Fate RE-Condensed

powered_by_fate

Licensing

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Credits

Fate Condensed by PK Sullivan, Ed Turner, and Fred Hicks. Additional development by Richard Bellingham, Robert Hanz, and Sophie Lagacé.

Based on prior works by Rob Donoghue, Fred Hicks, Leonard Balsera, Ryan Macklin, Clark Valentine, Mike Olson, Brian Engard, and Sophie Lagacé.

Based on Fate Core System by Leonard Balsera, Brian Engard, Jeremy Keller, Ryan Macklin, and Mike Olson and Fate Accelerated Edition by Clark Valentine.

Turn order system based on “Accidentally Designing Marvel’s Action Order System,” written by Fred Hicks and describing a variation on a method originally devised by Leonard Balsera.

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Getting Started

What Do I Need to Play?

To play *Fate Condensed* you'll need two to six friends with one acting as Game Master (GM), some dice, some tokens, writing implements, paper, and something to write short notes on (*e.g.*, small "sticky notes").

Fate Condensed uses **Fate Dice™** when characters take action. Fate dice are six-sided dice with two ■ sides, two ⊞ sides, and two ⊟ sides. One set of four dice will work fine, but one set per player is ideal. Other alternatives exist, such as using standard six-sided dice (1-2 = ⊟, 3-4 = ■, 5-6 = ⊞), or the **Deck of Fate**, which uses cards instead of dice. We use the word "roll" throughout the text for simplicity.

Define Your Setting

Any game of Fate starts with defining your setting. This might be a concept your GM is bringing to the table, a popular media property the players are familiar with, or a collaborative world-building exercise involving everyone at the table. The setting discussion may be quick and light on detail, or may involve a detailed full session with the whole group, or anything in between.

Your choice of setting forms the basis of the table's consensus about what is true, and what is acceptable in play and in character concepts. If your setting doesn't have flying people in it, then a player deciding to make a flying-person character doesn't pass muster. If your world involves shadowy organizations and deep conspiracies, players may expect story-lines free of clear-cut good-and-evil conflicts and devoid of farcical murder-clowns. It's up to you!

Create Your Characters

Who Are You?

Once you've decided on a setting, it's time for the players to make characters—also called PCs. Each player takes on the role of one of the heroes of your story, controlling all their actions. You get to build the character you want to see in the world. Keep in mind that Fate characters are competent, dramatic, and willing to engage with the adventures ahead.

Your PC is made up of several elements:

- **Aspects:** phrases describing who your hero is
- **Skills:** your hero's areas of relative expertise
- **Stunts:** remarkable things your hero does
- **Stress:** your hero's ability to keep calm and carry on
- **Consequences:** the wounds, physical and mental, your hero can endure
- **Refresh:** a measure of your hero's narrative agency
- **Finishing Touches:** your hero's personal details

Aspects

Aspects are short phrases that describe who your character is or what is important to them. They can relate to your character's physical or mental qualities, history, beliefs, training, relationships, or even particularly important equipment.

The first thing to know about them is: **Aspects are true** (see **page XX** for a discussion of this). In other words, how you define your character is real and true in the story you're telling. If you write down that your character is a **Precog Sniper**, then they *are* a precog sniper. You've told everyone that your character sees the future and is a crack shot with a rifle.

You'll also use aspects in play to change the story. They give you permission to improve your dice rolls and establish facts about the world. Lastly, aspects can earn you **fate points** if they create complications for your character—so to make the most versatile aspects, you should aim for ones that are double-edged, working both for you and against you.

To learn more about aspects and what makes a good one, consider reading some of *Aspects and Fate Points* (**page XX**).

To begin, you'll give your character five aspects: a high concept, a trouble, a relationship, and two free aspects. Start with the high concept and go from there.

High Concept

Your **high concept** is a broad description of the character, covering the vital bits. It's how you would open your pitch for the character when telling a friend about them.

Trouble

Next is your character's **trouble**—something that makes your character's life more complicated. It could be a personal weakness, family entanglements, or other obligations. Pick something you'll enjoy roleplaying!

Relationship

Your **relationship** describes a connection with another PC. They may already know one another, or have just met.

Good relationship aspects should introduce or hint at conflict, or at least an imbalance that gives the relationship a little momentum. This doesn't mean they are openly antagonistic, but they shouldn't be all roses either.

If you wish, you can wait to write down relationship aspects until everyone has more or less completed their characters.

Free Aspects

You can make your character's last two aspects anything you want—there are no restrictions beyond the obligation to fit the setting. Choose anything which you think will make your character more interesting, more fun to play, or better connected to the world they occupy.

Skills

While aspects define who your character is, **skills** show what they can do. Each skill describes a broad activity your character might have learned through study and practice or simply have an innate talent for. A character with Burglary is capable, to some degree, at all manner of crime relating to the fine art of burgling—casing a joint, bypassing security, pick-pocketing, and lock-picking.

Each skill has a **rating**. The higher the rating, the better the character is at the skill. As a whole, your character's skills will show you what actions they are built for, which ones they'll get by on, and which aren't their forte.

You'll choose your character's skill ratings, arranged in a pyramid with the highest-rated skill at Great (+4), as follows:

- One Great (+4) skill
- Two Good (+3) skills
- Three Fair (+2) skills
- Four Average (+1) skills
- All other skills at Mediocre (+0)

The Adjective Ladder

In *Fate Condensed*, and Fate in general, all ratings are organized into a ladder of adjectives, shown here.

Rating	Adjective
+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Average
+0	Mediocre
-1	Poor
-2	Terrible
-3	Catastrophic
-4	Horrifying

Skill List

Descriptions for these skills are found below.

- **Academics**
- **Athletics**
- **Burglary**
- **Contacts**
- **Crafts**
- **Deceive**
- **Drive**
- **Empathy**
- **Fight**
- **Investigate**
- **Lore**
- **Notice**
- **Physique**
- **Provoke**
- **Rapport**
- **Resources**
- **Shoot**
- **Stealth**
- **Will**

Academics: Mundane, everyday human knowledge and education, including history, sciences, and medicine. Academics stunts often refer to specialized areas of knowledge and medical skills.

Athletics: A measurement of physical potential. Athletics stunts focus on movement —running, jumping, parkour—and dodging attacks.

Burglary: Knowledge of and ability to bypass security systems, pick pockets, and generally commit crimes. Burglary stunts give bonuses to the various stages of committing a crime, from the planning to the execution and escape.

Contacts: Knowledge of the right people and connections that can help you. Contacts stunts give you ready allies and an information network wherever you go in the world.

Crafts: Ability to make or break machinery, build contraptions, and pull off MacGyver-esque feats of ingenuity. Crafts stunts let you have the gizmo on hand, give bonuses to building and breaking things, and provide justification for using Crafts in place of skills like Burglary or Academics under certain circumstances.

Deceive: Ability to lie and cheat convincingly and with aplomb. Deceive stunts might improve your ability to tell a particular breed of lie or help invent false identities.

Drive: Controlling vehicles under the most grueling circumstances, pulling wicked maneuvers, and simply getting the most out of your ride. Drive stunts can be signature maneuvers, a special vehicle of your own, or the ability to use Drive in place of a skill like Burglary or Academics under certain circumstances.

Empathy: Ability to accurately judge someone's mood and intentions. Empathy stunts can be about judging a crowd, picking up on lies, or helping others recover from mental consequences.

Fight: Ability to excel at hand-to-hand combat, whether with weapons or fists. Fight stunts include signature weapons and special techniques.

Investigate: Deliberate, careful study and puzzling out mysteries. Use this to piece together clues or reconstruct a crime scene. Investigate stunts help you form brilliant deductions or piece together information more quickly.

Lore: Specialized, arcane knowledge that falls outside of the scope of Academics, including supernatural topics of one sort or another. This is where the weird stuff happens. Lore stunts often support practical applications of your arcane knowledge, such as casting spells. Some settings may remove Lore, replace it with a different skill, or combine it with Academics.

Notice: Ability to pick up details in the moment, spot trouble before it happens, and generally be perceptive. It contrasts Investigate, which is for slow, deliberate observation. Notice stunts sharpen your senses, improve your reaction time, or make you harder to sneak up on.

Physique: Raw power and durability. Physique stunts let you perform superhuman feats of strength, throw your weight around while wrestling, and shrug off physical consequences. In addition, a high Physique rating gives you more physical stress or consequence slots (**page XX**).

Provoke: Ability to push people to act the way you want them to. It's coarse and manipulative, not a positive interaction. Provoke stunts let you push opponents into foolhardy action, draw aggression toward you, or scare enemies (assuming they can feel fear).

Rapport: Building connections with others and working together. Where Provoke is manipulation, Rapport is sincerity, trust, and goodwill. Rapport stunts let you sway the crowd, improve relationships, or build contacts.

Resources: Access to material things, not just money or direct ownership. It might reflect your ability to borrow from friends or dip into an organization's armory. Resources stunts let you use Resources in place of Rapport or Contacts or give you extra free invokes when you pay for the best.

Shoot: All forms of ranged combat, whether guns, throwing knives, or bow and arrow. Shoot stunts let you make called shots, quick-draw, or always have a gun handy.

Stealth: Staying unseen or unheard and escaping when you need to hide. Stealth stunts let you vanish in plain sight, blend into crowds, or advance through shadows unseen.

Will: Mental fortitude, the ability to overcome temptation and to withstand trauma. Will stunts let you ignore mental consequences, withstand the mental agony of strange powers, and hold steady against enemies who provoke you. In addition, a high Will rating gives you more mental stress or consequence slots (**page XX**).

Alternative Skill Lists

When building your own implementation of Fate, the first thing to think about is whether or not you'll keep the same skill list. Often you can work with the one given, combining, changing, or splitting apart a few of the skills given. But it's possible that the granularity of the default example skill list we've given above isn't to your liking. Here are some things to think about.

