

Mutagen Meta Playbook

This playbook, one of several in *your* playbook, defines the concepts used in a game we're all playing together—you, your GM, any other players at the table (virtual or otherwise), and me.

The goal of this game is to improvise a story to engage, entertain, and excite everyone at the table. There's no other way to win, and the only way to lose is for someone to stop having fun.

Everyone uses the rules in their playbooks to push the story forward. We use rules so that we can introduce meaningful limitations, flaws, risk, tension, and surprise while maintaining consensus. Other than that, we're all just bullshitting to have fun.

Fiction first - This game is designed to tell an interesting story, not simulate an outcome. The rules are infinitely looser than most RPGs, with "holes" you could drive a starship through.

Moves - A move is an action you take to solve some problem you have in the story. The problem might be something obvious and external, like a sliding avalanche. Or it might only be a problem for you, like your hand not containing a fireball when you'd like it to.

Some moves are very broad and open-ended, while some are very narrow and specific. Some might resolve in nearly an instant, while some might take a long time. Some are always (potentially) active, some you can make whenever you want, and some have specific trigger conditions. Often you must spend a resource to make a move.

Most moves describe an in-game effect, but meta moves relate to some aspect of the game itself. This is a meta move.

Make a move - You make a move any time you say you do something described by a move. You then resolve the outcome using the rules for that move.

If there's no move that at least kinda describes what you're doing, or there is but you haven't got it, you can't do that thing. Limitations define us.

If the move's description says that some conditions have to be true to make the move, but those conditions aren't true (and you can't make them

true), you can't make the move. Same if it says there's a cost that you can't or won't pay.

Chaining moves - Sometimes a move (parent) says that it applies when you're making a different move (child) or that you should make another move (child) as a part of this one. Unless otherwise stated, you're first making the parent and then the child move. All rules for the child move apply normally, unless the parent move says differently.

Respect our limits - This game is for everyone at the table. If somebody needs to *state a limit*, immediately cut away or fade to black from whatever is upsetting them. Talk as a table about how to continue the story while embracing the limit.

State a limit - This is a game to have fun. If some theme, activity, or imagery of the story is ruining your fun, speak up. You don't have to explain why, you only have to indicate what.

Think for the camera - This game works better when we think like we're directing a tv series more than writing a novel. Focus on what we can perceive with our (supernatural?) senses here in the moment.

Invent fiction - This game shines when you speak up to refine, improve, or augment the scenario. It needs to make sense, and the GM has final veto, but the only firm rule is: don't contradict anything already established. **Use this to set up a move or just to make shit cooler.**

Ex. *They're wearing my favorite designer. My fur is saturated violet. Lucky I've always got my boot knife. Maybe the roof collapsed in one corner. It's a huge gun, just a fucking giant revolver with shells like Vienna sausages. Surely there's a forklift in this warehouse.*

Be curious, not cautious - This game is more fun when we play to find out what happens than when we play to keep your character content. Stories about people who never take risks, never get hurt, who never fail leave fewer memories than stories about a hot fucking mess.

Don't sweat the meta - In this game, it's okay for you to know things that you don't know, and to act on that knowledge when it would make shit cooler.

Likewise, don't talk around what you're doing. Be plain so that everybody at the table can understand the badass shit you're up to.

Dispute fiction - Sometimes the GM will say something they think is cool, but that just ruins the story for you. You're trying to *be curious, not cautious* but whatever the GM said just seems to cheapen the whole damn thing for you. Speak up and negotiate an alternative.

This isn't the same as *resist consequences*. Don't use this to gain an in-game advantage. Use this when something happens that would make you turn off a show you were watching.

Labeled items - Items are often grouped into labeled sections. Instead of a specific item, a move may mention a section label instead. This refers to any or all items found in a section with that label—or any subsection of it.

Bought and free items - Some items have an empty ○; these items must be purchased during character creation or with XP during play. When you buy a ○, fill it in. Items with a pre-filled ● are free if your playbook contains them.

Items prefixed with △ are yours only if your playbook, a move, or the GM says you get them. They cannot be bought otherwise.

