

# Mutagen Engine

## Meta Moves

**Moves** - Moves are things you do to establish, advance, or alter the story you're telling together. Some 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 active, 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 describe some aspect of the game itself. This is a meta move.

**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 cinematically** - 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 our characters happy. 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 doing.

**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.

**Labeled items** - Some item names are written with a colon. For example, "Thread: Conjure elements". In this case "Thread" is the label, and the item is "Conjure elements". An entire subsection of your playbook might also be labeled; this is the same as if every item in that section were individually labeled the same way.

Instead of a specific item, a move may mention a label instead. This refers to any or all item names prefixed with that label.

**Bought and free items** - Some items are presented with an empty ○ in front of them; these items must be purchased during character creation or with XP during play. Items with a filled ● are free if your playbook contains them.

Items prefixed with △ are bought 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.

**Rolling** - A move may say that you roll dice to find out what happens. You'll always roll 2d6. Depending on the move, you might add a modifier—often an ability. The GM may also tell you that there's a penalty or bonus to the roll for some fictional reason. Sum everything that applies then cap at ±3 before adding to the dice roll.

The results of a roll will be one of the following:

☰☰ 12+: Critical Success  
☰☱ 10-11: Full Success  
☰☲ 7+: Qualified Success  
☰☳ 2-6: Failure

**Clocks** - Clocks are an abstract representation of tension mounting with progress or activity over time. A clock has a title and some number of ticks between 1 and 8. When the last tick is filled, whatever the title says happens.

Usually the title says exactly what's going to happen. Even if it's a surprise, though, the title should at least be an opaque reference that folks will understand after the event occurs.

The time a clock represents is highly abstract. It might be a few seconds to blow the vault before the guards arrive. Or it might be months before you've completed your dissertation. For events truly dependent on the passive passage of time, each tick might represent a fixed interval of time.

The number of ticks in a clock typically corresponds more to the abstract steps it takes for the event to occur than any fixed amount of time. More complicated processes just naturally take longer coming to fruition.

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

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**Resources** - A resource is some tracked asset or quality referenced in certain moves. 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 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. Likewise, if you don't have any filled ☐, and a move 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 you restore or gain a resource, fill a ☐. You cannot have more of a resource than your playbook has ☐ for that item.

**Abilities** - Abilities describe proficiency well outside the expectations on a random human being. They might be skills you've developed to professional or exceptional levels, or they might be truly unique, extraordinary, or even supernatural techniques you've got. In short, while moves say what you're doing to advance the story, abilities describe *how* you make moves.

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.

**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 your *effect level* and 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 an **ability** you've got, roll with that. Otherwise roll with **-1**.

- ☐☐ You succeed stunningly and gain some additional benefit. Each basic move describes what.
- ☐☐ You succeed as you've described.
- ☐☐ You succeed but there's some trade-off, consequence, or complication that the GM will decide.
- ☐☐ Something didn't go right. It might not be your fault, but you didn't achieve your goal.

**Effect Level** - When you make a *basic move*, before you roll, the GM will tell you what level of effect you can expect to have from a Full Success. For instance, you want to *fuck 'em up* using your 9mm against a battle tank: even if you succeed in making the shot, you're probably not going to achieve much but scratch the paint. On the other hand, if you're gunner in the tank, *fuck 'em up* is gonna be a lot more effective in returning fire.

Effect levels are as follows:

- Zero - your move will have no benefit, even with a ☐☐.
- Limited - your move won't have its usual punch. You might do less harm or only partially complete your goal.
- Standard - your move will do what it says.

- Great - your move is really gonna knock 'em dead. You might do more harm or complete your goal very efficiently.

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## Playbook: Common

Available to every character.

### Resources

**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*.

### Abilities

These are things that many people could learn to do. They don't require any superhuman or supernatural rationale, just a lot of hard work and/or lucky genetics.

○ **Driving** ○ ○ ○ - You steer or pilot a vehicle or vessel with exceptional skill.

○ **Brawling** ○ ○ ○ - You inflict and bear brutal personal violence using only your own body and the environment.

○ **Fighting** ○ ○ ○ - You inflict and evade efficient battlefield violence using every advantage you can acquire. You probably need your gear.

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

○ **Research** ○ ○ ○ - You examine, cross-reference, and analyze knowledge or records.

○ **Tech** ○ ○ ○ - IT would call *you*—if they could afford your rates. Hell, NASA might call you. You might need some tools.

○ **Healing** ○ ○ ○ - You tend the sick and wounded to ease their pain and heal their injuries. You'll need some supplies.

### Basic Moves

These actions and activities come up in most any exciting narrative at some point.

**Fuck 'em up** - You're inflicting physical violence or injury on someone or something animate. You inflict harm according to the kind of weapon you're using or the logical injury your actions would inflict. If you inflict harm, naturally they *take harm*.

- 🎲🎲 Pick 1:
- you inflict 1 extra harm.
  - you pick an injury status to give them.

**Go apeshit** - You're somehow trashing something inanimate.

**Get out the way** - You're bodily evading or avoiding physical injury or attack.

**Scope the scene** - You're observing and surveying around you to find out what's up.

- 🎲🎲 Pick 1:
- gain 1 Prep on your subject.
  - increase your Effect Level.

**Connect the dots** - You're putting together an idea based on clues or incomplete details.

- 🎲🎲 Pick 1:
- gain 1 Prep on your subject.
  - increase your Effect Level.

**Parkour!** - You're moving at speed to cover treacherous or challenging terrain.

- 🎲🎲 Pick 1:
- carry +1 forward to your next move.
  - you catch people off guard.

**Schmooze 'em** - You're building rapport or trust with someone.

🎲🎲 You get an Edge on your subject.

**Fool 'em** - You're deceiving or misdirecting someone.

**Compel compliance** - You're forcing or coercing someone to do what you want them to.

### Special Moves

**Resist consequences** - Spend 1 Resist. You don't like the consequences or complications the GM decided when you rolled a 🎲🎲 or 🎲🎲: speak up and 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.

**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 learn about. 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.

## Playbook: Soma Master

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

### Abilities

● **Kung Fu** ○ ○ ○ ○ - You can 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 can 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 seemingly float through the air.

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

○ **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.

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