- The default skill list has 19 skills in it, and players rate their characters above the Mediocre (+0) default in 10 of them. If you change the number of skills, you may want to change how the ratings are allocated.
- Our default skills are focused on answering the question "what can you do?"—but your list doesn't need to follow in line with that. You might want a list focused on "What do you believe?", the question "How do you do things?" (as with approaches in *Fate Accelerated*), job-roles in a crew of grifters and thieves, and so on.
- Skill ratings in Fate are structured to support character niches. That's why, in the default, players start with a "pyramid" shape. Make sure niche protection is possible in whatever new list you create.
- The best starting skill should come in around Great (+4). You can alter this up or down as you see fit, but make sure to keep an eye on what that means for the difficulty and opposing skill ratings your PCs will face.

> Fred decides he wants to do a space-faring Fate game with a shorter skill list that's focused on action-words. He settles on this 9-item skill list: Fight, Know, Move, Notice, Pilot, Sneak, Speak, Tinker, and Will. He also likes the idea of a "diamond" shape for skill ratings rather than a pyramid, so he has players rate their starting skills as follows: 1 at Great (+4), 2 at Good (+3), 3 at Fair (+2), 2 at Average (+1), and 1 at Mediocre (+0). His PCs will have a lot of overlap and core competencies due to the fat middle of his diamond, while still enjoying some niche protections at the top of the diamond's "point."

If you're considering making your own skill list for your game and are looking for some ideas to kick-start your imagination, see **page XX.**

Character Creation As You Play

If a player is comfortable making quick creative decisions in the moment, they may enjoy creating characters *as they play* rather than ahead of time. This mimics the way characters reveal themselves and develop in other media. It's not for everyone, but for groups where the method clicks it can be a real crowd-pleaser.

With this method, characters start with only a name, high concept aspect, and highest skill—if that! As play progresses and they are called on to use an unrated skill, they can choose an empty slot and reveal their knowledge of it in the moment. Similarly, aspects and stunts can be filled in when the circumstances that call for them, right in the moment a fate point is spent or a bonus claimed.

Refresh

Your **refresh** is the minimum number of **fate points** (**page XX**) your character begins with at the start of each session. Your character begins with a refresh of 3.

Each session, you start with fate points at least equal to your refresh. Be sure to keep track of the fate points you have left at the end of each session of play—if you have more fate points than your refresh, you'll start the next session with the fate points you ended this session with.

> Charles earned a lot of fate points during today's session, ending it with 5 fate points. His refresh is 2, so Charles will start the next session with 5 fate points. But Ethan ends the same session with just one fate point. His refresh is 3, so he'll begin the next session with 3 fate points, not just the one he had left over.

Stunts

While every character has access to all the skills—even if they are Mediocre (+0) at most of them—your character has some unique **stunts**. Stunts are the cool techniques, tricks, or bits of equipment that make your character unique and interesting. Where skills are about a character's broad competencies, stunts are about specific areas of excellence; most of them give you a bonus in particular circumstances or let you do something that other characters simply can't.

Your character begins with three free stunt slots. You don't have to define them all right away, and may fill them in as you play. You may purchase more stunts by spending 1 refresh each, to a minimum of 1 refresh.

Writing Stunts

You write your own stunts when building a character. Broadly, there are two types of stunts.

Bonus-granting stunts: The first type of stunt **gives you a +2 bonus** when you use a named skill within certain parameters, usually limited to a specific type of action (**page XX**) and type of narrative circumstance.

Write this type of stunt as follows:

Because I **[describe how you are amazing or have a cool bit of gear]**, I get a +2 when I use **[pick a skill]** to **[pick one: overcome, create an advantage, attack, defend]** when **[describe a circumstance]**.

Example Bonus-Granting Stunt: Because I am **a military-trained sniper**, I get a +2 when I use **Shoot** to **attack** when **I have a target In My Sights**.

Rule-changing stunts: The second type of stunt **changes the rules of the game**. This is a broad category that includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Swapping which skills are used in a given situation.** For instance, a researcher might use Academics to perform a ritual, while anyone else would use Lore.
- **Using an action with a skill that isn't normally used with it.** For instance, allowing a character to use Stealth to backstab an opponent from the shadows (which would typically be a use of Fight).
- **Giving a character a different kind of bonus to skills that's roughly equivalent to a +2.** For instance, when a skilled orator creates an advantage with Rapport, it gets an extra free invoke.

- **Allowing a character to declare a minor fact is always true.** For instance, a survivalist always has survival items like matches on their person, even under unlikely circumstances.
- **Allowing a character to make a specific rules exception.** For instance, a character might have two more stress boxes or another mild consequence slot.

Write this type of stunt as follows:

Because I **[describe how you are amazing or have a cool bit of gear]**, I can **[describe your amazing feat]**, but only **[describe a circumstance or limitation]**.

Example Rule-Changing Stunt: Because I **don't believe in magic**, I can **ignore the effects of a supernatural ability**, but only **once per game session**.

Stress and Consequences

Stress and **consequences** are how your character withstands the mental and physical toll of their adventures. Characters have at least three one-point boxes for physical stress and at least three one-point boxes for mental stress. They also get one slot each for mild, moderate, and severe consequences.

Your rating in Physique affects how many total physical stress boxes you have. Will does the same for your mental stress. Refer to the following table:

Physique/Will	Physical/Mental Stress
Mediocre (+0)	☐☐☐
Average (+1) or Fair (+2)}	☐☐☐ ☐
Good (+3) or Great (+4)	☐☐☐ ☐☐☐
Superb (+5) and higher	☐☐☐ ☐☐☐ and a second mild consequence slot specifically for physical or mental hits

You'll learn how stress and consequences work during play in *"Taking Harm"* (**page XX**).

Finishing Touches

Give your character a name and description, and discuss their history with the other players. If you haven't written down a relationship aspect yet, do so now.

Taking Action, Rolling the Dice

In a game of *Fate Condensed*, you will control the actions of the character you created, contributing to the story you are all telling together. In general, the GM will narrate the world and the actions of non-player characters (**NPCs**), and the other players will narrate their individual PCs' actions.

To act, follow the principle of **fiction first**: say what your character is trying to do, *then* figure out how you'll do that in the system. Your character's aspects inform what they can attempt and help set the context for interpreting the results. Most people couldn't even try to perform emergency surgery on a disemboweled ally, but with an aspect establishing a medical background, you can try. Without that aspect you might at best buy a few moments for some last words. When in doubt, check with your GM and the table.

How do you know if you're successful? Often, your character will simply succeed, because the action isn't hard and nobody's trying to stop you. But in difficult or unpredictable situations, you'll break out the dice to find out what happens.

When a character wants to take an action, the group should think about these questions:

- What's stopping this from happening?
- What could go wrong?
- How is it interesting when it does go wrong?

If no one has good answers to all of these questions, it simply happens. Driving to the airport doesn't require a roll of the dice. Racing down the highway to a waiting plane while being pursued by cybernetically enhanced beasts from another world, on the other hand, is a perfect time to roll the dice.

Whenever you take action, follow these steps:

1. Fiction first: Describe what you're trying to do, *then* choose the skill and action that fits.
2. Roll four dice.
3. Add up the symbols on the dice: a  is +1, is -1, and is 0. This will give you a dice result of -4 to 4.
4. Add the dice result to your skill rating.
5. Modify the dice by invoking aspects (**page XX**) and using stunts (**page XX**).
6. Declare your total result, called your **effort**.

Difficulty and Opposition

If the character's action faces a fixed obstacle or otherwise tries to alter the world rather than a character or creature, their action faces a static **difficulty** rating. These actions include picking locks, barring doors, and tactically assessing an enemy camp. The GM may decide that the presence of certain aspects (on the character, the scene, or something else) justifies changing the difficulty.

At other times, an enemy will provide **opposition** against the character's action by using a defend action (**page XX**). In these cases, the GM will also roll the dice and follow the same rules as in the previous section, using any skills, stunts, or aspects the enemy has. Any time you roll to attack an enemy or to create an advantage directly against them, the enemy will roll to defend against it.

Opposition can take many forms. Struggling with a cultist over the ritual dagger has a clear opponent. Or you might be opposed by the power of an ancient ritual that must be overcome to save the world. Cracking the safe in the First Metropolitan Bank to access the safe deposit boxes is a challenge with risk of discovery, but it's up to the GM if you're rolling against *opposition* from the patrolling guards or the *difficulty* presented by the safe itself.

Modifying the Dice

On your turn, you may modify your dice by invoking aspects to get +2 to your roll or reroll the dice. Some stunts also give you a bonus. You may also invoke aspects to support an ally (**page XX**) or to increase the difficulty an enemy faces.

Invoking Aspects

When you take action but the dice come up short, you don't have to sit back and accept failure. (Though you totally can. That's fun too.) The aspects in play give you options and opportunity to succeed.

When an aspect could justifiably help your efforts, describe how it helps and spend a fate point to **invoke** it (or use a free invoke). What is and isn't justifiable is subject to the **bogus rule**—anyone can say "that's bogus!" to invoking an aspect. Simply put, the bogus rule is a **calibration tool** that anyone at the table may use to help the group make sure the game stays true to its vision and concept. You can use the safety tools discussed on **page XX** in a similar fashion.

You have two options when your invoke looks bogus. First, you can retract your invoke and try something else, maybe a different aspect. Second, you can have a quick discussion about why you think the aspect fits. If the person still isn't convinced, retract the invoke and move on. If they come around to your perspective, go ahead with the invoke as usual. The bogus rule is in here to help everyone at the table have a good time. Use it when something doesn't sound right, make sense, or fit the tone. Someone invoking **Great at First Impressions** to throw a car is likely bogus.
But maybe that character has a supernatural stunt that makes them incredibly strong, strong enough to plausibly throw a car, and this is their opening gambit in a fight with a horrible monster. In that case, maybe **Great at First Impressions** is plausible.

When you invoke an aspect, you can either **gain a +2 bonus** to your roll or **reroll all four dice**, or you can add 2 to the difficulty of someone else's roll, if justifiable. You can invoke multiple aspects on the same roll, but you can't invoke the same aspect multiple times on the same roll. There is one exception: you can spend as many *free invokes* on an aspect as you like on the same roll.

Most often you'll invoke one of your character aspects, but sometimes you'll invoke a situation aspect or even make a hostile invocation of another character's aspect (**page XX**).

Often you'll invoke one of your character aspects. You may also invoke a situation aspect or make a hostile invocation of another character's aspect (**page XX**).