Items with neither △, ○, nor ● are automatically in play if your playbook contains them.

Gated moves - Some moves have a number in parenthesis after the name. In order to buy such a move, you must already have at least that number of moves from the same section of your playbook.

Dice - Every roll in this game uses 2d6.

Rolling - A move may say you roll to find out what happens. For most moves, you'll add a base modifier—often an ability. A move or the GM may also tell you that there are penalties or bonuses to the roll. Sum your base modifier and all the pluses and minuses into a total modifier, and cap that at ±3. Roll the dice and add your total modifier.

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Dice results - When you roll the dice plus a capped modifier, you'll get a number in the range 2-15. That range is broken down into result ranges, which moves will describe different effects for.

Range	Result Name	Result Icon
12-15	Critical Success	☐☐☐
10-11	Full Success	☐☐
7-9	Qualified Success	☐☐
2-6	Failure	☐☐

The icons are shorthand for the result. The pips are just a mnemonic for the lowest number in the result's range.

Clocks - Clocks are an abstract representation of progress, rising tension, or sustained activity. A clock has a title and some number of ticks between 1 and 8, both decided by the GM. When the last tick is filled, whatever the title says happens.

Ticks on a clock don't represent some fixed amount of time—even on the same clock, but definitely not between clocks. Don't think of clocks as timers, but instead like a download bar. The same size bar on your screen might represent a little download that finishes in seconds, or a huge download that takes hours. Likewise, it doesn't always fill at the same rate. But it still gives a pretty good idea of how much is done and how much is left to do.

Tick a clock - Tick a clock when a move or the GM says to.

Resources - A resource is some tracked asset or quality of your character—something they have or something they are, rather than something they do.

Some are just notes you keep, but most resources are tracked with points. Each point of a particular resource is represented with a ☐. Some resources come in ranks of advancement, permitting you to hold more points.

When you restore or gain a resource, fill a ☐. You cannot have more of a resource than you have ☐ for that item. If all your ☐ are full when you're supposed to gain the resource, just don't fill anything.

When you spend or lose a resource, erase a filled ☐. If you don't have any filled ☐, you cannot spend the

resource, so you cannot make moves that require you do so. If you don't have any filled ☐, and a move's effect tells you to lose a resource, just don't erase anything—any other effects or consequences of the move still happen as normal, though.

When do you lose what you spend? - Unless stated otherwise and regardless of where the cost appears in the move's description, you lose a move's cost(s) immediately before you roll or determine results. If there's no roll, the loss just happens before the effect takes place.

Abilities - Abilities describe proficiency well beyond the expectations on a random human being. They might be skills you've developed to professional or exceptional levels, or they might be truly extraordinary or supernatural techniques.

In short, while moves say what your goal is to solve a problem, abilities describe *how* you achieve that goal.

When you first get an ability, it starts at +0—even this gives you almost a 60% chance of success. Each additional ○ you buy gives you another +1 to your modifier.

If you haven't bought an ability, but use a move that says to roll with it anyway, roll with -1.

Some abilities have more than 3 ○ available. Buying extra ○ lets you soak up penalties to rolls, but doesn't let you exceed the maximum modifier.

Status - A status is a short, descriptive phrase describing a condition or state that is true; potentially about you, anybody else, or even an item or place. When a move or the GM says you or something of yours gets a status, write it down. As long as it's written down, no aspect of the fiction can violate its truth.

You can have an unlimited number of statuses. Likewise, they are not restricted to a predefined list. Write your active and permanent statuses down in a notebook.

Remove a status - You can erase a status when a move or the GM says you can, or when it no longer makes sense for it to be true.

Exploit status - When you make a move, you can describe how you're capitalizing on a status currently in play to add +1 on your move. You can only exploit one status in a move.

Low/Zero effect - When you're describing a move you want to make, the GM might sometimes speak up and tell you that you're going to have Low or maybe Zero Effect. This isn't about whether or not you can do what you're describing, it's an indication that even if everything does go according to plan, there's some reason it won't do what you're hoping. Go ahead anyway, or make a different move.

