LUMEN

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ЩО ТАКЕ LUMEN?

LUMEN is a rules-lite system for making and playing RPGs focused on telling the stories of *powerful characters*. LUMEN was first developed for the games LIGHT and NOVA, and has been converted to this genre agnostic SRD so that you can use it to make your own games with the same system.

At its core, LUMEN is designed to tell power fantasy stories. The characters played have access to incredible powers, and use those powers relentlessly in pursuit of their objectives. It's inspiration comes from video game genres such as looter shooters *(Destiny)*, hero shooters *(Overwatch)*, and dungeon crawlers *(Diablo)*.

LUMEN is also combat focused. While it doesn't require maps or measurement, games made with this system tend to work best if they are about powerful characters fighting their way through missions.

Which leads to the third part of LUMEN. It is driven by a core gameplay loop. Characters go on adventures, missions, quests, whatever you want to call them. They return after they succeed, share a brief downtime, and then get back to work.

Most importantly, LUMEN is quick to design for, and easily modifiable. Because there are not many moving pieces, you have the ability to change things to suit your game and style.
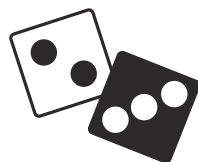
What Is This?

This is the LUMEN SRD and design guide. As an SRD, it is genre agnostic, and provides you with the core rules for a LUMEN game. It also provides guidance and advice on how to create games of your own using LUMEN, or how to make things for existing LUMEN games.

Lastly, it provides insight into some of my design decisions. That means this isn't going to be written as a straightforward SRD. My voice will be in every line. We're having a conversation about LUMEN as we read, and I can't wait to hear what you have to say.

Who Do You Need?

LUMEN games use the traditional grouping of a *Game Master (GM)* and some amount of *players*. In my experience, 3 has always been the sweet spot, but your experience will vary. The GM's role at the table is one that requires some improv skills, as the games we design with LUMEN are not prep-heavy, and the combat is more reactive than proactive on their part.

The players just need to be ready to feel badass. We'll do that with their Classes *(page 4)*.

What About Dice?

LUMEN games are designed to use *d6* dice only. This keeps things simple, and most people can grab a d6 from an old board game box in a pinch. Bringing on polyhedral sets will complicate the game, limit who has access to it, and crucially runs at odds with the core mechanic.

CORE MECHANIC

LUMEN uses **d6 dice pools**, with *ranges of success* as the core mechanic. Every class in the game has 3 Attributes, which describe how they attempt things, rather than what they are attempting. We'll discuss that more in the Classes section.

When a character is acting and there is risk to that action, they roll dice. They roll a pool of d6 equal to the Attribute that best describes how they are acting, and keep the highest result.

On a:

1-2 The action **fails** and there is a **consequence**

3-4 The action **succeeds**, but there is a **complication**

5-6 The action **succeeds** with no problems

That's it, that's how 90% of the game works. Let me show you an example.

Kate is playing as Amp, and wants to quickly leap across a catwalk unnoticed, timing it when the guards have their backs turned. It's decided the action is using *Flow*. She has a 3 for Flow, and so rolls *3d6*, keeping the highest result.

| 2 | 1 | 4 |

Kate gets a 4: a *success* with a *consequence*. The GM describes Kate's Frame landing on the catwalk, and then noticing the guards are changing shifts. The heavy boots of approaching soldiers echo off the walls!

While a d6 dice pool is not revolutionary in any way, the important thing is that those dice are linked to the 3 Attributes. Let's talk about those.

ATTRIBUTES

L U M E N games do not have skill lists. The characters are highly qualified and capable badasses. They might be *immortal guardians* defending the galaxy, *super heroes* with incredible powers, or *veteran dungeon delvers* once more going into the dark depths below. We assume they can do pretty much anything.

If they can do anything, then how do we decide what to roll? It doesn't matter what they are doing, but how they are doing it. Each character has **3 Attributes**, and their score in those Attributes describes how they like to do things.

◇ One attribute represents **powerful** actions. Feats of strength, sweeping actions, emotional situations. When things are intense and big, this is the one for you.

◇ Another represents **speedy and quickness**. Reacting at the right time, coming up with the right idea at the right time, seizing an opportunity. Think fast, act faster.

◇ Lastly one attribute represents **practiced** actions. Patient, methodical, even surgical in the approach. Expertise and the right action for exactly the right situation.

These attributes should be named in such a way that they reflect the themes of your game.

In LIGHT, the attributes are named after the elements of Light the Beacons wield. Powerful *Pyre*, lightning quick *Volt*, and the patient void of the *Nether*.

In NOVA, the attributes represent approaches used by the exos. *Force*, *Flow*, *Focus*.

Why just three Attributes? First, to keep things fast. This is a **power fantasy**, remember, and the characters can do anything. Skill lists are...boring...for a game around those themes.

But more important, the Attributes can be used todescribe 3 different approaches to the samesituation, and work both in and out of combat.

Look at these examples of how Force, Flow, and Focus are used in NOVA.

FORCE

Non-combat: Brute-forcing a console, smashing througha door or barrier, enduring a strenuous weight.

Combat: Devastating and destructive firearms, spraying a room full of lead, smashing foes with your melee weapon.