Using Stunts

Stunts may give you a bonus to your roll, provided you meet the criteria written in the stunt, such as the circumstances, action, or skill used. You may wish to use create advantage (**page XX**) to introduce aspects that line up with those circumstances. Keep your stunts' circumstances in mind when you describe your actions too, and set yourself up for success.

Normally, stunts give you a +2 bonus in a narrow circumstance with no cost; you may use them anytime they apply. Some rare and exceptionally powerful stunts may require you to spend a fate point to use them.

Outcomes

Whenever you roll dice, the difference between your effort and the target difficulty or opposition is measured in **shifts**. A shift has a value of 1. There are four possible outcomes:

- If your effort is less than the target difficulty or opposition, you **fail**.
- If your effort is equal to the target, you **tie**.
- If your effort is one or two shifts more than the target, you **succeed**.
- If your effort is three or more shifts more than the target, you **succeed with style**.

Some outcomes are obviously better for you than others, but all of them should advance the story in interesting ways. You started with fiction first (**page XX**); make sure you end with it too, to maintain focus on the story, and to ensure you interpret the results in a way that fits the fiction.

> Ethan isn't an adept safe-cracker (though he has the tools), and yet he's in a sinister cult's guarded secret headquarters, with a steel door between him and the ritual book he desperately needs. Can he get in?

Failure

If your effort is less than the target difficulty or opposition, you fail.

This can play out in a few ways: simple failure, success at a major cost, or taking a hit.

Simple Failure

The first is the easiest to understand—**simple failure**. You don't accomplish your goal, don't make any progress, and are left wanting. Ensure this keeps the story moving—simply failing to crack the safe is stagnant and boring.

> Ethan pulls the handle triumphantly, but the safe remains resolutely closed while the alarms begin to blare. Failure has changed the situation and driven the story forward—now there are guards on the way. Ethan is faced with a new choice—try another way of opening the safe, now that subtlety is out the window, or cut his losses and run?

Success at a major cost

Second is **success at a major cost**. You do what you set out to do, but there's a significant price to be paid—the situation gets worse or more complicated. GM, you can either declare this is the result or can offer it in place of failure. Both options are good and useful in different situations.

> Ethan fails his roll and the GM says, "You hear the click of the last tumbler falling into place. It's echoed by the click of the hammer on a revolver as the guard tells you to put your hands in the air." The major cost here is the confrontation with a guard he'd hoped to avoid.

Take a Hit

Lastly, you may **take a hit**, which you'll need to absorb with stress or consequences, or suffer some other drawback. This sort of failure is most common when defending against attacks or overcoming dangerous obstacles. This is different from a simple failure because the character alone, not necessarily the whole group, is affected. It's also different from success at a major cost, in that success isn't necessarily on the table.

> Ethan is able to get the safe door open, but as he grasps the handle, he feels a jab in the back of his hand. He couldn't disable the trap! He writes down the mild consequence **Poisoned**.

You can mix these options together: Harmful failure can be harsh but appropriate in the moment. Success at the cost of harm is certainly an option.

Tie

If your effort is equal to the target difficulty or opposition, you tie.

Just like failure, ties should move the story forward, never stymie the action. Something interesting should happen. Similar to failure, this can play out a couple ways: success at a minor cost, or partial success.

Success at a minor cost

The first is **success at a minor cost**—a few points of stress, story details about difficulty or complication but aren't hindrances themselves, and a boost (**page XX**) to the enemy are all minor costs.

> Ethan's first few attempts all fail. By the time he actually gets the door open, dawn has broken, and escape under cover of darkness is impossible. He got what he needed, but his situation is worse now.

Partial Success

The other way to handle a tie is **partial success**—you succeeded but only got some of what you wanted.

> Ethan can only open the safe door a crack—if the door opens more than an inch, the alarm will sound, and he can't figure out how to disengage that. He manages to pull a couple pages of the ritual out through the narrow gap, but he'll have to guess at the final steps.

Success

If your effort is one or two more than the target, you succeed.

You get what you want with no additional cost.

> Opened! Ethan grabs the ritual and leaves before the guards notice him.

Applying "Fiction First" to Success

The fiction *defines* what success looks like. What if Ethan didn't have the tools or experience needed to break into the safe? Perhaps that success is more like our "minor cost" example above. Similarly, if Ethan was on the team because he *built* the safe, that success might look more like our "with style" example.

Success with Style

If your effort is three or more than the target, you succeed with style.

You get what you want, and you get a bit more on top of that.

> Ethan is beyond lucky; the safe door opens almost instantly. Not only does he get the ritual, but he has enough time to poke through the other papers in the back of the safe. Amidst various ledgers and financial documents, he finds a map of the old Akeley mansion.

Actions

There are four actions you can roll, each with a specific purpose and effect on the story:

- **Overcome** to surmount obstacles with your skills.
- **Create an advantage** to change a situation to your benefit.
- **Attack** to harm the enemy.
- **Defend** to survive an attack, stop a foe from creating an advantage, or oppose an effort to overcome an obstacle.

Overcome

Overcome to surmount obstacles with your skills.

Every character will face untold challenges in the course of the story. The **overcome** action is how they face and surmount those obstacles.

A character good at Athletics can climb over walls and race through crowded streets. A detective with high Investigate can piece together clues others have missed. Someone skilled in Rapport will find it easier to avoid a fight in a hostile bar.

Your outcomes when overcoming are:

- **If you fail,** discuss with the GM (and the defending player, if any) whether it's a failure or success at a major cost (**page XX**).
- **If you tie,** it's success at a minor cost (**page XX**)—you're in a tough spot, the enemy gets a boost (**page XX**), or you may take a hit. Alternatively, you fail but gain a boost.
- **If you succeed,** you meet your goal and the story moves on without hiccups.
- **If you succeed with style,** it's a success and you also get a boost.

> Charles has made his way to an Antarctic research facility. The buildings have been wrecked, and the occupants are missing. He wants to search the wreckage for clues. The GM tells him to roll Investigate against Fair (+2) difficulty. Charles gets ■■⊕⊕ on the dice, plus his Average (+1) Investigate, for a Good (+3) effort. A success! The GM describes the clue he finds: footprints in the snow, made by creatures walking on many thin, inhuman legs.

Overcome actions are often used to determine whether a character can access or notice a particular fact or clue. Keep a close eye on those success-at-a-cost options when that's the case. If missing a detail would cause your story to stall, take failure off the table, and focus on the cost instead.

Create an Advantage

Create A situation aspect or gain a benefit from an existing aspect.

You can use the **create an advantage** action to change the course of the story. By using your skills to introduce new aspects or add invokes to existing aspects, you can stack the deck for yourself and your teammates. You might change the circumstances (barring a door or creating a plan), discover new information (learning a monster's weakness through research), or take advantage of something already known (such as a CEO's taste for scotch).

An aspect created (or discovered) by creating an advantage works like any other: It defines the narrative circumstances and can allow, prevent, or impede actions—for instance, you cannot read a spell if the room has been made **Pitch Black**. It can also be invoked (**page XX**) or compelled (**page XX**). In addition, creating an advantage gives you one or more **free invokes** of the created aspect. A free invoke, as the name suggests, lets you invoke an aspect without spending a fate point. You can even let your allies use free invokes you have created.

When you roll to create an advantage, specify whether you're creating a new aspect or taking advantage of an existing one. If the former, are you attaching the aspect to an ally, opponent, or the environment? If you're attaching it to an opponent, they can take the defend action to oppose you. Otherwise you'll usually face a difficulty, but the GM can decide if something or someone opposes your efforts with a defend roll instead.

Your outcomes when creating a new aspect are:

- **If you fail,** you either don't create the aspect (failure) or you create it but the enemy gets the free invoke (success at a cost). If you succeed at a cost, the final aspect may need to be rewritten to benefit the enemy. This may still be worth it because aspects are true (**page XX**).
- **If you tie,** you don't create an aspect, but you do get a boost (**page XX**).
- **If you succeed,** you create a situation aspect with one free invoke on it.
- **If you succeed with style,** you create a situation aspect with *two* free invokes on it.

With an existing known or unknown aspect the outcomes are:

- **If you fail,** and the aspect was known, the enemy gets a free invoke. If it was unknown, they may choose to reveal it to get a free invoke.
- **If you tie,** you gain a boost if the aspect was unknown; it stays unknown. If the aspect is known, you get a free invoke on it instead.
- **If you succeed,** gain a free invoke on the aspect, revealing it if unknown.
- **If you succeed with style,** gain two free invokes, revealing it if unknown.

> Ethan is face-to-something with a shoggoth, a massive and tireless fleshy beast. He knows it's too powerful to attack directly, so he decides his best bet is to distract it: "I'd like to make a Molotov cocktail and set this thing on fire!" he announces.
>
> The GM decides that actually hitting the shoggoth is trivial, so this is a Crafts roll—how quickly can he find and weaponize something flammable? The difficulty is set at Good (+3). Ethan has Average (+1) Crafts but rolls  , giving a Great (+4) effort.
>
> Ethan cobbles together the Molotov and tosses it at the beast. The shoggoth is now **On Fire**, and Ethan has one free invoke on that aspect. The shoggoth is definitely distracted, and if it does try to chase him, Ethan can use that invoke to help himself get away.

Attack

Attack to harm the enemy.

The **attack** action is how you try to take out an opponent—whether you're looking to kill a loathsome monster, or knock out an innocent guard who doesn't know the truth about what he's guarding. An attack can be unloading with a machine gun, throwing a solid punch, or casting a baleful spell.

Keep in mind whether or not harming your target is even possible. Not every attack is equal. You can't just punch a kaiju and hope to hurt it. Determine whether the attack even has a chance of being successful before you start rolling the dice. A number of powerful beings may have specific weaknesses that need to be exploited, or some means of defense you must get through before you can even begin to hurt them.

Your outcomes when attacking are:

- **If you fail,** you fail to connect—the attack is parried, dodged, or maybe just absorbed by armor.
- **If you tie,** maybe you barely connect, maybe you cause the defender to flinch. Either way, you get a boost (**page XX**).
- **If you succeed,** you deal a hit equal to the difference between your attack's total and the defense's effort. The defender must absorb this hit with stress or consequences, or else be taken out (**page XX**).
- **If you succeed with style,** you deal a hit just like a success, but you may reduce the shifts of the hit by one to get a boost.

