

# Common Playbook

You're a PC. You and your comrades are literally the center of the entire universe. These are your tools to define yourself and drive the story forward—like a character sheet and a rulebook in one.

[First time? Please read the last two pages first.]

## 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? 1 is fine, 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, you can *level up*.

## Abilities

These are exciting things that many people could learn to do, although they hardly cover the true gamut of experience. They're intentionally broad. If you want, you can informally restrict your abilities—e.g. nurture only with feng shui, research only beetles, etc.

☐ **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 scarily comfortable coordinating, applying, and resisting purposeful force or violence.

☐ **Athletics** ☐ ☐ ☐ - You're pushing yourself to the 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 novel techniques and artifacts.

☐ **Relations** ☐ ☐ ☐ - You're manipulating, negotiating, or navigating some kind of relationship with deep empathy and insight—we get it, you fuck.

☐ **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.

☐ **Learned Profession** ☐ ☐ ☐ - You're applying the guarded knowledge and skills of a specialized or privileged career. What is it?

## Story Moves

"Someone" means a person or anything animate. "Something" means anything inanimate.

● **Fuck 'em up** - You want someone to *take harm* and maybe die, so you make it happen.

● **Compel compliance** - You want someone to do your will, so you direct, entice, coerce, or force them.

● **Make it chooch** - You want a broken, unreliable, or unfamiliar mechanism or artifact to do something useful, so you roll up your sleeves and get to work.

● **Go apeshit** - You want some inanimate object to stop working or existing, so you disrupt, ruin, or destroy it.

● **Get out the way** - You don't want to *take harm*, so you dodge, evade, or flee an attack or mishap.

● **Parkour!** - You want to be some other specific place, urgently, so you traverse terrain that's challenging or dangerous in its own right—the terrain need not be concrete.

● **Medic!** - You want to stabilize or improve someone's health, so you attend to their injuries or illness.

● **Scope it out** - You want more details and information about your surroundings or their contents and inhabitants, so you survey, observe, and intuit.

● **Connect the dots** - You want to extract useful information from clues, data, or details you've got, so you apply and collate what you know.

● **Schmooze 'em** - You want to build rapport, trust, or graces with someone, so you do something you think they'll like or respect.

● **Fool 'em** - You want to control what someone believes, so you deceive or misdirect them.

● **Go dark** - You want to avoid the consequences of discovery or detection, so you take precautions or special care.

# 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** - When you fill your last XP, spend all your XP to fill one ○ in your playbook—you must fulfill all other criteria to buy the item. Instead of a ○, you could ask the GM to buy off a permanent status.

**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 *story 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 *story 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 *story move*.

○ **Fists of Steel** - When striking with hand or foot to make a *story move*, the target's material or composition can't make you get No Effect.

○ **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 can catch or deflect a bullet or other projectile with your body or iconic weapon.

# Mutagen Meta Playbook

**Fiction first** - This game is designed to tell an exciting story, not realistically simulate a scenario. If there's no rule for something, use common sense about how that works in your world. This is intentional, to give you freedom to tell a badass story. Leave the simulation to other games.

**Moves** - A move is an action you take either as a player or a character during the course of playing this game. Usually a move has an in-game effect; sometimes it has activation conditions or costs.

Meta moves, like this one, tell you about the game itself. It strains the definition, but it's organizationally convenient, so don't worry about it much.

**Make a move** - You make a move by saying you're doing something described by a move. You may be forced to make a move by its activation criteria or some other move. In any case, you then resolve the outcome for a move 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.

**Chain 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 the parent. Unless otherwise stated, you're making both moves: first the parent and then the child. Everything related to the child applies normally, unless the parent move says otherwise.

**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 at 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 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 subsection of your playbook.

**Roll** - A move may say you roll to find out what happens. For most moves, it'll say to roll with an ability. That or a different move may also tell you there are penalties or bonuses to the roll. Sum the ability and all the pluses and minuses into a total modifier, then cap it at ±3. Roll 2d6 and add your total modifier to get your result.

**Alternate abilities** - A move may say to roll a different move with a nonstandard or specific ability. Just use the weird ability, don't add it to your normal one.

**Read the dice** - When you roll, you'll get a number between (-1) and 15. That's broken down by range into different results, for which moves will describe different effects.