FLOW

Non-combat: Quickly hacking a console, threading the needle, avoiding harm or detection.

Combat: Running from one foe to the next, firing on a foe before they can react, taking aim mid-flip.

FOCUS

Non-combat: Carefully unlocking a console, assessing a situation or location, knowing when to act.

Combat: Carefully aimed shots from your firearm, stabbing into a weak point, using a foe's mistakes against them.

By using the 3 Attributes, the players will think about not what they are capable of, but instead **how** they want to approach the problem. Trust me, it keeps things moving and you all get the hang of it real quick.

Oh, and if you can't figure out what Attribute fits a roll, maybe that action doesn't need a roll? *Perception checks* for example. I hate them. Maybe, maybe you could use your slow methodical Attribute for it, but do you really need to? These characters are badass, and making Perception checks is not badass.

CLASSES

The bread and butter of LUMEN games are the classes the players choose from. Classes are quick to build, and quicker for the players to understand. Remember, they only have 3 <u>Attributes</u>. We'll need a few more things to make the character complete, but we're already off to a great start.

Before talking about how to make a class, let's talk about inspiration. LUMEN games are largely inspired by video games, especially those with rosters of unique characters with small sets of powers.

Guardians in Destiny fall into three classes, with a small set of unique Light powers

Overwatch characters all want to shoot people, but have cool sets of powers that make them stand out from one another

Diablo classes customize the sets of powers they bring to the table, so that no two characters have to behave the same way.

We're going to design classes of characters that have somewhere in the space of 3-5 <u>Powers</u>, unique abilities and talents that they bring to the table. We'll talk about why it's 3-5 in a little bit.

Here is what a **character** in a LUMEN game needs:

◇ **3 Attributes:** We've already talked about these.

◇ **Health:** It's a power fantasy, so death probably *isn't* on the line, but we need to track the characters taking a beating.

◇ **Resource:** Something *spendable*, and *renewable*, that the characters will use to activate their Powers

◇ **Powers:** 3-5 unique Powers that make the class *special*. These are pretty much going to be combat focused, assuming your making a game about fighting and killing things.

You might include some other features, and we'll talk about those in a bit. Let's break down the features of a class, what they represent, and how you might use them in your LUMEN game.

Health

In the LUMEN games I've developed, final death is very *rarely* on the table. Even still, I include Health as a necessary component of LUMEN games. *Why?*

Well, *first* of all they are combat games. So if your players are dishing out pain, they will probably take some in return. You need to track that in one way or another.

Second, losing all your Health doesn't mean you're dead. Instead, some sort of penalty for *"death"* occurs, and then the character gets right back into the fight. In LIGHT, Beacons become corrupted with Darkness with each death and resurrection, which messes with how their <u>Attribute rolls</u> work.

Designing Health

LUMEN games are intended to be *quick* in combat, which means both PCs and enemies are bags of hit points. Most enemies will deal 1-2 Harm when they get the chance, and so LUMEN classes should begin with 5-10 Health, depending on how risky you want to make fights in your game.

That number also connects with your death penalty. You will need to design something to happen when a character runs out of Health. Some ideas:

Change how their Attribute rolls work (more or less dice, new dice rolled with them, etc)

Remove access to Powers

Narrative penalties or reflections of their failure (body horror games are perfect for this)

The lower the starting Health of the classes, the more likely they are to face that penalty.
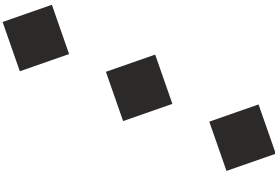
Resource

The most important part of a class is its **Powers**, the unique actions they can bring to a fight that make them special. In order to use those Powers, they must spend the **Resource.**

Energy, fuel, ammo, whatever you want to call it, the characters have a *limited* amount of it to spend during a fight. The resource is replenishable, and the PCs will recover lots of it throughout the fight *(see Combat)*, so they shouldn't feel worried about spending it.

Before we talk about Powers, we should discuss what else you can do with the Resource. At minimum, it is there to activate Powers. But, you may decide to allow the Resource to accomplish other things.

For example, in LIGHT, the resource is called Light. Beyond using Powers, Light allowed the characters to *resurrect* when they died, *reroll* Attribute rolls, and *shrug* off huge amounts of damage.

You do not need to include alternative uses for the Resource. But if you do, you will need to ensure you have tools in place for the characters to **recover** it, otherwise they will be scared to use it ever. Who among us hasn't hoarded a healing potion throughout the playthrough of a game worried you'd use it at the wrong time? Let's avoid that.

POWERS

The thing that makes LUMEN games exciting is seeing the classes use their Powers. Each class has 3-5 Powers, activated using the Resource.

Why 3-5? *Speed.* I'll say it again, LUMEN games are power fantasy games with a lot of fighting. But you know what is not fun? Combat encounters that take **hours** to complete. A fight in a LUMEN game is over in *minutes*. That's because the characters are wiping out their enemies with these Powers. And if they have just 3-5 to choose from, a player's turn takes *seconds* rather than minutes.