Ruth has stumbled across a corpse raised by arcane powers to fulfill some dark purpose. She decides to punch it. She has Great (+4) Fight but rolls , giving a Fair (+2) effort.

Defend

Defend to survive an attack or interfere with a foe's action.

Is a monster trying to eat your face? Is a foe pushing you out of the way as they flee your wrath? What about when that cultist tries to stab you in both kidneys? **Defend**, defend, defend.

Defend is the only reactive action in *Fate Condensed*. You use it to stop something from happening outside your turn, so you're often facing an opposing roll rather than a set difficulty. Your enemy rolls, and you immediately roll to defend, so long as you're the target or can justify your opposition (which often makes you the target). Aspects or stunts may provide justification.

Your outcomes when defending are:

- **If you fail** against an attack, you take a hit, which you must absorb with stress (**page XX**) or consequences (**page XX**). Regardless, the enemy succeeds as described for their action.
- **If you tie,** proceed according to the tie result for the opposed action.
- **If you succeed,** you don't take a hit or you deny the enemy's action.
- **If you succeed with style,** you don't take a hit, you deny the enemy's action, and you even get a boost as you gain the upper hand for a moment.

Continuing from the previous example, the corpse gets to defend itself against Ruth. The GM rolls  , which doesn't change the creature's Mediocre (+0) Athletics.

Because Ruth's effort was higher, her attack succeeds by two shifts, and the corpse is a little closer to being down for good. Had the corpse rolled better, then its defense would have succeeded, and the undead monstrosity would have avoided taking a hit.

Which skills can be used to attack and defend?

The default list of skills follows these guidelines:

- Fight and Shoot can be used to make physical attacks.
- Athletics can be used to defend against any physical attack.
- Fight can be used to defend against melee physical attacks.
- Provoke can be used to make a mental attack.
- Will can be used to defend against mental attacks.

Other skills may gain permission to attack or defend under special circumstances, as determined by the GM or table consensus. Some stunts may grant broader, guaranteed permission when circumstances might otherwise not do so. When a skill can't be used to attack or defend but might help with it, prepare for it by using that skill with the create an advantage action, and use the free invokes generated on your next attack or defend roll.

Aspects and Fate Points

An **aspect** is a word or phrase that describes something special about a person, place, thing, situation, or group. Almost anything you can think of can have aspects. A person might have a reputation as the **Greatest Sharpshooter in the Wasteland** (see below for more about these kinds of aspects). A room might be **On Fire** after you knock over an oil lamp. After an encounter with a monster, you might be **Terrified**. Aspects let you change the story in ways that go along with your character's tendencies, skills, or problems.

Aspects Are Always True

You can invoke aspects for a bonus to a roll (**page XX**) and compel them to create a complication (**page XX**). But even when those aren't in play, aspects still affect the narrative. When you have that flesh-wrapped monstrosity **Pinned in a Hydraulic Press**, that is *true*. It can't do much stuck in there, and it's not getting out easy.

In essence, "aspects are always true" means that **aspects can grant or withdraw permission for what can happen in the story** (they can also affect difficulty: see **page XX**). If the aforementioned monstrosity is **Pinned**, the GM (and everyone else) has to respect that. The creature has lost permission to move until something happens which removes that aspect, either a successful overcome (which itself might require a justifying aspect like **Superhuman Strength**) or someone foolishly reversing the press. Similarly, if you have **Cybernetically Enhanced Legs**, you've arguably gained permission to leap over walls in a single bound without even having to roll for it.

That's not to say you can create any aspect you want and use its truth like a club. Aspects grant a lot of power to shape the story, yes, but with that power comes the responsibility to play within the story's constraints. Aspects have to line up with the table's sense of what actually passes muster. **If an aspect doesn't pass the sniff test, it needs to be reworded.**

Sure, you might *like* to use create an advantage to inflict the aspect **Dismembered** on that fungal super-soldier, but that clearly steps on the toes of the attack action, and besides, it takes a bit more work to lop her arm off than that (could work as a consequence, though—see the next page). You might *say* you're the **World's Best Shot**, but you'll need to back that up with your skills. And as much as you'd like to make yourself **Bulletproof**, removing permission for someone to use small arms fire to harm you, that is unlikely to fly unless the game you're playing involves using aspects-as-superpowers.

What Kinds of Aspects Are There?

There's an endless variety of aspects (see **page XX** for more), but no matter what they're called, they all work pretty much the same way. The main difference is how long they stick around before going away.

Character Aspects

These aspects are on your character sheet, such as your high concept and trouble. They describe personality traits, important details about your past, relationships you have with others, important items or titles you possess, problems you're dealing with or goals you're working toward, or reputations and obligations you carry. These aspects primarily change during milestones (**page XX**).

Examples: Leader of My Band of Survivors; Attention to Detail; I Must Protect My Brother

Situation Aspects

These aspects describe the surroundings or scenario where the action is taking place. A situation aspect usually vanishes at the end of the scene it was part of, or when someone takes some action that would change or get rid of it. Essentially, they last only as long as the situation they represent lasts.

Examples: On Fire; Bright Sunlight; Crowd of Angry People; Knocked to the Ground; Pursued by the Police

Consequences

These aspects represent injuries or other lasting trauma taken by absorbing a hit, often from attacks (**page XX**).

Examples: Sprained Ankle; Concussion; Debilitating Self-Doubt

Boosts

A **boost** is a special kind of aspect, representing an extremely temporary or minor situation. You cannot compel a boost or spend a fate point to invoke it. You may invoke it once for free, after which it vanishes. An unused boost vanishes when the advantage it represents no longer exists, which may be a few seconds or the duration of a single action. They never persist beyond the end of a scene, and you can hold off naming one until you're using it. If you're in control of a boost, you may pass it to an ally if there's rationale for it.

Examples: In My Sights; Distracted; Unstable Footing

What Can I Do with Aspects?

Earning Fate Points

One way you can earn fate points is by letting your character's aspects be **compelled** (**page XX**) against you to complicate the situation or make your life harder. You may also get a fate point payout if someone uses your aspect against you in a hostile invoke (**page XX**) or when you concede (**page XX**).

Remember, each session, you also start with fate points at least equal to your **refresh**. If you were compelled more than you invoked in the prior session, you'll show up at the next one with more. See **page XX** for details.

Invokes

To unlock the true power of aspects and make them help you, you'll need to spend **fate points** to **invoke** them during dice rolls (**page XX**). Keep track of your fate points with pennies or glass beads or poker chips or some other tokens.

You can also invoke aspects for free, *if* you have a free invoke from you or an ally creating an advantage you can use (**page XX**).

The Ellipsis Trick

If you want an easy way to ensure you have room to incorporate aspects into a roll, try narrating your action with an ellipsis at the end ("..."), and then finish the action with the aspect you want to invoke. Like this:

Ryan says, "So I'm trying to decipher the runes and..." (rolls the dice, hates the result) "...and **If I Haven't Been There, I've Read About It**..." (spends a fate point) "...so I easily start rambling about their origin."

Hostile Invocations

Most of the time an aspect is invoked, it's a character aspect or a situation aspect. Sometimes you'll invoke enemies' character aspects *against* them. This is called a **hostile invocation**, and it works just like invoking any other aspect—pay a fate point and get a +2 to your roll or reroll the dice. There's one small difference—**when you make a hostile invocation, you give the fate point to the enemy.** But they don't get to use the fate point until after the scene is over. This payout only applies when a fate point is actually spent on a hostile invocation. Free invokes do not trigger a payout.

Invoking to Declare Story Details

You may spend a fate point to add an important or unlikely detail to the story based on an aspect in play. In cases where "aspects are always true" (page XX) suffices, you do not need to spend the fate point; paying is for when it's a stretch.

Compels

Aspects can be **compelled** to complicate the situation and earn fate points. To compel an aspect, the GM or a player offers a fate point to the player whose character is being compelled, and tells them why an aspect is making things more difficult or complicated. If you refuse the compel, you must spend a fate point from your own supply and describe how your character avoids the complication. Yes, this means that if you don't have any fate points, you can't refuse a compel!

Any aspect can be compelled—whether it's a character aspect, situation aspect, or consequence—but it must be something that affects the character being compelled.

Anyone can offer a compel. The player proposing the compel must spend one of their own fate points. The GM then takes over running the compel for the affected target. The GM does not lose a fate point by offering a compel—they have a limited pool of fate points for invoking aspects, but can compel as much as they'd like.

Compels can be retroactive. If a player finds they have roleplayed themself into a complication related to one of their aspects or a situation aspect that concerns them, they can ask the GM if that counts as a **self-compel**. If the group agrees, the GM slides the player a fate point.

It's okay to recognize a compel as off-the-mark and withdraw it. If the group agrees that a proposed compel wasn't appropriate, it should be withdrawn at no cost to the compelled character.

Compels Are Complications, Not Stymies

When offering a compel, make sure that the complication is a course of action or major change in circumstance, not a denial of options.

"Oh, you've got sand in your eyes, so you shoot at the creature and miss," is not a compel. It denies action rather than complicating anything.

"You know, curse your luck, I think that the sand in your eyes means you can't really see anything. Your shots at the shoggoth go wild, puncturing a few barrels that are now gushing gasoline toward the fire pit." This is a much better compel. It changes the scene, ratchets up the tension, and gives the players something new to think about.

For some ideas about what does and doesn't work as a compel, check out the discussion of types of compels found in *Fate Core System* starting on page 72 of that book, or online at: *https://fate-srd.com/fate-core/invoking-compelling-aspects#types-of-compels*

Events and Decisions

There are two general kinds of compels: **events** and **decisions**.

An event compel is something that happens to a character because of an external force. That external force connects with the aspect in some way, resulting in an unfortunate complication.

A decision compel is internal, where the character's flaws or competing values get in the way of better judgment. The aspect guides the character to make a particular choice—and the fallout of that choice creates a complication for them.

In either case, a resulting complication is key! Without a complication, there is no compel.

Hostile Invocations or Compels?

Don't confuse hostile invocations and compels! Though they are similar—they are ways to give a character an immediate problem in exchange for a fate point—they work differently.