Harm - Harm is abstract damage inflicted on an animate creature or inanimate object. A single injury can do 1-3 harm.

The scale is calibrated roughly to the human body. 1 harm causes a serious injury. 2 harm causes a life-threatening injury. 3 harm will kill most any vanilla human instantly.

When applied to inanimate objects, just gauge whether the object would be damaged or broken based on common sense. Fragile items probably break after 1 harm, but 3 harm will just bounce off a battleship's armor.

Basic Moves - Basic moves share a common formula. Any move listed in your playbook under a Basic Moves heading uses this formula.

When you make a basic move, state your goal and describe how you're achieving it. Based on the narrative and your description, the GM will tell you any bonuses or penalties to the roll. You can decide whether you want to go for it or amend your plan.

If your description or a move has you making the move using any **ability** you've got, roll with that. Otherwise roll with **-1**.

☐☐☐ You succeed stunningly and gain some additional benefit that the GM will decide.

☐☐ You succeed as you've described.

☐☐ You succeed but there's some trade-off, consequence, or complication that the GM will decide.

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☐☐ Something didn't go right. It might not be your fault, but you didn't achieve your goal.

Common Playbook

You're a PC. You and your comrades are literally the center of the entire narrative universe. Here are the basic tools you need to define yourself and drive the story forward.

Resources

Concept - What's your deal? Don't just put a playbook name. Put what makes you cool, special, or exciting. Stick to things we'd notice on screen. You can change or refine this as you play.

Drives - What do you want or need? What gets you out of bed to take exciting risks? Like, why even bother? You only need 1, but 2 is better for you.

1.

2.

Health - Health abstractly represents the integrity and functionality of your body, mind, and spirit. When you're weakened or injured, you *take harm*, which might cause you to lose health. When you erase your last health, *you die*.

- 1. ☐ ☐ ☐ (Human)
- △ 2. ☐ ☐ ☐ (Superhuman)
- △ 3. ☐ ☐ ☐ (Boss-tier)

Resist ☐ ☐ - When you make a roll and don't like the complications the GM describes, you can *resist consequences*.

XP ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ - XP abstractly represents your knowledge and skill acquired through painful experience. You get XP when a move says so. When you fill your last XP, erase all of them and *level up*.

Abilities

These are exciting things that many people could learn to do, although they hardly cover the true gamut of human experience. They're intentionally broad. If you want, you can informally restrict your ability—e.g. nurture only with feng shui, fight only with your elbows, and operate only sailing ships.

○ **Operation** ○ ○ ○ - You're running, piloting, or commanding subtle or intricate mechanisms to reap maximum performance.

○ **Administration** ○ ○ ○ - You're wrangling and managing minutiae—nothing slips through the cracks.

○ **Nurturing** ○ ○ ○ - You're providing just the right encouragement, support, safety, or kick in the ass.

○ **Fighting** ○ ○ ○ - You're inflicting and evading purposeful violence with efficiency or brutality.

○ **Athletics** ○ ○ ○ - You're pushing yourself to the human limit as you exert your body.

○ **Research** ○ ○ ○ - You're discovering, examining, and analyzing knowledge that others would overlook.

○ **Engineering** ○ ○ ○ - You're applying knowledge and artifice to synthesize astonishing techniques and artifacts.

○ **Mating** ○ ○ ○ - You're enticing or negotiating romantic and domestic relationships with apparent joy and aplomb. The physical act is only part of the equation.

○ **Shady Shit** ○ ○ ○ - You're practicing the secret tricks of the trade for those who lurk beyond the edge of polite society.

○ **Spooky Shit** ○ ○ ○ - You're interacting with the weird, esoteric, and uncanny on its own terms—or at least you think you are.

Basic Moves

These are things most folks could potentially do to solve an exciting problem. People do these kinds of things all over the planet without needing any special powers, but PCs often use superhuman abilities to do them.

● **Fuck 'em up** - You inflict violence on someone or something animate so that they'll *take harm*.

● **Compel compliance** - You force or coerce someone or something to do what you want, but they shouldn't *take harm*.

● **Go apeshit** - You disrupt, break, trash, or ruin something inanimate.