Analysis paralysis is a real thing. Folks get overwhelmed when they have to sift through a laundry list of spells, feats, and other features they need to keep track of. It makes it so that planning your turn can be an impossibility. Combat in LUMEN games moves fast enough that you shouldn't need to plan, you are just in the moment and raining hell down on your foes.

Ok, so what *is* a Power? A Power is something that the character activates during a fight to give them an edge. Powers usually come in two flavors:

One use powers get activated, their effect is resolved immediately, and play continues.

Ongoing powers last for some amount of time, providing bonuses, interfering with enemies, boosting allies, or any other effect you would want to stick around a bit.

Check out the example character sheets from some other LUMEN games to see what Powers might look like.

Costs

Activating Powers comes from spending the Resource. There are different approaches you can take with your design.

All Powers cost the same thing, usually 1 Resource. This is how LIGHT works, and keeps things simple. No Power feels more costly, and so all are equally exciting and enticing to use.

Powers have variable costs, so that more potent Powers cost more Resource than others. NOVA works this way, so that some Powers can be scaled up to be truly incredible compared to some others.

Using Powers

Powers may require spending the Resource to activate, but they *do not require rolls*. The core mechanic of the game does not apply to them. Once they are activated, they happen. This leans into the power fantasy element of the game.

Have you ever been a wizard in the world's *"most popular"* RPG, spent a high level spell slot, and then only rolled for your spell to do jack shit? Wow, that really sucks.

Beyond this, you need to make an important decision about using Powers, and that's related to the action economy of combat. We haven't covered that yet, so we'll come back to this question later in the doc.

Here are some examples of Powers from LIGHT. All Powers in LIGHT cost the same amount of Resource *(Light)*.

Here are some examples of Powers from FRAME. These had variable costs in the Resource *(Energy)* to show that some were to be used more often than others. There is also an example of a Passive Power, an optional feature added to classes in FRAME. Lastly, each Power has specific advances that make them more powerful as the characters advanced.

Fire Forge: Hurl 3 hammers, wreathed in flame. Deal 2 Harm each, leaving pools of fire in their wake.
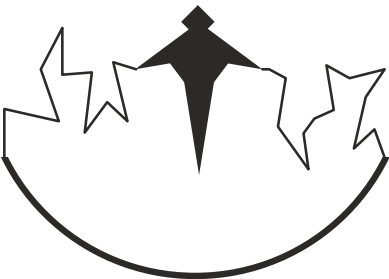
Charger: Electricity courses through you. For your next 3 attacks, you run at lightning speed and double all Harm done at melee range.

Bubble: A barrier with 10 Health surrounds you and all nearby allies. Attacks cannot go through the barrier, in either direction.

Gravity Bomb: Hurl a massive ball of nether energy. Deal 5 Harm to target and 1 Harm to everyone nearby.

Solar Well: You and all nearby allies recover all Harm. Allies recover 1 Light.

Arc Storm: Cast chain lightning from your hands, dealing 1 Harm to a number of targets equal to your total Light.

Sharpened (P): Increase the effect of all Slash tags +1 Harm.

Shuriken (1): Throw a shuriken that seeks out your target. The shuriken deals 1 Harm, and has the Slash tag.

◇ +1 Harm.

◇ Throw two shurikens at once, targeting two enemies.

Smoke Screen (1): Throw a smoke bomb at your feet, stunning nearby enemies and cloaking you in invisibility until the end of your next turn.

◇ Next attack or Power you use deals +1 harm while invisible.

◇ Invisibility lasts for an extra turn.

Teleport (1): Teleport behind a Near or Close enemy, dealing your melee weapon's Harm to them.

◇ +2 Harm.

◇ Regain the Energy spent if you kill the target.

Blade Storm (X): Stand still and target X enemies with a mark of death. After choosing targets, each target is attacked by a shadow version of you, dealing 2 Harm per mark.

◇ Targets can now be marked multiple times (up to 3).

◇ You may activate Teleport immediately after, adding yourself to the assault. +2 Harm per mark if you do so.

Optional Character Features
(Passives, Melee, Other)

Attributes, Health, Resources, and 3-5 Powers covers what you need for a LUMEN game, but you may feel like you want a little more. I have found that including a couple other features that help lean into the power fantasy and make the classes special really adds to my games.

Before you go adding this, remember: speed. If you start giving each class a bunch of feats and perks on top of their Powers, it will take that much longer for them to decide what to do on their turn, and also in resolving said action. 1-2 more things is a nice sweet spot.

What else would you add? Here are some examples of things you might add:

Passive Powers/Perks: Since Powers require the Resource to be used, you might want the class to have a small bonus that is ever present in particular situations. For example, a class that deals more damage when using a particular weapon type.

Health Alternatives: Shields that absorb damage, armor that reduces it. If you really want to make sure the characters don't die easily, but don't want to give them a big pile of Health, including something that boosts up Health is a nice touch.