A compel creates a *narrative change*. The decision to compel a character's aspect isn't something that happens in-universe; rather, it's the GM or player proposing a change to the story. The effect can be broad, but the target gets the fate point immediately if they accept the compel, and may choose to refuse the compel.

A hostile invocation is a *mechanical effect*. The target doesn't get a chance to refuse the invocation—but as with any invocation, you will need to explain how that aspect makes sense to invoke. And while they do get a fate point, they don't get to use it in the current scene. However, the ultimate result is much more constrained: a +2 bonus or one reroll of the dice.

Compels let you, as a player or GM, change what a scene is *about*. They throw a wrench in the narrative. Using them against an opponent is a risky proposition—they might refuse, or accomplish their objective despite the complication thanks to the shiny new fate point you handed them.

Hostile invocations help you in the current moment. In addition to your own aspects, you have your opponent's aspects available to invoke, giving you more options and making scenes more dynamic and connected.

How Can I Add and Remove Aspects?

You can create or discover a situation aspect using the create an advantage action (**page XX**). You may also create boosts that way, or as a result of a tie or success with style when you overcome an obstacle, attack, or defend.

You can remove an aspect provided you can think of a way your character could do so—blast the **Raging Fire** with a fire extinguisher, use evasive maneuvers to escape the pursuing guard that's **On Your Tail**. Depending on the situation, that might require an overcome action (**page XX**); in this case, an opponent could use a defend action to try to preserve the aspect, if they can describe how they do so.

However, if there's no narrative block to removing an aspect, you can simply do so. If you're **All Tied Up** and then a friend unties you, the aspect goes away. If there's nothing stopping you, there's no need to roll.

Other Kinds of Aspects

We've covered the standard aspect types on **page XX**. These additional types are optional, but may add value to your game. To some extent these are variants on character aspects (if you expand your notion of what counts as a character) and situation aspects (if you change your notion of how long those last).

Organization aspects: Sometimes you might be dealing with a whole organization that operates under a certain set of principles. Consider giving the organization aspects which any member of it can access as if it were their own.

Scenario aspects: Sometimes a particular plot might introduce a new "trope" that shows up time and again in the storyline. Consider defining this as an aspect which is available to all characters in the story until that part of the story concludes.

Setting aspects: Like a scenario aspect, the setting of your campaign itself may have recurring themes. Unlike a scenario aspect, these aspects don't go away.

Zone aspects: You can attach situation aspects to a particular place on the map represented by a zone (**page XX**). This can add extra dynamism to your group's interactions with the map. A GM can encourage this by making an "up for grabs" free invoke available on a zone aspect at the start of the scene, drawing characters (player and non-player alike) to leverage that aspect as part of their early strategy.

Challenges, Conflicts, and Contests

Many times, you will be able to resolve an action with a single roll of the dice—do you crack the safe, avoid security, or convince the reporter to give you their notes? Other times you'll face extended engagements that take many rolls to resolve. For those cases, we offer three resolution tools: **challenges**, **contests**, and **conflicts**. Each does things a little differently, depending on the goal of the engagement and the opposition involved.

- **A challenge is a complicated or dynamic situation.** You'll be opposed by someone or something, but there isn't a dominant "other side." This is how you might play out a researcher looking for clues in an ancient tome, the party negotiator distracting the librarian, and the bruiser holding back untold horrors from entering the library all at the same time.
- **A contest is a situation where two parties are pursuing mutually exclusive goals, but not actively harming one another.** Contests are perfect for chases, debates, and races of all sorts. (And just because the parties are not trying to harm each other doesn't mean that harm can't befall them!)
- **A conflict is when characters can and want to harm one another.** Wrestling in the mud with a cultist as knives stab at bellies, riddling a swarm of ghouls with bullets as their claws rake at your flesh, and an exchange of vicious barbs with your rival under the watchful eye of the queen—these are all conflicts.

Setting Up Scenes

Regardless of the type of scene, the GM will start by setting the essential pieces into place, so that the players know what resources are available and what complications are in play.

Zones

Zones are a representation of the physical space—a quick map broken into a few discrete sections. A conflict in a remote farmhouse might have four zones: the first floor, second floor, front yard, and back woods. Two to four zones are sufficient to handle most conflicts. Large or complicated scenes may require more. Try to keep your zone map to a simple sketch, something that fits on a note card or can be quickly drawn on a whiteboard.

Zones help guide the story by shaping what is possible. Who you can attack and where you can move depend on the zone you're in.

Anyone in a zone can interact with everyone and everything in that zone. This means you can hit, stab, or otherwise physically engage with people and things in your zone. Need to open that wall safe in the bedroom? You'll have to be in that zone. Anything outside your zone is usually beyond your reach—you'll need to move to get there, or use something that can extend your reach there (telekinesis, a gun, etc).

Moving between zones is easy, as long as there's nothing in your way. **You can move to an adjacent zone in addition to your action during an exchange (page XX) as long as nothing is in your way.** If your movement is impeded, it takes your action to do so. Make an overcome roll to climb a wall, rush past a group of cultists, or leap across rooftops. If you fail, you stay in your zone or the movement costs you something. You can also use your action to move *anywhere* on the map—though the GM is within rights to set a high difficulty if it's an epic movement.

If something isn't risky or interesting enough to merit a roll, then it isn't an impediment to movement. For instance, you don't need to use up your action opening an unlocked door—that's just a part of the movement.

Shooting lets you attack from a distance. Ranged attacks can target enemies in adjacent zones or maybe further, if the zones are clear enough. If there's a creature rooting around in the bedroom upstairs and around the corner, you can't shoot it from the bottom of the stairs. Pay attention to the way the zones and situation aspects are set up when deciding what's fair game or not.

Situation Aspects

When setting the scene, the GM should think of interesting and dynamic environmental features that can constrain the action or provide opportunities to change the situation by using them. Three to five details are more than enough. Use these categories as a guide:

- **Tone, mood, or weather**—darkness, lightning, and howling winds
- **Impediments to movement**—connected by ladders, covered in slime, and filled with smoke
- **Cover and obstructions**—vehicles, pillars, and crates
- **Dangerous features**—crates of TNT, barrels of oil, and eldritch artifacts crackling with electricity
- **Usable objects**—improvised weapons, statues or bookshelves to knock over, and doors to be barred

Anyone can invoke and compel these aspects, so remember to take them into account when you wrestle that cultist to the ground amid the **Caustic Slime Covering Everything**.

More situation aspects can be written down as the scene plays out. If it makes sense that there are **Deep Shadows** in the recesses of the catacombs, go ahead and write that down when a player asks if there are any shadows they can use to hide. Other aspects come into play because characters use the create an advantage action. Things like **Flames Everywhere!** don't just happen without character action. Well. Usually.

Free Invokes on the scene's aspects?

It's up to the GM to decide if a situation aspect arising from the scene's setup provides a free invoke to the players (or even to the NPCs). Some of the scene's aspects might provide a clever player just the advantage they need right away—and a free invoke can be a strong incentive to drive players to interact with the environment. Free invokes also might end up on the scene's aspects at the start due to preparations made in advance.

Zone Aspects

A mentioned on **page XX**, Some situation aspects might apply to specific zones on the map, and not others. That's okay—it can add some extra texture, opportunity, and challenge to the map that might be lacking otherwise.

Turn Order

Often, you won't need to know who is acting precisely when, but in contests and conflicts turn order can become important. These scenes take place over a series of **exchanges**. In an exchange, each involved character can take one overcome, create an advantage, or attack action, and can move once. (Contests work slightly differently; see **page XX**.) Because defending is a reaction to someone else's action, characters can defend as many times as they need to during other characters' turns, so long as they can justify their ability to interfere based on what's already been established in the story.

At the start of a scene, the GM and players decide who goes first based on the situation, then the active player picks who goes next. The GM's characters are selected in the turn order just like the PCs, with the GM deciding who goes next after the NPCs have acted. After everyone has taken a turn, the last player picks who goes next at the start of the next exchange.

Cassandra and Ruth have stumbled across a small group of cultists, led by an acolyte in a golden mask, performing some arcane ritual. Because the cultists are focused on their work, the GM declares that the PCs will go first in this conflict. The players decide that Cassandra will act first: she creates an advantage against the masked cultist, **Distracted**, by running directly at them screaming. It's crude but effective. To make the best use of the situation aspect, Cassandra's player decides that Ruth should go next. Ruth throws a dagger at the masked acolyte, and immediately invokes **Distracted** to improve her attack. It's not enough to take out the acolyte in one hit, but it is a one-two punch that leaves the cultist reeling.

Unfortunately, now that all the PCs in the scene have acted, Ruth has no choice but to pick one of the cultists to go next. She chooses the masked acolyte. The GM smiles, because they know that once the acolyte acts, she can have the cultists act until the end of the round, at which point they can choose the masked acolyte to start the next exchange. The PCs may have gotten a good first hit in, but now the cultists get to fight back.

Teamwork

Fate offers three methods for teamwork: combining the same skill from multiple characters on a single roll, stacking free invokes by creating advantages to set up a team member for success, and invoking aspects on an ally's behalf.

When you combine skills, figure out who has the highest level in the skill among the participants. Each other participant who has at least Average (+1) in that skill adds a +1 to the highest person's skill level. Providing support like this uses your action for the exchange. Supporters face the same costs and consequences as the person making the roll. The maximum total bonus a team may provide this way is equal to the highest person's skill level.

Otherwise, you can create an advantage on your turn and let an ally use the free invokes when it makes sense that they can. Outside of your turn, you may invoke an aspect to add a bonus to someone else's roll.

Challenges

Many of the difficulties your characters face can be handled with a single roll in the course of a scene—disarm the bomb, find the tome of eldritch lore, or decode the cypher. But sometimes things are more fluid, more complicated, and it's just not as simple as finding the tome of eldritch lore because the yacht you're searching is careening through Hong Kong harbor while a monsoon rages outside and the boat's library is on fire—which is totally not your fault.

In complicated circumstances with no opposition, you'll want to use a **challenge**: a series of overcome actions that tackle a bigger issue. Challenges let the entire group work together in a scene, and they keep things dynamic.

To set up a challenge, the GM considers the situation and picks a number of skills that can contribute to the success of the group. Treat each action as a separate overcome roll.

