from an attack by succeeding at either **Avoid Harm** or the following **Endure Injury**.

The way I do it is **Endure Injury** is immediately triggered whenever the PC suffers Harm. In this case, the Move only informs the group if there will be mechanical feedback from what just happened (receiving a **Serious** or **Critical Wound** and having **-1 Ongoing** due to being injured) or not. When a **15+** is rolled, the character doesn't receive the **Wound** although they have been hit and must deal with the consequences.

They will remain suffering if they don't do anything about it. This allows me to later subject them to a Soft or Hard Move — a Soft Move would be announcing they are dying and remind them they can still do something about the injury, or maybe even asking for another **Endure Injury** to continue riding the pain. A Hard Move might be finally dealing a **Serious** or **Critical Wound**, having them fall unconscious, or even die.

This approach might seriously bother a player that invested in high **Fortitude** because of its **15+** benefits, so it is wise to discuss beforehand if you plan to use this approach. In case you want to stay true to the core ruleset, be ready to improvise means that justify the PC sustaining Harm when rolling **15+**. Some examples based on what I have done before include Armor/clothing softening the blow, an unimportant object was hit instead, and grazing shot wounds.

Naturally, rolling -9 immediately exposes them to an attack, have them miss a clear opportunity, or whatever new challenge you want them to face.

Investigate is the one and only Move that requires careful examination of something to wield any meaningful results. However, should a character have a near-death experience that shifts them to somewhere else in Time & Space, you can give them more time to work this out and get back to reality fast enough to see who dies at the end of the battle. You are free to mess with Time on such occasions, zoom in and out, and let them investigate a way to get out of a Purgatory, Dreamscape, or wherever else their soul happened to be trapped in.

CONFLICT FLOW

These are the three steps I follow when it comes to combat. First, I stop and set the challenge by establishing a clear threat. Second, I work the spotlight by asking what PCs are doing, and focusing on those characters that have the most relevant actions. Third, I decide if these actions trigger a Move and either weave the results into the narrative or escalate/terminate the threat. If the combat doesn't finish by the end of the third step, I repeat the cycle.

This loop requires players to take on a reactive role in the Conversation, deciding whether or not to tackle the challenge that is presented, and how to go about it.

Set the Challenge

Think of "challenges" as "**Beats**" — a brief moment in the Conversation when action halts so the risks can be better framed. Just like a movie, the focus shifts to the single most dangerous immediate threat, allowing both gamemaster and players to highlight key actions (and reactions) that will change the scene.

Beats are not hard stops in the Conversation, so unless combat is over, avoid implications and ambiguous statements. Instead, clearly set a problem that demands action, or give your players an opportunity to continue the conflict from a different angle. If your players feel they have little options to work with, remind them they are free to choose whether or not to tackle a given challenge/opportunity. **Give the Possible Consequences and Ask** whenever you are unsure they fully understand what is going on, when they ask for clarification, or they ignore the threat altogether.

It is important to avoid postponing the effects of immediate threats. For example, if you have stated that the monster will attack them if they don't do anything about it, follow through

with the monster's action unless they actively seek to stop it — in this case, **Engage in Combat** is a viable option when fighting back, **Act Under Pressure** and **Avoid Harm** work well if the PC wants to flee the scene or dodge the incoming attacks, and **Endure Injury** or making the **Deal Damage** GM Move if there's no opposition to the monster.

This keeps you from repeating the same Beat over and over, endlessly waiting for someone to respond to it. Let players and their characters shape the scene, but don't let their avoidance be an excuse to not act on behalf of your Threats.

Beats that offer opportunities and consequences heighten the drama as players are forced to choose. Double down when it's a golden opportunity that doesn't happen twice in a physical conflict, or make it appear again later in the scene during worse situations at much greater costs.

Avoid making Basic Moves or Advantages the centerpiece of a Beat. Focus on openings that player characters may act on, opportunities they can seize, and weaknesses that can be exploited. "You have to roll for **Engage in Combat**" isn't a

Beat. It merely is one of the possible responses to a proposed challenge. The same goes every Move your players can trigger. Let their actions dictate the direction of the combat and if any Moves are triggered, not the other way around. This is the core principle of PbtA; to do something, you do something. First, they have to describe the PC attacking, ducking, unloading the shotgun against the Threat, and preparing to be beaten up as a result. Then, if applicable and necessary, they trigger a Move. As a rule of thumb, remember that if your Beat doesn't end with "What do you do?", there is no challenge to be tackled. Reword or rethink it to remain in control of the Conversation and keep the players in a reactive role. Here are some examples:

