

Common Playbook

You're a PC. This playbook has what you need to define yourself and drive the story. Look it over. The last two pages cover rules, but take a look around first.

§ Common Resources

Concept ► What's your deal? Don't just put a species and playbook name. Put what makes you cool, special, or exciting. *„Think for the camera”*. You can change or refine this as you play.

Drives ► What do you always 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.

🔦 **Profession** ► If you've got a trade or career that isn't covered by a PC playbook, put it here. This should be something many people could do in your world, but most don't know how.

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 □ □ □ □ □ □ □ ► You get XP mostly for good storytelling. When you fill your last XP, *„level up”*.

§ Common Aptitudes

These are exciting things that many could get good at. They broadly cover most things, but no list can be perfect.

○ **Expression** ○ ○ ○ ► Creating, interpreting, or performing representations of emotion or intellect.

○ **Operation** ○ ○ ○ ► Running, piloting, or commanding subtle or intricate mechanisms to reap maximum performance.

○ **Administration** ○ ○ ○ ► Wrangling and managing minutiae—nothing slips through the cracks.

○ **Nurturing** ○ ○ ○ ► Providing just the right encouragement, support, shelter, or kick in the ass.

○ **Fighting** ○ ○ ○ ► Coordinating, applying, and resisting purposeful violence or force with scary familiarity.

○ **Athletics** ○ ○ ○ ► Pushing yourself to the limit as you exert your body.

○ **Research** ○ ○ ○ ► Discovering, examining, and analyzing knowledge that others would overlook.

○ **Engineering** ○ ○ ○ ► Applying knowledge and artifice to synthesize novel techniques and artifacts.

○ **Relations** ○ ○ ○ ► Manipulating, negotiating, or navigating interpersonal relationships with deep empathy and insight—we get it, you fuck.

○ **Shady Shit** ○ ○ ○ ► Practicing the secret tricks of the trade for those who lurk beyond the edge of polite society.

○ 🔦 **Spooky Shit** ○ ○ ○ ► Interacting with the weird, esoteric, and uncanny on its own terms—or at least you think so.

○ 🔦 **Professional Skills** ○ ○ ○ ► Applying the educated, practiced, or specialized knowledge and skills of your trade or profession.

§ Story Moves

“Someone” means a person or anything animate. “Something” means anything inanimate.

Fuck ‘em up ► You want someone to get injured or 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

§ Common Moves

Resist consequences ► If you don't like the consequences or complications the GM describes when you ↘↓ on a *story move*, 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.

Buy Resist ► Any time you make a *story move* and ↗→, you can announce that you wish to convert it to ↘ and restore 1 Resist. The GM has veto, but you should suggest the complication or cost.

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. Before you continue the story, use your result from the story move below:

- ↗ You restore 1 Resist and continue the story.
- ↘ Everyone else rolls the same story move. They are free to describe their actions individually, along with what aptitudes they're exercising. Their results don't change the story, but if everyone ↗→↘, you restore 1 Resist before continuing the story.

Grit your teeth ► In order to resist or overcome some overwhelming feeling or compulsion, you summon all of your willpower and determination.

When you make this move, decide with the GM on a **discord** rating based on how much the feeling or compulsion resonates with your Concept and Drives. The scale goes from -3 for something that strongly reinforces your concepts; to 0 for something unrelated to your concepts; to +3 for something totally opposed to your concepts. **Discord**.

- ↗ You resist or overcome the feeling/compulsion, and you get 1XP.
- You resist or overcome the feeling/compulsion.
- ↘ You suppress the feeling/compulsion, but it's still there. Choose a related *status* to keep for the rest of the scene.
- ↓ You spend 1 Resist or succumb to the feeling/compulsion.

Take harm ► You take *harm* when you're injured or hurt in some way (or if a move says so). Unless a move says specifically how much harm you take, use the harm scale in the Meta playbook.