GMs, do your best to give each character in the scene an opportunity to contribute—aim for a number of skills equal to the number of characters involved. If you expect to have some of the characters pulled away or distracted by other priorities, downsize accordingly. For more difficult challenges, build the challenge with more needed actions than there are characters, in addition to adjusting the difficulties of the actions.

After the rolls have been made, the GM will evaluate the successes, failures, and costs of each action as they interpret how the scene proceeds. It could be that the results lead into another challenge, a contest, or even a conflict. A mix of successes and failures should allow the characters to move forward with a partial victory as they face new entangling complications.

Contests

A **contest** is when two or more sides are in direct opposition but there isn't a conflict. This doesn't mean one side doesn't *want* to hurt the other. Contests may involve the group trying to escape or counteract danger (such as an erupting volcano or angry god) before the danger cuts off any chance of victory.

At the start of a contest, everyone involved declares their intent, what they hope to get out of it. If there are multiple PCs involved, they can be on the same or different sides, depending on their goals—*e.g.,* in a foot race, each character might be on their own side. **If the PCs can't or aren't trying to harm the enemy, the GM can still declare a goal of harming or killing the PCs.**

Contests take place over a series of exchanges (**page XX**), during which each side will take an overcome action to do something to achieve their goals. Only one character on each side takes the overcome action in each exchange, but their allies can provide teamwork and try to create advantages to assist (which comes with some risk—see below). The overcome actions can be against passive difficulties—if the contestants are facing separate environmental challenges—or compared against one another when they're in direct competition.

At the end of each exchange, compare the efforts of each side's action. The side with the highest effort marks a **victory**. If the victor succeeds with style—and no one else did—then they mark **two** victories. The first one to three victories wins the contest. (You can always decide instead to run an extended contest requiring more victories, though we recommend no more than five.)

When there's a tie for the highest effort, no one marks a victory, and an **unexpected**

twist happens. The GM will introduce a new situation aspect to reflect how the scene, terrain, or situation has changed.

In contests where something is trying to harm any of the contestants, the PCs take hits whenever the opposition beats them in an exchange. The hit has shifts equal to the shifts of failure, just as if they were in a conflict. Just like in a conflict, if a character can't absorb all the shifts of a hit, they are taken out.

Creating Advantages in a Contest

During any exchange, your side can try to create advantages before making your overcome roll. If you're targeting another participant, they get to defend. If someone can interfere, they may oppose it with a defend roll as normal. Each participant may attempt to create an advantage in addition to rolling or providing a teamwork bonus (**page XX**). If you fail to create an advantage, you have a choice: either your side forfeits its overcome roll, or you may "succeed at a cost" (preserving your roll or teamwork bonus) by giving the other side a free invoke instead. If you at least tie, proceed as normal with your roll or bonus.

Conflicts

When the heroes get into a straight-up fight—whether with the authorities, cultists, or some unspeakable horror—and can win, you have a **conflict**. In other words, use conflicts when violence or coercion is a reasonable means to the ends of the PCs.

Conflicts may seem the most straightforward—after all, the history of roleplaying games is built on combat simulators. But keep in mind a key part of their description: the characters involved have the capability to harm *each other*. If it's one-sided—say you're trying to punch a living mountain—there's no chance you can hurt it. That's not a conflict. That's a contest, probably where the PCs are trying to escape or find the means to fight back.

Conflicts can be physical or mental. Physical conflicts can be shoot-outs, sword-fights, or ramming extradimensional beings with trucks. Mental conflicts include arguments with loved ones, interrogations, and eldritch assaults upon the mind.

Taking Harm

When an attack is successful, the defender must absorb the hit, which has shifts equal to the difference between the attack's effort and defense's effort.

You can absorb shifts of a hit by marking stress boxes and by taking consequences. If you can't or don't absorb all of the shifts, you are **taken out** (**page XX**)—you're removed from the scene, and the attacker decides how it plays out.

> A series of regrettable decisions has put Charles in a dank basement, confronting a ghoul that very much wants to eat him. The ghoul attacks, lunging with its sharp claws; this is an attack using its Fair (+2) Fight. The GM rolls ■■➕➕, bringing the effort up to Great (+4). Charles tries to leap out of the way with his Good (+3) Athletics, but rolls ■■■➖, taking his effort down to Fair (+2). Because the ghoul's attack effort was two steps higher than Charles's defense effort, Charles must absorb two shifts. He marks the first two of his three physical stress boxes; already the fight is proving dangerous.

Stress

Simply put, **stress** is plot armor. It's a resource used to keep your character up and in the fight when their foes hit them. When you mark stress boxes to absorb a hit, you're saying things like, "That *just* missed me," or "Whoa, that knocked the wind out of me but I'm okay." That said, it's a limited resource—most characters only have three boxes for physical stress and three boxes for mental stress, though characters with high Will or Physique have more.

You'll find two **stress tracks** on your character sheet, one for physical harm and one for mental harm. When you take a hit, you can mark empty stress boxes of the appropriate type to absorb it and stay in the fight. Each stress box you mark absorbs one shift. You can mark multiple stress boxes if you need to.

The boxes are binary—either they're empty and can be used or they're full and can't. That's okay, though. You'll clear the stress track as soon as you make it through the scene—provided the monsters don't eat you first.

Consequences

Consequences are new aspects you write on your character sheet when your character takes a hit, representing the real harm and injury your character suffers.

When you take a consequence to absorb a hit, write an aspect in an empty consequence slot that describes what harm befalls your character. Use the severity of the consequence as a guide: If you were bitten by star spawn, a mild consequence might be **Nasty Bite**, but a moderate consequence could be **Bite That Won't Stop Bleeding**, and a severe consequence might be **Crippled Leg**.

While stress turns a hit into a near miss, taking a consequence means you got hit hard. Why would you take a consequence? Because sometimes stress isn't enough. Remember, you have to absorb *all* the shifts of the hit to stay in the fight. You only have so many stress boxes. The good news is that consequences can take pretty big hits.

Each character starts with three consequence slots—mild, moderate, and severe. Taking a minor consequence absorbs two shifts, a moderate one absorbs four shifts, and a severe one absorbs six shifts.

So, if you take a big five-shift hit, you can absorb the whole thing with a single stress box and a moderate consequence. That's a lot more efficient than spending five of your stress boxes.

The downside to consequences is that they are aspects—and aspects are always true (**page XX**). So if you've got **Gut Shot**, your character's gut is shot! That will mean you can't do things a gut-shot person can't do (like run fast). If things get particularly complicated due to this, you might even face a compel on your consequence, too. And, just like the aspects you make when you create an advantage, the character that created the consequence—that is, whoever shot you—gets one free invoke on that consequence. Ouch!

> Charles is still battling the ghoul. It claws at him, this time rolling a ■■✚✚, adding its Fair (+2) Fight, and invokes its **Hungry for Flesh** aspect for an additional +2, adding up to a devastating Fantastic (+6) blow. Charles's –■■, added to his Good (+3) Athletics, gives him a merely Average (+1) defense; that's five shifts he needs to absorb. He chooses to take a moderate consequence. His player and the GM decide that the ghoul gave Charles a **Gaping Chest Wound**. This consequence absorbs four of the shifts, leaving one, which Charles absorbs with his last remaining stress box.

Getting Taken Out

If you can't absorb all the shifts of a hit with stress and consequences, you're **taken out**.

Getting taken out is bad. Whoever took you out decides what happens. Given dangerous situations and powerful enemies, this could mean you're dead, but that's not the only possibility. The outcome must be in keeping with the scope and scale of the conflict at hand—you won't die of shame if you lose an argument—but changes to your character sheet (and more) are possible. The outcome should also fit within the boundaries your group has established—if your group feels that characters should never get killed without the player's consent, that's perfectly valid.

But even when death is on the table (it's best to be clear about that before a roll), GMs should remember that it's usually a boring result. A PC that's been taken out could be lost, kidnapped, imperiled, be forced to take consequences... the list goes on. A character's death means someone has to make a new character and bring them into the story, but a fate worse than death is limited only by your imagination.

Follow the fiction when describing how someone—or something—is taken out. Was a cultist taken out by a barrage of machine gun fire? A spray of red fills the air as they slump with a wet thump to the ground. Were you hurled from the truck as it crossed the 26th Street overpass? You disappear over the edge and are left behind as the conflict rumbles on along the Dan Ryan. Keep death in mind when discussing the terms of being taken out, but often it's just as interesting to cheat death.

> The ghoul gets in a very lucky hit, dealing a Legendary (+8) attack against Charles's Poor (-1) defense. By this point in the conflict, all of Charles's stress boxes are full, as is his moderate consequence slot. Even if he were to take a mild and a severe consequence at once, absorbing eight shifts, it wouldn't be enough. As a result, Charles is taken out. The ghoul gets to decide his fate. The GM would be within their rights to have the ghoul kill Charles then and there...but getting killed isn't the most interesting result.
>
> Instead, the GM declares that Charles survives, getting knocked out and dragged to the ghoul's lair, consequences intact. Charles will wake up lost and very fragile in the pitch-dark catacombs beneath the city. Because he was taken out, Charles has no choice but to accept the terms laid before him.

Conceding

So how do you keep from dying horribly—or worse? You can interrupt any action in a conflict to **concede** as long as the dice haven't hit the table yet. Just give in. Tell everyone that you're done, that you can't keep going. Your character loses and exits the conflict, but **you gain a fate point** plus an extra one for each consequence they took in the current conflict.

Also, concession means *you* declare the terms of your loss and how you exit the conflict. You can escape the monsters and live to fight another day. It is a loss, though. You'll have to give your foe something they want. You can't concede and describe how you heroically save the day—that's not on the table anymore.

Conceding is a powerful tool. You can concede to escape with an action plan for the next fight, a clue as to where to go, or some advantage going forward. You just can't win *this* fight.

You must concede before your opponent rolls the dice. You can't wait to see the outcome of the dice and concede when it's obvious you can't win—that's poor form.

Some negotiation is expected, here. Look for a solution that works for everyone at the table. If the opposition isn't on board with the terms of your concession, they can push for rewording those terms, or ask that you sacrifice something different or extra. Because a concession is still a loss for you, that does mean the other side should gain at least part of what they're after.