Genre Specific: In LIGHT, the combat is mostly resolved with guns. But sometimes you get up close and personal and need to swing a fist. So I added class specific melee abilities that were representative of the class, and allowed them to do something special when fighting up close.
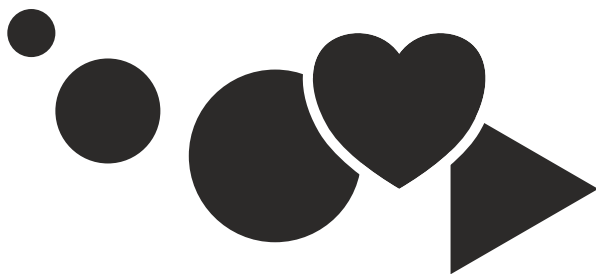
CHARACTER CREATION OPTIONS

As a system that uses classes, LUMEN games follow character creation steps that are familiar to those who have played games with classes, playbooks, or other similar features. However, you may find that you prefer an alternative method of character creation. I'm going to tell you about two ways you can design your LUMEN classes in terms of character creation.

The traditional way is for each class to be its own island. It is a **prepackaged** selection of Health, Resources, Powers, and anything else your classes need.

When a player selects that class, they know exactly what they are getting into. The Powers and other features are set, and while they may be able to be improved through character advancement, they won't change much beyond that.

This approach is how NOVA works. Each exo has a selection of Powers that predefine the class. This expedites character creation, and helps keep players focused on what their character does best. The learning curve is drastically reduced, they just need to learn their 3-5 Powers and they are good to go!

An alternative method is what I call the **ala carte** approach. In this method, players choose a class framework that provides Health and Resources, and then they choose 3-5 Powers that they want to have from a longer list.

This method definitely is a more involved character creation process, but it allows players to really craft the badass they want to be. A *superhero game* would be great for this approach. Rather than having to choose the *"Speedster"* class and having 3-5 speed related Powers, you might want 1 speed power, a little telekinesis, some super strength, and maybe cloaking technology. Boom, now you have a very unique superhero, totally different from the other players.

Neither of these methods is better than the other inherently, they should be reflective of the *themes* and *goal* of your LUMEN game. When considering which one to use, you need to also consider your work load.

Using the first method means creating a handful of very thematic classes. You may find it easy to create Powers for a themed class, or you might find it restrictive. The second method requires you to come up with a much longer list of possible Powers the players can *"shop"* from. You want to make sure they are all somewhat equally enticing, otherwise you'll see all your players choosing the same small set of Powers.

COMBAT

LUMEN games are combat focused. Be it gunfights in the wild west, slashing swords through hordes of demonic forces, or hopping in your exosuit and raining hell down on your foes, you're going to fight.

When a fight breaks out between the PCs and their enemies, it's called a **Battle.**

Tactical-Lite

Combat is meant to be *fast* and *lethal*. Players will not have long drawn-out turns, and the enemy forces will do their best to try and react to the oftentimes overwhelming power of the PCs. You don't need a map, since movement and specific distances are not measured. Instead, players will take turns snapping the camera around the battlefield as they each do something awesome.

Rounds & Turns

The progress of Battles is tracked with **Rounds** and **Turns.** During a round, each PC will get a chance to act, making up their turn, after which the GM will take their turn, ending the round. This cycle is repeated until the Battle is over, usually with the PCs standing over the corpses of their enemies.

Player Turns

PCs take one action during their turn, and can move freely. What is an action? Usually it is attacking the enemy, resolving the attack with the core mechanic based on what Attribute best describes the approach. It could be other things too. For example, trying to break open a door while your allies hold back waves of enemy forces is an action.

The one exception are the Powers. Using a Power does not use up the PCs action. So long as they have the Resource to spend, they can use their Powers alongside other attacks.

Why? Two reasons. **First, Powers do not require rolls**. Second, the Powers are the opportunity for the players to show off, and sometimes being able to string together a weapon attack alongside a Power feels very very cool.

That's the default setting for LUMEN. However, I mentioned earlier you need to make a decision about this when it comes to using Powers. You may find that allowing unrestricted use of Powers messes with the *"action economy"* of the game. It does, obviously, but that's intentional. If that doesn't fit the style you're going for, then restricting it to one Power use per turn, or even having the Powers count as actions is always an alternative you could consider.

GM Turn

The GM isn't sitting idly while the PCs take turns demolishing their enemies. Remember the core mechanic? On any roll that 1-4, there is some sort of *consequence* or *complication*. When that happens, the GM uses their enemy forces. However, we'll get to what that looks like when we talk about enemies a little later.

After every player has had their turn, the GM does two very big things.

◇ **Change the Battle** in a big way

◇ **Generate Drops**

Both of these steps are so very important to LUMEN games. The enemies are going to get their asses kicked, again and again. But they won't go down quietly. The GM Turn brings a **big change** to the battlefield. You should encourage the GM to do something big when they have this opportunity. What's a big change? Lots of options, depending on your setting:

Alarms go blaring and reinforcements are on their way

Enemy **switches their tactics**

A **new enemy type** shows up, resistant to the PCs approaches so far

The environment **changes** suddenly *(blow the airlock)*

The important thing is that the change is big, so that the PCs **have** to change their tactics. They want to feel powerful, but it gets boring if they can wipe the floor with no real opposition. Write your GM's Turn to reflect the sorts of things the GM should do to turn the PC's approach on its head.

The GM Turn also involves generating Drops. **Drops** are taken from video games, when enemies die and they conveniently leave behind little blobs of *health*, *ammo*, *energy*, whatever you might need. Enemies in LUMEN games are filled with that stuff.