When you take harm, take these steps:

1. Make any moves you can make.
2. Make any moves you must make.
3. Decide if you have *armor* that applies.
4. If now [harm ≤ 0], this move is over. Otherwise continue.
5. Tell the GM how much harm you're taking. They'll roll some dice and say if anything changes.
6. Write down any status you may have gotten.
7. Lose 1 health for each harm.
8. If you have 0 health, *you die* and this move is over.
9. Make any moves you must make when you lose health (vs take harm).

Armor ► Armor is worn to protect you from *harm*. Armor has a rating in the range 1-3. If it would make sense for your armor to protect you from the kind of harm you're taking, reduce the harm by the armor's rating.

When determining the rating of armor, look at the harm scale and decide what severity of injury the armor would protect you from.

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.

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 or clutch *story move* that reinforced your Concept.
- You suffered a particularly painful (or hilarious) blunder as a result of playing to your Concept—this doesn't have to be a failed roll.
- You made a *story move* to pursue a Drive.
- You offer the GM honest-but-gentle constructive feedback when they do GM XP.

Level up ► When you fill your last XP, you can spend all your XP to fill a ○ in your playbook—you must fulfill all other criteria to buy the item.

☛ Instead of buying a ○, the GM might let you buy or remove a permanent *status*. You probably can't buy a △, but you could ask anyway.

Adept Playbook

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

§ Adept Aptitudes

● **Kung Fu** ○ ○ ○ ○ ► Fighting 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** ○ ○ ○ ► Manipulating the chi within you to affect your bodily processes and your spiritual presence.

§ Adept 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 Health¹.

○ **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 either stash your iconic weapon seemingly “nowhere”; or you retrieve the weapon you previously stashed. You can only stash your iconic weapon, and only if it's inanimate.

○ **Catch a bullet** ► You catch or deflect a bullet or other projectile with your body or iconic weapon. You can only deal with one projectile at a time.

Mutagen Meta Playbook

Defined and refined ► These rules define some concepts; then name, define, and use different types of them. Types with different names are different: “salty moves” aren’t “story moves”, but they’re both “moves”. No need to memorize, but try not to confuse similar names.

[Example text; just visual reference] ► „Refers” to a text block with (nearly) that heading. *Italics* is a non-meta „move”, not emphasis. Bold for **what** you roll. Math in []: get [5 × (bushes ÷ bears)] berries.

Moves ► A move is an action you can take as either a player or a character while playing this game. A move’s text describes how the move works. Usually a move has an in-game effect; sometimes it has activation conditions or costs.

Meta moves, like this one, define or explain stuff. You „make a move” like this one just by reading it.

Aptitudes ► An aptitude is a score representing affinity or proficiency at some challenging activity. „Moves” are verbs that say what you can do; aptitudes are nouns that track what you’re good at. Don’t confuse them.

Resources ► A resource is some asset or quality you have in this game. Some resources are just notes you keep, but many are tracked with points that go up and down during play. Some combine both.

Make a move ► You “make” a „move” by doing something described in a move. You may be required to make a move by its description or by some other move. If there’s no move that kinda describes what you’re doing, or there is but you don’t have it, you can’t do that thing.

If a move’s description says that some conditions apply, but those conditions aren’t met (and you can’t meet them), you can’t make the move. Same if it says there’s a cost that you can’t or won’t pay.

Move chains ► 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 parent, then 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 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 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 keep secrets out-of-character. Be open so that folks can appreciate the badass in-character secrets you’re keeping.

Dispute fiction ► Sometimes the GM will say something they think is cool, but that would make you turn off a show you were watching. You’re trying to „be curious, not cautious” but whatever the GM said just seems to ruin the whole damn thing for you. Speak up and negotiate an alternative. This is your story too.

Labeled items ► Items that are grouped together in a section might be referred to from inside a „move” by just the section name. This means any or all the items from that section and its subsections.