Range	Result Name	Result Icon
12-15	Critical Success	☰☰
10-11	Full Success	☰☲
7-9	Qualified Success	☰☱
(-1)-6	Failure	☰☶

The icons are strictly fixed shorthand for the result name. The pips shown are just a mnemonic for the low number in the result's range (on positive dice).

**(Progress) Bars** - Progress bars are an abstract representation of rising tension or sustained activity. A bar has a title and some number of ticks between 2 and 8, both decided by the GM. When the last tick is filled, whatever the title says happens.

# Mutagen Meta Playbook

**Tick a bar** – When the GM or a move says to tick a bar, fill one tick on it. If they say to tick it some number of times, fill that many ticks.

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

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

When you restore or gain a resource, fill a ☐. You cannot have more of a resource than you have ☐ for that resource. 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 can't do moves requiring you to spend that resource. On the other hand, if a move's effect tells you to lose a resource you're out of, just don't erase anything—any other effects or consequences of the move still happen as normal, though.

Unless stated otherwise, you start the game with all resources full.

**Lose what you spend** – Unless stated otherwise and regardless of where the cost appears in the move's description text, you lose a move's cost(s) immediately before you roll and determine results. If there's no roll, you just lose the resource before the effect takes place.

**Abilities** – An ability typically represents proficiency at some challenging activity. Many moves say what you can attempt, but then ask you to roll with an ability to determine how well you do.

**Ability scores** – 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 got an ability, but need to roll it anyway, roll with -1.

Some abilities have more or less ☐ available. Buying more than 4 ☐ lets you soak up penalties to rolls, but doesn't let you exceed the maximum total modifier.

**Status** – A status is a short, descriptive free-form 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 in a special section of your notes. As long as it's written down, no aspect of the fiction can violate its truth.

**Remove a status** – 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 *story move*, you can describe how you're capitalizing on a status on anything currently in play to add +1 on your move. You can only exploit one status in a move.

**Harm** – Harm is abstract traumatic damage (not necessarily physical) sustained by something living. A single injury can do 1-3 harm. Unless a move says specifically how much harm it does, just use common sense and the scale below.

The scale is calibrated roughly to the human body. A bunch of small injuries or one serious injury does 1 harm—you want a doctor. A life-threatening injury does 2 harm—you need a doctor. An injury likely to outright kill a vanilla human does 3 harm—too late for a doctor.

Inanimate objects don't take damage in these terms. If you want to advance the story by breaking something, you need to make a move that deals with inanimate objects—like *go apeshit*—even if you're using your regular asshole-shooting gun.

**Low/Zero Effect** – When you're describing how you make a *story move*, the GM might tell you that you're going to have Low/Zero Effect. This means even if you roll ☐☐ or ☐☐, you won't get (all of) what you want.

**Story moves** – Story moves decide what happens next when you act in the face of conflict, risk, or adversity to get what you want. They serve the same purpose as system rules in other games, but in a flexible way that puts the *fiction first*. They answer “okay, so what happens next?”

Most moves flatly describe something you can do, but they don't address why you're doing it, what you hope to ultimately achieve. A metaphor: you slam on the brakes while you're driving, but are you trying to avoid or to cause a collision? Another: you fence with the Duchess, but are you trying to kill or to teach her?

Each story move follows the same formula: it states what you want, and it gives a hint at how you're trying to get it. When figuring out which story move you're making, the hint about how is less important than the part about why.

There aren't many story moves; they're mostly in the Common playbook. I intend them to be fairly universal; please think metaphorically when applying them to weird situations.

**Make a story move** – When you make a *story move*, describe how you're trying to achieve your goal in-game. Be specific. Wait a sec before rolling; the GM might have something to say.

If you're making a story move as part of another move, that move might say what to roll with. Otherwise check if your description depends logically and primarily on **any ability** you've got—use common sense. If you've got something, roll with that **ability**. Finally, if you've got nothing that fits, roll with **-1**.

The GM playbook has stuff about what exactly might happen for each story move, but the results all follow this formula. Remember the icons are just shorthand.

- ☐☐ You succeed with an unexpected benefit.
- ☐☐ You succeed as you've described.
- ☐☐ You succeed but there's some trade-off, consequence, or complication.
- ☐☐ Something didn't go right. It might not be your fault, but you didn't achieve your goal.