At the end of the round and wrapping up the GM's Turn, the GM rolls a d6 for each enemy that died and generates a **Drop** for them depending on what fits your game. Most typically this is Health and the Resource, usually with a 50/50 split on the likelihood either is Dropped. For example, in NOVA, a roll of 1-3 creates a Health, and a 4-6 creates an Energy.

Players then quickly decide who wants what, update their sheets, and go right back to their turns demolishing the enemy forces.

What Drops you include will depend on your *setting* and what you've included. You may have a third thing that can be generated, or you may want to change the likelihood a particular thing is created. For example, if you want the players to feel really powerful, but damage is still scary, maybe make it so that Health only is created ⅓ of the time, and otherwise they are getting lots of Energy.

By combining both of these elements of the GM's Turn, you will create a game that allows the players to continuously feel badass and powerful, but in new ways that will continue to challenge them so that it doesn't become tedious.
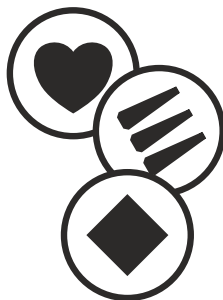
Why Rounds & Turns?

If LUMEN games are fast, why use rounds and turns at all? Why not follow the path of the more narrative RPGs and just do what makes sense based on narrative positioning?

Two reasons. *One*, I've always honestly found those systems to not be as intuitive for combat. You may love them, and more power to you. But they aren't for me if I'm running a game that is mostly focused on fighting.

Second, rounds and turns are oftentimes linked to Powers and weapons. Some Powers are effective "until your next turn" for example, and you need a way to track that. Some weapons allow you to deal *"more damage against the target until the end of the round"*. We need to track these things, so we need rounds and turns.

Range

Because movement isn't measured specifically and we don't need maps, we distill range into *abstract* distances. Every character is a relative distance from one another, and from other locations. LUMEN games usually require three abstract **ranges**:

> **Close:** In melee, or a few steps away
>
> **Near:** Across the room, a quick sprint can get there
>
> **Far:** Anything beyond that

You may want to tweak those distances and descriptions based on what makes sense for your setting.

Since movement isn't measured specifically, these ranges can be a helpful way to determine how far a character can move. Typically, rules in LUMEN games allow a character to move from one range band to the next.

For example, your enemy is at Near distance right now, but you want to close the gap and stab them. Moving from Near to Close is totally reasonable for most characters. Linking movement to range like this is especially important in games where positioning is important. But if your characters are flying through the air, or incredibly nimble, you might not want to couple the two.

FAR

CLOSE

NEAR
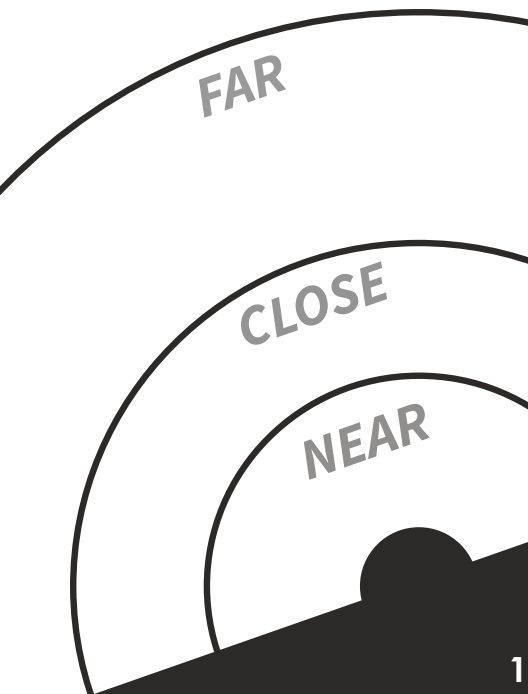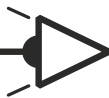
Harm & Death

When characters in LUMEN games attack each other, they deal **Harm**. Harm is measured as *flat numbers*, not variably. That means an attack deals *2 Harm* for example, not *1d6 Harm*. You always know what you are capable of.

Harm is taken away from the character's <u>Health</u>. When an enemy character reaches 0 Health, they are **dead**, and generate that drop during the GM's Turn. When PCs hit 0 Health, you have to consider what the *"death"* penalty is going to be in your game. As I mentioned earlier, in some of my LUMEN games it means the *corruption* of the characters, or *losing access* to certain Powers until the mission's end.

Final death for PCs is not the default setting in LUMEN, unless you really want it to be.

Making Combat Your Own

What I've described is the most typical way LUMEN games run combat, but hopefully you see places where you can make changes to fit your game. As a quick rundown, consider these things:

Action Economy: What counts as an action?

Powers: What are the limitations to using them in combat?

Range & Movement: Are the three bands enough? Is movement free or defined?

Drops: What do you need, and how often should it generate?

ENEMIES

The PCs need something to kill, and those are the enemies. Enemies in LUMEN are represented with reduced statblocks, and require three things:

◇ **Health:** Tracked the same way as PC Health

◇ **Harm:** Damage the enemy can do to the PCs

◇ **Moves:** 3 actions, reactions, tactics, and more than reflect the enemy

Here is an example enemy from LIGHT:

Loyal foot soldiers.