Bought and free items ► Some items have a ○ or △; you buy these to select or improve your moves, aptitudes, and resources.

Once bought, they mean the same. The difference is that you buy ○ at creation or with XP; but you cannot buy △ directly, only when a „move” or the GM says so.

When you buy a ○ or get a △, fill it in solid. This is typically permanent. Items with ● are “pre-bought”.

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

Aptitude Rating ► When you get an „aptitude”, 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 don’t have an aptitude, but need to „roll” it anyway, roll with **-1**.

Some aptitudes 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.

Gated moves (0) ► 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.

☛ **Consult the GM** ► Stuff with a ☛ icon may not be appropriate for your story (at this time)—or it may have special fictional restrictions or implications. Talk to the GM about taking any ☛ option. Please be cool if it’s unavailable; boundaries define stories.

(Progress) Bars ► Progress bars are a GM-managed shared „resource” abstractly representing rising tension or sustained activity. A bar has a title and some number of ticks between 2 and 8. When the last tick is filled, whatever the title says happens.

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.

Mutagen Meta Playbook

Resource points ► If applicable, each point of a particular „resource“ is tracked with a □—maybe with an individual note attached. Some resources come in ranks with ○, 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 it. 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.

Harm ► Harm is abstract systemic or 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—you want a doctor—1 harm. A life-threatening injury—you need a doctor—2 harm. An injury likely to outright kill a vanilla human—too late for a doctor—3 harm.

That’s only for living stuff: if want to “hurt” something inanimate, go apeshit on it.

Status ► A status is a short, free-form phrase describing a condition or state that is true; about you, anybody else, 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.

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 a status ► When you make a „story move“, you can describe how you’re capitalizing on a „status“ (yours or otherwise) to add +1 on your move. You can only exploit one status per move.

Read the dice ► When you roll, you’ll get a number between (-1) and 15. Results are defined not in terms of success and failure, but how your roll affects your metaphorical narrative “momentum” going forward.

Range	Result	Icon
12-15	Gain Momentum	↗
10-11	Carry Momentum	→
7-9	Lose Momentum	↘
(-1)-6	Stall Momentum	↓

Groups written together (e.g. ↗→) mean any of the results in that specific group. Read this like “gain or carry momentum”.

Roll ► Rolls are indicated by a ▣ in move text like:

- with an „aptitude“: ▣**Nurture**.
- with a number: ▣**-1** or ▣**+0**.
- with a new **custom bold term** defined earlier in that move’s text.

Roll [2d6 + **bold text**] and „read the dice“.

Unless stated otherwise, the effect of your roll is described by the next momentum icons (↗→↘↓).

Modifiers ► A move or the GM may say you get ±y on a move. Sum individual modifiers (mind the signs), then cap the total modifier at ±3. Your total roll is [regular roll + total modifier].

Alternate rolls ► If a move says “▣**something weird** for another move”, use the weird roll in the child move instead of whatever the normal roll is. Modifiers apply normally.

Low/Zero Effect ► When you’re describing how you make a „story move“, the GM might say you’ll have Low Effect or Zero Effect. This means even on ↗→, you won’t get (all of) what you want.

Author ► Mutagen RPG Engine © 2021 Aubrey R. Jones
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⚠Critical Concept⚠

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 then?”

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 to achieve, 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 method is less important than the part about your intent.

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 no other move is saying what to roll with, decide if your action description depends logically and primarily on **any appropriate „aptitude“** you’ve got. Use common sense and talk as a table.

▣**Any appropriate aptitude**; or ▣**-1** if you don’t have one that applies.

The GM playbook has stuff about what might happen for each story move, but they share this formula:

- ↗ You get what you want with an unexpected benefit.
- You get basically what you want.
- ↘ You get what you want, but there’s some trade-off, consequence, or complication.
- ↓ It might not be your fault, but you don’t get what you want—or you do get it, plus something even worse.