- ◆ "After the exchange of quick and powerful blows, you notice the man reaching for something hidden in his back. You suddenly realize he's probably drawing a weapon. What do you do?" Here the GM establishes the man is armed and will most likely threaten harm beyond a few punches. The player has the opportunity to try and stop him from drawing the gun, running and hiding, etcetera. Should the player ignore the man grabbing a weapon, a new Beat might be that he will try to fire his weapon against the PC, causing terrible **Harm** and possibly even killing her.
- ◆ "You are now laying flat on your back, gutted and bleeding profusely. The creature laughs believing that you've already lost this battle, not realizing you are dangerously close to the loaded revolver she fought so hard for you to lose. You have an opening to pick up the weapon and keep fighting. The creature is distracted. What do you do?" Again, the GM establishes a clear problem and an opportunity; the PC will probably die here, but she also may keep fighting,



now armed. This is a tricky moment, for it depends on the player's wits to realize this may be a bait. However, it is possible that she may attempt to flee. All ideas are welcome, and depending on the direction the player steers to, different Moves apply.

- ◆ "As you stumble and fall holding onto your assailant, you feel a sudden heat expanding over your body. This is blood, but not yours. You land on top of her, and as she rolls her eyes, you notice that a shard of glass pierced her belly. She is weakened, vulnerable, lost. What do you do?" If the result of a Move is **15+**, the scene may be played out in such a way that the PC ends up in an advantageous position. Here, there is no established threat, but a clear opportunity for the PC to take advantage of. Straight murder doesn't have to trigger any Moves, but as the final nail on the coffin, it might trigger **See Through the Illusion** when the character revels in savagery, or **Keep It Together** to define the emotional scars that this killing will leave. Both are good ways to finish the combat and drive the scene back to an intimate personal horror atmosphere.
- ◆ "The abomination violently flails sharp daggers against its surroundings, shredding everything in its path. You are out of sight, but it has detected one downed ally of yours, and rapidly spins towards him. You're free to flee the battle, but your ally is weakened and cannot defend himself. What do you do?" This is a no-brainer for most groups, as players will often act on the urge of going back into battle to help their fallen allies, even when they may suffer greatly for it. These types of Beats help highlight the importance of sticking together, sacrificing your wellbeing for your friends, or even shed a light on the egotistical Deceiver character that puts himself over anyone.

AMBUSHES

Traditionally, the modus operandi is to ask for a perception check or similar "saving throws". In **KULT: Divinity Lost**, you should think of how they apply in this cycle. As a Soft Move, you can **Put Someone in a Bad Spot** (KDL, page 150) while still allowing them to react — usually by fighting back and triggering **Engage in Combat**. If it is reasonable that the PCs wouldn't be able to defend themselves, you can make a Hard Move such as **Capture Someone** (KDL, page 150) if it's a kidnapping, or even **Deal Damage** (KDL, page 151) if the first attacks are unavoidable.

Work the Spotlight

After establishing a new challenge, address everyone at the table and ask what they will do about it. After everyone describes their actions, pick the one that better suits the situation and focus on it. If two or more players are doing the same thing, someone has to take the spotlight. When they are unable to choose by themselves, it is the gamemaster's job to pick someone to be the driving force — the rest will **Help or Hinder**. Before the secondary players roll to **Help or Hinder**, **Give the Possible Consequences and Ask**. Remember they are making a Move too, and failing to help the spotlighted PC might not only raise the danger, but also create a whole new challenge. If applicable, Harm Moves may affect more than one person.

Once you decide to focus on someone, don't forget others may be taking actions as well. If someone decides to run, let them

run. You can focus on them later by coming up with challenges that entice them to go back or act as obstacles on their way out.

During play, both gamemaster and players have to decide who acts, when, how, and what are the consequences. When a player character is "under the spotlight", it means the group is focusing on that PC's actions and responses to the problems at hand. Ideally, the same amount of airtime is divided between all player characters, but just like in a tv series, this varies according to the challenges presented by the gamemaster.

At times it might seem that combat-focused PCs will dominate the spotlight and rob others of their own airtime. This doesn't have to be true. When presenting a challenge, everyone has an equal opportunity to do something, meaning it is a matter of focusing on the right PC at the right time. Sometimes, it is better to focus on someone that doesn't know how to fight. Other times, it is better to see a good fighter in action. Giving airtime to everyone ensures the combat scene is not only dynamic, but diversified in its approach. Not everyone will want to attack, hide, flee, shoot, overcome their fears, see through the illusion, etcetera.

However, unlike "combat rounds" commonly seen in traditional games, there is no guarantee that everyone involved in a conflict will act or trigger a Move before the group moves on to the next challenge. To counterbalance this, it is your job as a gamemaster to ensure that regardless of that, by the end of the combat everyone will have had a chance to shape its outcome. Even those that have not made a single Move.