They obey commands, but look for opportunities to ascend.

Health: 2

Harm: 1 Harm, Close/Mid

Moves:

Duck behind cover for a moment

Summon an arcane turret

Obey commands

Health

Not much to say here, enemies have Health just like the PCs. There are really only two big things to consider when designing enemies in terms of Health.

First, don't give them a lot of it. Combat in which two sides are just hitting each again and again and again and again is boring. What makes an enemy interesting isn't how much damage they can take, but what they do with the short life that they have. Want a recommendation? Don't go over 10.

Second, you might have other features in your game that supplement Health. I mentioned using things like **shields** or **armor** earlier, and so enemies could have access to these as well. If you're going to give enemies three different stats to track, you're going to slow down combat. So be selective in giving enemies access to this stuff.
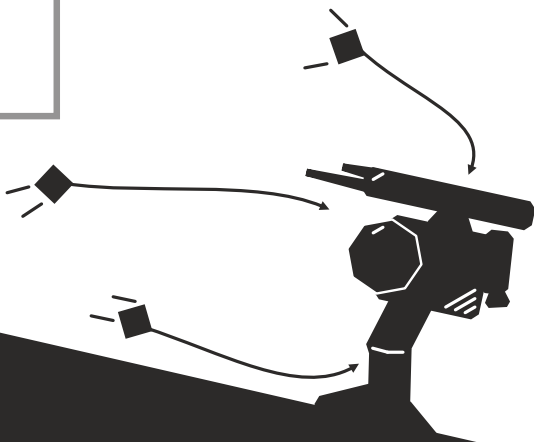
ENEMIES

Harm

Believe it or not, the enemies can in fact hurt the PCs. When they do, they deal their **Harm.** Rather than designing specific weapons that the enemies use, LUMEN enemies just have a flat amount of Harm they deal, with specifics in terms of at what range they can deal said Harm.

For example, I might have an enemy with the following Harm text:

> **Harm:** 2 at Close, 1 at Near

This enemy specializes in hurting people up close, can at least do something nearby, but has no way of hurting people at Far range. What weapons are they using? That's up to the GM to decide. This enemy might have a shotgun, good up close and getting worse with distance. Or maybe they've got a super sharp knife for melee fighting, and a cheap pistol for range.

By leaving the Harm as just a value and range, we give the GM the freedom to play around with what the enemies are using in combat. You may also include some tags *(we'll cover those soon)* in the enemy Harm descriptor. For example, adding the *AOE tag* shows that this enemy deals some sort of splash damage when they deal Harm.

Moves

These are what truly define an enemy, giving it life. Moves represent the *tactics* they use, the types of *actions* and *reactions* most commonly seen in combat, or just generally their *disposition* on the battlefield.

Each enemy has **3 moves.** Keeping it to three allows the GM to quickly decide how an enemy might act during the fast-paced combat, without needing to consult a long list of options. How are they used? Great question.

Enemies in Combat

The GM wields the enemies during Battles. While the GM has their turn they take at the end of the round, they are also acting during the player's turns. Whenever a PC acts and their roll has some sort of **complication** or **consequence** *(any roll between 1-4)*, the GM activates one of the enemies.

When using the enemies, the most common action the GM does is dealing their Harm to the PCs. That's not always possible, or doesn't fit narratively, and so the GM can also use any of the enemy's **Moves** to have them act in a believable way during the fight.

When it is the GM's turn, not only are they making a big change or update to the Battle, but they can do so by consulting the moves of the enemies and activating a bunch of them. It's recommended that you codify this in some way when describing your LUMEN game's GM Turn. Perhaps the GM gets to make an update, as well as activate 3 enemy moves. In doing so, the GM isn't entirely reliant on the PCs rolling poorly in order to use the enemies.
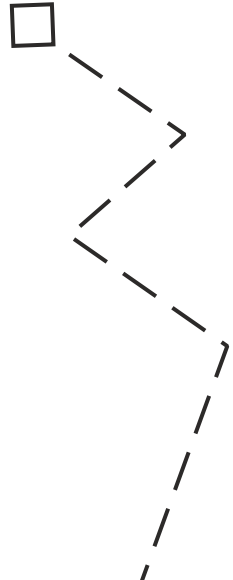
WEAPONS

The PCs need tools of war in order to do their work. Instead of creating a long list of all the available weapons, they are generated in LUMEN games. This is borrowed from LUMEN's heavy inspiration from the looter shooter and other similar genres. Here's what you'll need to arm your players with.

Types

The **types** of weapons available will be dependent on your setting. LIGHT is focused on gunplay, and so all of the weapons are different types of guns. NOVA has a blend of firearms and melee weapons, and so has a slightly different list of weapon types required.