The more significant the cost you pay, the greater the benefit your side should receive as part of the concession—if certain doom is about to befall the entire group, one member choosing to concede as a heroic (and fatal) last stand could mean everyone else is spared!

Ending a Conflict

A conflict draws to a close when everyone on one side has either conceded or been taken out. At the end of a conflict, any players who conceded collect their fate points for the concession (**page XX**). The GM also pays out fate points owed to players for hostile invokes (**page XX**) that happened during the conflict.

Recovering from Conflicts

At the end of each scene, every character clears their stress boxes. Consequences take more time and effort to clear.

To start the **recovery process**, the person treating you will need to succeed at an overcome action with an appropriate skill. Physical injuries typically are addressed using medical knowledge via Academics, while mental consequences are healed with Empathy. This overcome action faces difficulty equal to the severity of the consequence: Fair (+2) for a mild consequence, Great (+4) for moderate, and Fantastic (+6) for severe. These difficulties increase by two when you're trying to treat yourself (it's easier to have someone else do that).

If you succeed on this roll, rewrite the consequence to indicate that it is healing. A **Broken Arm** may be rewritten as **Arm in a Cast**, for instance.

Success here is only the first hurdle—it takes time to clear the consequence.

- **Mild** consequences take one full scene after treatment to clear.
- **Moderate** consequences last longer, taking a full session after treatment to clear.
- **Severe** consequences only clear when you reach a major milestone (**page XX**) after treatment.

Advancement

As your characters muck about in the storyline, they'll grow and change. At the end of each session you'll earn a **minor milestone**, which lets you move things around on your character sheet. As you conclude each arc of the story, you'll earn a **major milestone**, which lets you add things to your character sheet. (Learn more about sessions and arcs on **page XX**.)

Minor Milestones

Minor milestones happen at the end of a session, part of the way through dealing with a story arc. They are focused on adjusting your character laterally rather than advancing the character. You may not wish to use a minor milestone, which is fine. It doesn't always make sense to change your character. The opportunity is there if you need it.

During a minor milestone, you can do one of the following:

- Switch the ranks of any two skills, or replace one Average (+1) skill with one that isn't on your sheet.
- Rewrite one stunt.
- Purchase a new stunt by spending 1 refresh. (Remember, you can't go below 1 refresh.)
- Rewrite any one of your aspects, except your high concept.

Major Milestones

Major milestones are more significant, letting your character actually grow in power. A major milestone lets you do one thing from the minor milestone list. On top of that, you do *all* of the following:

- Rewrite your character's high concept, if you care to.
- If you have any moderate or severe consequences not yet in recovery, you can begin the recovery process and rename them. Any that were already in recovery may now be cleared.
- Increase the skill rating of one skill by one step—even from Mediocre (+0) to Average (+1).

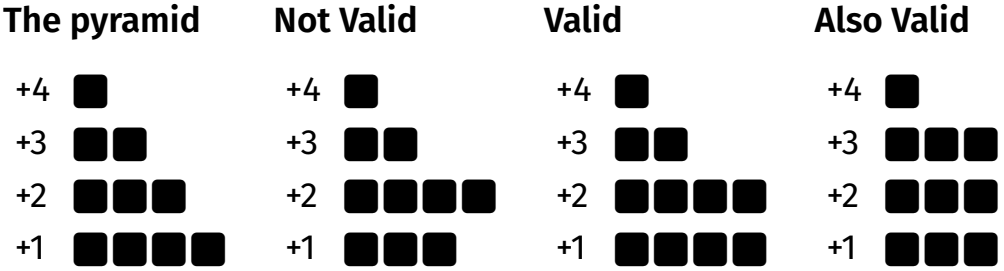
If the GM feels a major plot development has concluded and it's time for the characters to "power up," they may also offer one or both of the following:

- Gain a point of refresh, which you can immediately spend to buy a new stunt if you like.
- Increase a second skill rating by one step.

Improving Skill Ratings

When improving a skill rating, you must maintain a “column” structure. Each step may not have more skills than the step below it. That may mean you need to promote a few Mediocre (+0) skills first—or, you may save up your skill points rather than spend them immediately, allowing big increases all at once.

Ruth wants to increase her Lore from Average (+1) to Fair (+2), but this means she’d have four Fair (+2) skills and only three Average (+1)...that won’t do. Luckily, she has saved a second skill point from an earlier milestone, so she also increases her Mediocre (+0) Empathy to Average (+1). Now she has one Great (+4), two Good (+3), four Fair (+2), and four Average (+1) skills.



Sessions and Arcs

There are a few assumptions at play here where we talk about sessions and arcs. We’d like to shine some light on those assumptions so you can make adjustments based on how your game differs from them.

A **session** is a single session of play comprised of several scenes and a few hours of gameplay. Think of this as similar to a single episode of a television show. It likely falls into the three-to-four hour range.

An **arc** is a series of sessions that often contain plot elements that carry over from session to session. Those plot elements don’t have to conclude within an arc, but there are usually significant developments and changes that come about over the course of it. Think of this as similar to a third- or half-season of a television show. It’s likely comprised of about four sessions of play.

If your gameplay falls outside of those “likely” ranges, you may want to change how some parts of the milestones work. If your arcs run more than four to six sessions of play, you may want to allow Severe consequences to clear after four sessions pass rather than waiting until the end of the arc. If you want advancement to happen more slowly, you might allow improvements like skill points and refresh gains less often. If your group tends to schedule fairly short sessions, you might not hit a minor milestone at the end of every session. Season to taste; the game is yours to shape!

Being the Game Master

As the GM, you are the director of game sessions. Note that you are not the *boss. Fate Condensed* is collaborative, and the players have say in what happens to their characters. Your job is to keep things moving by doing these things:

- **Run scenes:** A session is made up of scenes. Decide where the scene begins, who's there, and what's going on. Decide when all the interesting things have played out and the scene's over. Skip over the unnecessary stuff; in the same way that you don't roll dice if the outcome of an action won't be interesting, don't have a scene if nothing exciting, dramatic, useful, or fun will happen during it.
- **Adjudicate the rules:** When some question comes up about how to apply the rules, you can discuss it with the players and try to reach an agreeable consensus, but you get final say.
- **Set difficulty:** Decide when rolls are necessary and set their difficulties.
- **Determine the costs of failure:** When a character fails their roll, you decide what the cost of success at a cost will be. You can certainly take suggestions from the player—they may know just how they want their character to get hurt—but you ultimately decide.
- **Play the NPCs:** Each player controls their own character, but you control all the rest, from cultists to monsters to the Big Bad itself.
- **Give the PCs opportunities for action:** If the players don't know what to do next, it's your job to give them a nudge. Never let things get too bogged down in indecision or lack of information—do something to shake things up. When in doubt, think about your Big Bad's tactics and goals to create a spot of bother for the heroes.
- **Make sure everyone gets the spotlight:** Your goal isn't to defeat the players, but to challenge them. Make sure each PC gets a chance to be the star once in a while. Spread around compels and challenges tailored to the characters' different abilities and weaknesses.
- **Complicate the PCs' lives:** In addition to throwing monsters at the characters, you will be the primary source of compels. Players can compel themselves and other characters, of course, but you must ensure that everyone gets opportunities to experience the negative repercussions of their aspects.
- **Build off player choices:** Look at the actions the PCs have taken during play and think about how the world changes and responds. Make the world feel alive by presenting the PCs with those consequences—good and bad—in play.

Setting Difficulty and Opposition

Sometimes, a PC's action will face **opposition** via a defend roll from another character in the scene. In this case, the opposing character rolls dice and adds their relevant skill rating, just like the PC. If the opposing character has relevant aspects, they can be invoked; the GM can invoke NPCs' aspects using the fate point in their pool (**page XX**).

But if there's no opposition, you have to decide on the **difficulty** of the action:

- **Low difficulties**, below the PC's relevant skill rating, are best when you want to give them a chance to show off.
- **Moderate difficulties**, near the PC's relevant skill rating, are best when you want to provide tension but not overwhelm them.
- **High difficulties**, much higher than the PC's relevant skill rating, are best when you

want to emphasize how dire or unusual the circumstances are and make them pull out all the stops, or put them in a position where they will need to suffer the consequences of failure.

Likewise, use the adjective ladder (**page XX**) of ratings to help you choose an appropriate difficulty. Is it superbly difficult? Then pick Superb (+5)! Here are a few rules of thumb to get you started.

If the task isn't very tough at all, make it Mediocre (+0)—or just tell the player they succeed without a roll, as long as there's no serious time pressure or the character has an aspect that suggests they'd be good at it.

If you can think of at least one reason why the task is tough, pick Fair (+2); for every extra factor working against them, add another +2 to the difficulty.

When thinking about those factors, consult what aspects are in play. When something is important enough to be made an aspect, it should get a little attention here. Since aspects are true (**page XX**), they might have influence over how easy or difficult something should be. That doesn't mean that aspects are the only factors to consider, of course! Darkness is darkness regardless of whether or not you decided to make it an aspect on the scene.

If the task is impossibly difficult, go as high as you think makes sense. The PC will need to drop some fate points and get lots of help to succeed, but that's fine.

For an expanded look at what you can do to create varied and interesting opposition and adversaries for your players, check out the *Fate Adversary Toolkit*, available for sale as a PDF or with its essentials freely available in the online system reference documents at *https://fate-srd.com/*

NPCs

NPCs include bystanders, supporting cast, allies, foes, monsters, and pretty much anything else that might complicate or oppose the efforts of the PCs. You will probably want to create other characters for the PCs to interact with.

Major NPCs

If someone is particularly important to the story, you can stat them out just like a PC. This is appropriate for someone who the PCs will deal with a lot, such as an ally, a rival, the representative of a powerful group, or a Big Bad.

A major NPC doesn't necessarily follow the same limits as a starting PC. If the NPC is going to be a recurring boss-level threat, give them a higher peak skill (see *Setting Difficulty and Opposition* on **page XX**), more stunts, and whatever else it takes to make them a danger.

Minor NPCs

NPCs that aren't going to be major, recurring characters don't need to be nearly as well-defined as major NPCs. For a minor NPC, only define what is absolutely necessary.