Having a visual track record of how many times each player shaped the action sequence helps when choosing who gets airtime. If you notice someone has been under the spotlight four times while there are player characters that have barely come close to it, shift the attention to the PC that has had less input. Do this until everyone is at a more even level of activity. Seek to lift up the silent players at the same rate you reward proactivity.

WATCH OUT FOR INTENT

The same set of actions can trigger different Moves. This is precisely why you have to ask for the player's intent. Give The Possible Consequences and work well with the openings they offer. For example, imagine a scene where a creature is leaping towards the PC who has to pick up a shotgun or find other means of protection. You ask the infamous "What do you do?" and the response is "Fearing for my life, shaking and crying, I dive for the shotgun!". There are a bunch of ways this can go down; can they grab it in time? Can they line up the shot? Would the creature be able to dodge? Can they think straight enough to nail this? These and more questions might bog down the gameplay as you think about the next Move. Don't answer them alone. Ask the player the intentions behind the PC's actions and make a quick judgment call. Examples of how this could go down:

- ◆ **Intention:** "I just want to pick the gun." The PC avoids the immediate danger (being attacked). The creature's leaps are fast and deadly, there is no time to catch the gun before it reaches the PC. You give them the possible consequences (being attacked while diving for the weapon) and the player decides to follow through, immediately triggering **Endure Injury**. Failing may lead the PC to triggering

See Through the Illusion as the claws rip him apart, or force her to **Act Under Pressure** to continue fighting gracefully — the pressure being the shock of suffering a vicious attack.

- ◆ Intention: "I want to dodge the attacks." To have the weapon the PC has to first dodge one of the leaps, thus triggering **Avoid Harm**. A bad result may lead to failure when trying to grab the weapon — **Put Someone In A Bad Spot** — PC is unarmed and defenseless, but still has to either **Act Under Pressure** or **Engage in Combat**.
- ◆ Intention: "I want to avoid panicking." Overwhelmed with fear, the PC has to **Keep It Together** to snap out of it and think clearly. Should they fail and suffer emotional trauma, **See Through the Illusion** is inevitably triggered.
- ◆ Intention: "I want to keep fighting." Diving for the weapon and firing it triggers **Engage in Combat**, with every possible outcome being covered by the Basic Move alone.
- ◆ Intention: "I want to have a fair fight." Successfully grabbing the weapon requires the PC to **Act Under Pressure**. Regardless of success, the creature will leap forward and force the PC to either **Engage in Combat** or **Avoid Harm**. Shooting the creature opens up more room to inflict great **Harm** and possibly creates an opening to flee as the creature is dazed by pain.
- ◆ Intention: "I want to threaten the creature away with the weapon." Emotional intelligence demands a lot of mental energy when you are in the middle of a battle. As the creature leaps forward, the PC dives and grabs the shotgun. When the PC turns to the monster, she notices the creature is too damn close. She may try to **Keep It Together** to avoid wasting precious bullets in a jerk reaction out of fear. **Influence Other** also applies, since the PC is now in a position of power.

Stakes should be adjusted according to the PC's intentions. If the focus is not panicking, then subjecting the PC to an attack might not be the best route. In this case, what you would do instead is explore the emotional aspect of the conflict.

Remember, too, that some simple actions are just that. Simple actions. Unless a failed or messy reload will seriously hinder the PC, there is no need to demand a Move to do so. The same applies to PCs whose route of actions might happen unchallenged or don't exactly affect the scene in any meaningful way — like running, scanning the surroundings, shouting an order, eyeing another PC, or whatever else they come up with. However, some Beats require immediate action. Under relentless assault, even the most basic actions might hinder the PC when fighting back. Always **Give the Possible Consequences and Ask** when this is the case.



NO-TRIGGER REACTIONS

Daredevil (KDL, page 108), **Officer** (KDL, page 118), and many other Advantages allow PCs to react to Beats and GM Moves without triggering any Basic Moves. If that's the case, you usually count the Edge as rolling **15+** on a Move, act on it, and keep the scene flowing. Rolling up to three Edges to spend during the scene is both awesome and demanding at the same time. Don't deprive your players from using their Advantages, but diversify the challenges enough that using them is but one way to solve a given problem.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN PLAYER CHARACTERS

These types of conflict can be confusing, feel unfair, and reveal grander problems in a group's dynamic. *GM Advice #1* sheds a light on this topic from an off-game standpoint. Before switching to a different dynamic, you should first try the six different approaches on page 159 of the core rulebook.

Another way to handle these types of conflicts is to stick to this cycle, with the key difference that you may allow players to help you set the challenges according to the results of their Moves, and shift the spotlight to the player responding to it.