When creating a weapon type, you will need three things:

◇ **Name** of the weapon type *(e.g. rifle, sword, lascannon)*

◇ **Harm** the weapon deals by default

◇ **Range** that the weapon works at *(e.g. Close/Near, or Far only)*

◇ *(Optional)* Any **Tags** the weapon requires

Here are some examples of weapon types from LIGHT:

Auto rifle: 1 Harm, Mid

Hand cannon: 2 Harm, Close

Sniper rifle: 3 Harm, Far, Stationary

SMG: 1 Harm, Close/Mid, Spray

Scout rifle: 2 Harm, Mid/Far

Tags

While weapon types offer some variety, what sets two weapons apart from one another are their tags. Think of tags like mods for the weapon, characteristics that change the way it functions from its default.

LUMEN weapons *live and die* by their tag lists. You're going to want to make a long list, because you're going to lean on it a lot whenever weapons are created. Here are some example tags from LIGHT:

Burst: Deals an additional Harm if you roll a 6 on the attack.

Charge: Must be charged momentarily before firing.

Close: Effective up close.

Elemental: Effective against shields.

Erupt: Enemies killed with this weapon explode in the Element used.

Far: Effective from far away.

Fount: +1 Light after getting a kill.

When creating tags, there are two approaches. First, you can make tags that are purely **narrative** in their function. They don't mechanically change the way the weapon works, but still make it unique. Some examples:

Unique **appearance** or **sound** when used

A **reputation** attached to it

Glows when in a specific situation

Most commonly, tags are **mechanical.** They function as ways to differentiate two weapons on the battlefield. Two pistols may have the same core features since they are the same weapon type, but would behave very differently if one of them had an *"autofire"* tag, and the other had a *"corrosive"* tag. When creating mechanically focused tags, consider some of these things:

> **Increasing effectiveness** when using a specific Attribute
>
> **More Harm** when used against types of enemies
>
> **Flat increases** (e.g. +1 to outcome) vs. variable increases (+1d6 on a roll)
>
> Change the **effective range**
>
> **Unexpected ways** for the weapon to function
>
> **Interacts** with Powers or the Resource

The world is your oyster when it comes to tags and what you want to include. The more tags you create, the more variety of weapons the players will have access to. Plus, you can give some of your enemies these tags as well, which will really keep the PCs on their toes!

Weapon Creation

LUMEN games have a randomized weapon creation system by default. When PCs are being made, they also make at least one weapon that they have. This is typically done using a table to first determine the weapon type. After determining the weapon type, players should add 1 or 2 tags to the weapon.

The two schools of thought for this are either letting the players **choose** their tags, or **randomly** generating them. Allowing the players to choose is always nice, player agency is good. But it also pushes players towards having *"ideal"* weapons. By randomly generating tags, your players will have truly unique weapons that they will need to use in Battles. Don't worry though, there is always more loot to have, and we'll cover that later.

Using Weapon in Combat

The players use their weapons in combat during their turn. When a weapon is used, the PC chooses a target enemy within the weapon's range, and then describes how they are using it. This activates the LUMEN system's core mechanic. **How** someone is using the weapon determines which Attribute they roll, rather than having a *"pistol skill"* or a *"sword fighting skill."*

The PC rolls the appropriate Attribute, and then deals the weapon's Harm as long as they get some form of success *(a 3+)*. Make sure to see if any tags are relevant for the attack and resolve them as well. If they fail, or succeed with a complication, the GM will be using the enemy, as described earlier.

GAMEPLAY LOOP

So far, with everything you've read, you could make a really solid LUMEN RPG designed for oneshots. We haven't covered character advancement, or getting more loot *(weapons)*, or what exactly the players are going out and doing.

If you want to, you can just stop right here. Go design an awesome action-packed RPG where the players go on an exciting *mission* or *quest*, and then go run it with another group, and another. One shots are awesome, and a LUMEN one shot is totally doable!

But, I LOVE solid gameplay loops in games. I've learned this over the years and I found myself being drawn to games like *Blades in the Dark*. You go out on your heist, do the job, then come back and do downtime. Then you do it all over again, rinse and repeat. I've run some sandbox style campaigns and they are fun, but I've always been drawn to a tight loop of play.

LUMEN RPGs are designed for that loop. What follows are rules for codifying what exactly the players are doing in a LUMEN game, and how their characters will get even more powerful through advancement and loot.

The Loop

LUMEN games are built around **missions.** You might call them quests, adventures, strikes, or some other thing in your game, but I'm going to use the term mission here. Missions are work that the PCs are sent out to do. Clear out the dungeon, sabotage that facility, recover the lost tech. Whatever it is, the PCs need to go out and accomplish their mission, and look good doing it.

Sessions of LUMEN RPGs are primarily made up of the mission. The general structure of the gameplay looks like this:

◇ Short **briefing** where the PCs get their mission

◇ Lots of time spent on the **mission** itself

◇ **Advancing** the characters after the mission is complete

That's the basic structure. The PCs are wandering around looking at bounty boards, exploring an open world for opportunities. They are given missions, and they do them.

Mission Generation

You are going to want to include some rules or advice for generating missions in your game. **Tables** work great for this. In NOVA, there are tables for different types of missions, and then additional tables to determine which enemy faction is involved, the danger of the mission, modifiers for it, and a whole host of other things.

We include these so our GMs can prep the mission if they want to, and if they don't, they at least have a framework to go off of.