● **Make it chooch** - You make a broken, unreliable, complicated, or unfamiliar artifact do something useful—potentially even what it was meant to do.

● **Get out the way** - You dodge, evade, or flee an attack or mishap.

● **Parkour!** - You overcome terrain that is challenging and dangerous in its own right—the “terrain” need not be concrete.

● **Medic!** - You attend someone's injuries or illness.

● **Scope the scene** - You survey, observe, and intuit to see what's up.

● **Connect the dots** - You put together the big picture based on clues or incomplete details.



● **Schmooze 'em** - You build rapport or trust with someone.



● **Fool 'em** - You deceive or misdirect someone.

● **Go dark** - You take action where the biggest risk is the consequence of discovery, detection, or suspicion.

Common Playbook

Special Moves


● **Resist consequences** - You don't like the consequences or complications the GM decided when you rolled a  or : speak up and **spend 1 Resist** to insist they invent something less drastic instead. This isn't the same as *dispute fiction*; resist consequences whenever you think it's advantageous in-game.

Earn Resist - Gain 1 Resist when you creatively *invent fiction* to set up a move where you then roll a  or .

Take harm - When you take harm blahblah.

You die - You've lost your last health or a move says you die. You can go sweetly into the night and build a new character to love. Or...

You're out of the scene for now, but you somehow survived. You come back later with 1 health and a permanent, severe status of the GM's choice. Explain what happened to the group.

Level up - Spend 6 XP. Fill 1  to buy a resource, ability, or move in your playbook. You must fulfill all other criteria to buy the item.


Earn XP - When you finish a play session, it's time to decide what XP you've earned. Talk as a group about this: maybe they remember something you forgot. Ultimately, though, it's up to you.

You get 1 XP for each item below that you (not the GM) think is true for this play session. You can only take each item once, even if you did the thing multiple times in the session.

- at no point did *you die*.
- you made a particularly badass move that reinforced your Concept.
- you suffered a particularly painful (or hilarious) blunder as a result of playing to your Concept.
- you made moves to pursue a Drive.

● **Lead the group** - Spend 1 Resist. You lead others in a *basic move* where you'll succeed or fail as a

group. You roll the **move as normal** and everyone canonically shares your result.

If you succeed, before you proceed with the story, everyone else rolls the same *basic move*. They are free to describe their actions individually, along with what abilities they're using. Their results don't change the narrative, but if everyone rolls at least a , you restore 1 Resist.

Soma Master Playbook

You channel your magic through your body using Hong Kong action-flick martial arts.

Abilities

● **Kung Fu** ○ ○ ○ ○ - You fight and defend uncannily with empty fist and foot or with your iconic weapon—which might just be a specific body part. When you're attacking with your body, you can choose to do 1 or 2 harm; with your weapon, 1-3 harm.

Iconic weapon:

○ **Chi Control** ○ ○ ○ - You control the chi within you to affect your bodily processes and your spiritual presence.

Special Moves

○ **Eyes of the Mantis** - You simultaneously see in all directions around you, except directly behind your head. You can individually track every threat you see without moving your head or even your eyes.

○ **What wires?** - You jump really high, can kick off the scenery to go even higher, and float gracefully back to the ground.

○ **Body of Iron** - You reinforce your body with conditioning and your spirit. You permanently get rank 2 of Health.

○ **With a fucking pencil!** - You grab an object close at hand. You can use that object as if it were your iconic weapon for the purposes of a single move—after which the object is irretrievably lost or broken.

○ **Drunken Master** - Ignore any mental status while using **kung fu** to make a *basic move*.

○ **Fists of Steel** - When striking with hand or foot to make a *basic move*, your target's material or composition does not reduce your effect level.

○ **Down your pants?** - Any instant nobody's looking at you, you can either stash your iconic weapon seemingly "nowhere"; or you can retrieve the weapon you previously stashed there. You can

only stash your iconic weapon, and only if it's an inanimate object.

○ **Catch a bullet** - You *get out the way* by catching or deflecting a bullet or other projectile with your body or iconic weapon.