The one thing you should keep in mind is that Moves require commitment. Spotlighting, too. Everyone should respect the spotlighted PC's actions, and should they succeed glamorously, it is everyone's job to commit to it. Remember your players that everyone has equal agency over the story, and sometimes being on the losing side is important to telling a fun tale.

Work the Outcomes

Once you have highlighted the important actions, continue to control the pacing of the encounter by describing how the scene changes and a new immediate threat emerges. This requires you to weave Moves, Edges and Holds into the narrative, explore the ramifications of failing to **Help or Hinder**, and seek new opportunities to set new Beats that shift the group's attention to another PC.

Unless combat is over, this will inevitably send you back to the first step where you have to set a new challenge. It is important to not lose sight of the main requirement of a Beat; not having hard stops. This remains true even when a **15+** is rolled and is time for PCs to revel in timely victory. If that's the case, remember that the world doesn't stop because a Move was successful.

Whenever damage is dealt to a Threat, it triggers a Harm Move. Knowing that in certain situations Harm Moves might be too hard on PCs, you might want to avoid triggering it. If that's the case, you have several options to give your players in the form of opportunities with or without a price. Openings to completely

disarm an opponent, finish the job with one last bullet, flee the scene, retrieve a weapon, help an ally, dominate the enemy with **Influence Other**, have enough time to **Observe a Situation**, finally **Keep it Together**, stabilize a **Wound**, etcetera.

As expected, the **-9** consequences of Basic Moves are similar to Hard Moves, but that doesn't mean that you have to completely shut down your players. Remember that you can **Turn Their Move Against Them** (KDL, page 153). This works particularly well in combat to demonstrate that the PC has lost sight of certain details. They dive for the shotgun, but it is emptied or jammed. They attack the creature and deal partial **Harm**, but the creature's Harm Move completely changes the combat in a way they have not expected... And so on.

IMPROVISING

Following the core Moves' instructions ensures that you remain in-theme with KULT: Divinity Lost and there are Moves for every type of action, but know that it is okay to divert from the rules sometimes. Especially if you don't want to stop the game to bend over the corebook and entertain rules lawyering, as it can suck the soul out of a good scene and completely kill the hype. When that happens, fall back to the core principles of PbtA and ask for an attribute roll that best suits the situation. A **15+** always changes the situation for the better. **10-14** can be a success followed by a Soft(er) Move or the other way around. Rolling **-9** is the same, but the GM Moves are harder and success is not guaranteed, comes at a great price, or is detrimental.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is no perfect technique that will suit each and every group. It all depends on your (and your players') pains and needs. Each gamemaster has their own mileage, storytelling style, preferred group dynamics, etcetera. Some groups like to be handheld and railroaded, some groups prefer loose GM-less sessions.

To level up the playing field, here are some questions to keep in the back of your mind while preparing yourself to apply the tips found in this booklet:

- ◆ What themes and atmosphere do I want to explore in my games? How does that translate to violent conflicts?
- ◆ Does my group enjoy improvising? Do I enjoy improvising?
- ◆ Are we playing to find out?
- ◆ What is more important when it comes to violence; having a balanced encounter or Threats free to exercise their full power regardless of consequences?
- ◆ What do I want to highlight during violent scenes?
- ◆ Is PC death an option? Is this something I want to handle in my games?
- ◆ Who are my player characters? Are they capable and willing to be cruel?

- ◆ How much does the advice I'm reading fit what I want out of my games? Does it seem like it will better the experience or worsen it?

I hope this helps you in knowing how can you take what I'm writing and twist it into something usable and fun for you and your group. As for tips, keep the best and ditch the rest.

Additional Resources

[When in Combat, Don't Just Hurt Them](#) An article about combat in KULT: Divinity Lost.

[Alternate Wound Penalties Chart](#) Another way to handle Wounds in combat.

[Refuse Dearb](#) Homebrew of what happens when PCs don't want to die.

[GM Hyperfocus - Car Chases](#) How to handle highoctane car chase sequences.

[Gabe's Deep Dive](#) A beginner friend introduction to The Conversation.

[What To Roll When Attacked in KULT: Divinity Lost](#) Another player's answer about a combating.

[A Rant About the Free-Form Nature of PbtA](#) An articule about PbtA and its base ideas.

[A 16 HP Dragon](#) Perhaps the most famous representation of how to work with GM Moves and Fictional Positioning.

[The Dungeon World Guide](#) A free resource to Dungeon World that explains the Conversation and GM Moves, as well as combat.

[How To Play KULT: Divinity Lost - CONFLICTS](#) A video introduction to combat by TTRP Theater.

Good luck,
Gabe the Herald