Briefing & Debriefing

This part right here is a decision point for you. LUMEN games are roleplaying games, so you are going to want to give some opportunity to do the RP side of that. While the characters can RP in mission, they don't often get chances to interact with other people that are willing to talk to them instead of rip them apart.

The **scenes** before and after the mission are opportunities for the characters to take shape. You aren't obligated to include anything lengthy here, but I recommend giving the GM advice on how to bring the RP into the game during these book ends of the mission.

Adding to the Loop

The gameplay loop is straightforward, but there are opportunities to disrupt it, or shake it up. One of the more popular ways to do that is to add **factions** to your game. Someone has to give the PCs their missions, right? By creating factions, and tracking the players' reputation with various groups, you will start to see buy-in from the players in terms of who they decide to work with. Factions also help provide a framework on the types of missions available to the players.

Speaking of, you can mess around with the mission structure as well. Borrow from how other games do this. For example, in *Band of Blades*, the group is given 3 missions and they have to choose 1 to fail, 1 to resolve with a single roll, and 1 to actually play out. Adding **stakes** to the mission helps give weight to the game. This is important because the PCs are incredibly powerful and capable, and this is a chance to push back against them a bit.

BRIEFING

MISSION
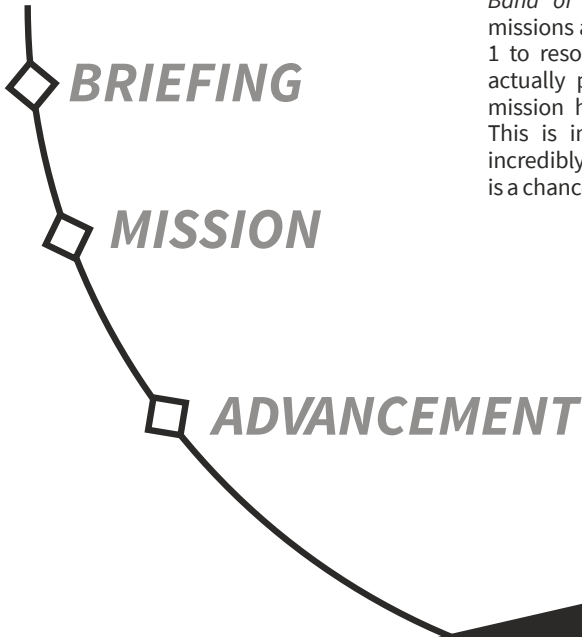
ADVANCEMENT

ADVANCEMENT

Finally, we come to the end of the loop, and the last piece of the LUMEN puzzle. These characters are powerful, but they want to be even MORE powerful! Character advancement in LUMEN games comes in two flavors: the characters, and the loot.

Character advancement is when the characters themselves become more powerful. There are a few ways that you can do this.

Increase an **Attribute score**

Increase **Health** or the **Resource**

Beyond that, the Powers themselves are a source of advancement opportunity. In NOVA, each Power has 2 advances that can be taken, improving the Power. These can be straight forward, such as providing +1 Harm, or allow the Power to be used in ways it couldn't be before.

In addition, you could allow for the PCs to gain access to new Powers through advancement. If you do this, I recommend requiring them to replace an existing Power, rather than adding on more and more options. Or, having them "equip" their 3-5 Powers at the start of a mission. Remember, the name of the game is speed, and having a list of 10 Powers to choose from on your turn slows the game down.

Loot advancement is all about making the weapons in the game more interesting. This form of advancement is best served in games where the weapons hold a prominent place in how the PCs are dealing with their fights. There are a lot of ways to handle loot advancement, and you need to choose a path that best fits your game:

Generate a new weapon at the end of each mission

Gain favor with weapon makers, allowing you to "buy" new weapons

Swap out tags of weapons after successful missions

Get access to **legendary weapons**!

Not all LUMEN games need a robust loot system, or one at all. In LIGHT, loot generation at the end of Strikes is super important, and so I made sure to include plenty of rules about creating random loot, loot tables, and working for the gunsmith. In NOVA, the classes are more important, and loot takes a backseat, so I don't have as many rules for acquiring new weapons.

MAKING A LUMEN GAME

You now have all the rules and guidance you need to make an RPG using the LUMEN system. If you want to make something with this, you 100% have my blessing. I just ask that you include the following text:

This game is Illuminated, and is made using the LUMEN system created by Spencer Campbell of GilaRPGs. This game is not affiliated with Gila RPGs.

You may also include this logo:

ILLUMINATED
by LUMEN

If you do end up making something with the LUMEN system, I'd love to see it. Please share it with me on Twitter and maybe we can even play together someday!

Finally, if you want to cut through all the fluff above, here is a **checklist** for making a LUMEN RPG:

○ **Determine 3 Attributes** for *strength*, *speed*, and *methodical* actions

○ **Create classes.** Each class needs:

  ○ The 3 Attributes

  ○ Health

  ○ Resource

  ○ 3-5 Powers

○ **Create enemies.** Each enemy needs:

  ○ Health

  ○ Harm

  ○ 3 Moves

○ **Create weapon types and tags.** Each weapon type needs:

  ○ Harm

  ○ Range

  ○ Optional required tags

You make those things, you're most of the way there with a LUMEN RPG.

Make your games...

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