Most minor NPCs will have a single aspect, which is just what they are: **Guard Dog**, **Obstructive Bureaucrat**, or **Enraged Cultist**, etc.

If necessary, give them another aspect or two to reflect something interesting about them or a weakness. They may also have a stunt.

Give them one or two skills to describe what they're good at. You can use skills from the

skill list or make up something more specific, like Fair (+2) at Getting into Bar Fights or Great (+4) at Biting People.

Give them zero to three stress boxes; the more they have, the more of a threat they can be. Generally, they have no consequence slots; if they take a hit with more shifts than they can absorb with stress, they are simply taken out. Minor NPCs aren't meant to stick around.

Monsters, Big Bads, and Other Threats

Like minor NPCs, monsters and other threats (like a storm, a spreading fire, or a squad of armored minions) are written up as characters, but are usually simpler than a PC. You only need to define what is absolutely necessary. Unlike minor NPCs, these threats can be defined really in any way. Break the rules. Give them whatever combination of aspects, skills, stunts, stress, and consequences it will take to make them dangerous, and think about what sort of difficulties they will present to the PCs when determining their ratings.

Your Fate Points

At the start of each scene, begin with a pool of fate points equal to the number of PCs. If the scene includes a major NPC or monster that conceded (**page XX**) a previous conflict, or received hostile invokes (**page XX**) in a previous scene, those fate points are added to your pool. If you received a compel in the prior scene that ended that scene, giving you no opportunity to spend the earned fate point, you may add that point to your pool as well.

> Charles, Ruth, Cassandra, and Ethan are headed for the final confrontation with Alice Westforth. Previously, she escaped from the heroes by conceding a conflict after she had taken a moderate consequence. That means the GM gets four fate points for the PCs and two more that Alice is bringing along.

As the GM, you can spend fate points from this pool to invoke aspects, refuse compels that the players offer NPCs, and use any NPC stunts that require you to—all exactly as the players do.

However, you do *not* need to spend fate points to compel any aspects. You have an infinite supply of fate points for that purpose.

Safety Tools

GMs (and truly, players as well) have a responsibility to ensure that everyone at the table feels safe in the game and space they're playing. One way a GM can support this is by offering a framework for anyone at the table to voice a concern or objection. When this happens, it must take priority and must be addressed. Here are some tools that can help make that process more available to the players at the table and more easy to enact when necessary.

- **The X-Card:** The X-Card is an optional tool (created by John Stavropoulos) that allows anyone in your game (including you) to edit out any content anyone is uncomfortable with as you play. You can learn more about the X-Card at http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg
- **Script Change RPG Toolbox:** For something with a bit more nuance and granularity, look to Script Change by Brie Beau Sheldon, which provides options to pause, rewind, skip ahead, and more using an accessibly familiar media-player metaphor. Learn more about Script Change at http://tinyurl.com/nphed7m

Tools like these may also be used like the bogus rule (**page XX**) for calibration. They offer a way for players to comfortably advocate for what they're looking for in the game. Give such tools the respect and support they deserve!

Optional Rules

These are a few optional or alternative rules you can decide to use in your game.

Conditions

Conditions are a substitute for consequences, and replace them entirely. Conditions serve two purposes: they take some of the pressure off of the players and GM to quickly figure out a correctly-worded aspect for an inflicted consequence, and they give you an opportunity to shape the nature of your game by pre-defining the ways lasting harm befalls characters.

The *Fate Condensed* version of conditions takes each consequence level and splits it into two conditions of half the value.

☐ **Hurt** (Mild) ☐ **Scared** (Mild)
☐☐ **Injured** (Moderate) ☐☐ **Shaken** (Moderate)
☐☐☐ **Wounded** (Severe) ☐☐☐ **Demoralized** (Severe)

These correspond to physical and mental states—but just because you've taken a physical hit doesn't mean you can't also mark a mental condition, and vice-versa, so long as it makes sense. Attacks are traumatic!

Conditions are recovered just like consequences, based on their severity.

If you would gain an additional mild consequence, instead gain two more boxes on either **Hurt** or **Scared**, as appropriate.

Moving Conditions Further Apart

If you would prefer instead to keep physical and mental conditions separate, double the number of boxes on each. That said, there is a cutoff: if two boxes total are marked on either condition in a row, no more boxes may be marked on that row. So if you had one box (out of two) marked on **Hurt** and none on **Scared**, and then marked either the second **Hurt** box or first **Scared** box, you would no longer be able to mark any more boxes on that row.

If you would gain a mild consequence slot (from high Physique, Will, or a stunt), instead add two more boxes of **Hurt** or **Scared** as appropriate. These added boxes increase the cutoff threshold for that row, one for one.

Other Versions of Conditions

Several published Fate-based games use conditions instead of consequences. Feel free to adopt their implementation instead of this one if it better suits you. Each one achieves much the same purpose for the game: reducing pressure to figure out consequence aspects on the fly, and guiding the nature of the game by limiting the kinds of lasting harm characters can take.

Alternative Skill Lists

When building your own implementation of Fate, the first thing to think about is whether or not you'll keep the same skill list. Often you can work with the one given, combining, changing, or splitting apart a few of the skills given. But it's possible that the granularity of the default example skill list we've given above isn't to your liking. Here are some things to think about.

- The default skill list has 19 skills in it, and players rate their characters above the

Mediocre (+0) default in 10 of them. If you change the number of skills, you may want to change how the ratings are allocated.

- Our default skills are focused on answering the question "what can you do?"—but your list doesn't need to follow in line with that. You might want a list focused on "What do you believe?", the question "How do you do things?" (as with approaches in *Fate Accelerated*), job-roles in a crew of grifters and thieves, and so on.
- Skill ratings in Fate are structured to support character niches. That's why, in the default, players start with a "pyramid" shape. Make sure niche protection is possible in whatever new list you create.
- The best starting skill should come in around Great (+4). You can alter this up or down as you see fit, but make sure to keep an eye on what that means for the difficulty and opposing skill ratings your PCs will face.

> Fred decides he wants to do a space-faring Fate game with a shorter skill list that's focused on action-words. He settles on this 9-item skill list: Fight, Know, Move, Notice, Pilot, Sneak, Speak, Tinker, and Will. He also likes the idea of a "diamond" shape for skill ratings rather than a pyramid, so he has players rate their starting skills as follows: 1 at Great (+4), 2 at Good (+3), 3 at Fair (+2), 2 at Average (+1), and 1 at Mediocre (+0). His PCs will have a lot of overlap and core competencies due to the fat middle of his diamond, while still enjoying some niche protections at the top of the diamond's "point."

Changing the Skill List

Our default skill setup presents a list of 19 skills arranged in a pyramid of 10. That list is also structured around a traditional notion of capabilities in various fields of action, in essence addressing the question "what can you do?" Other skill lists aren't necessarily the same length, arranged the same way, or addressing the same question. With that said, here are some short skill lists to consider, borrow, and modify.

- **Actions:** Endure, Fight, Know, Move, Notice, Pilot, Sneak, Speak, Tinker.
- **Approaches:** Careful, Clever, Flashy, Forceful, Quick, Sneaky.
- **Aptitudes:** Athletics, Combat, Leadership, Scholarship, Subterfuge.
- **Attributes:** Strength, Dexterity, Toughness, Intelligence, Charm.
- **Relationships:** Leading, Partnering, Supporting, Solo.
- **Roles:** Driver, Hitter, Hacker, Gearhead, Grifter, Thief, Mastermind.
- **Themes:** Air, Fire, Metal, Mind, Stone, Void, Water, Wind, Wood.
- **Values:** Duty, Glory, Justice, Love, Power, Safety, Truth, Vengeance.

If you want a longer list, try starting with the default list, adding, combining, and removing skills from it as needed until you land on what you're after. You could instead blend together two or more lists from the above in some form.

Advancement: The smaller the number of skills in your list vs. the default, the less frequent you'll want skill point awards from advancement. Perhaps allow them only during "power ups" (**page XX**), or restrict them another way.

Alternatives to the pyramid:

- **Diamond:** A broad middle (about a third of them) that tapers towards the top and bottom of the range, *e.g.*, 1 at +0, 2 at +1, 3 at +2, 2 at +3, 1 at +4.
- **Column:** A roughly equal number of skills rated at each tier. If your list is short enough, this might be a line, one skill per tier.

- **Free + Cap:** Give players enough skill points to make a pyramid (or other shape), but don't mandate it. They can buy whatever, staying under the cap.

Coverage: Make sure to consider how many skills you expect to be rated out of the total. The default list has ratings in 53% (10 of 19). The higher the percentage, the more overlap players might have. Preserve niche protection.

Combination: You may want to have two lists, with players adding together one from each to make their roll. The main thing to keep in mind is keeping the potential totals inside the zero-to-cap range. You might have ratings from +0 to +2 on each list, or -1 to +1 on one and +1 to +3 on the other, etc.

Countdowns

A countdown adds urgency to an adversary or situation: deal with it now or things will get worse. Whether you're talking about a ticking bomb, a ritual near completion, a bus teetering on the edge of a suspension bridge, or a soldier with a radio who's about to call in reinforcements, countdowns force the PCs to act quickly or face a worse outcome.

Countdowns have three components: a countdown track, one or more triggers, and an outcome.

The **countdown track** looks a lot like a stress track: it's a row of boxes that you mark from left to right. Every time you check off a box, the countdown gets closer to being over. The shorter the track, the faster their doom approaches.

A **trigger** is an event that marks a box on the countdown track. It can be as simple as "a minute/hour/day/exchange elapses" or as specific as "the villain takes a consequence or gets taken out."

When you mark the last box, the countdown ends and the **outcome** happens, whatever it is.

GMs might wish to reveal the existence of a countdown track to players without telling them what it represents, at first, as a kind of foreshadowing and to turn up the feeling of tension in the story.

A countdown can have more than one trigger if you want; perhaps the countdown proceeds at a predictable pace until something happens that accelerates it. You could also give a different trigger to each box on the countdown track, if you want a specific series of events to set off the outcome.

Extreme Consequences

Extreme consequences introduce an optional fourth severity of consequence to your game: something that permanently, irrevocably changes a character.

Taking an extreme consequence reduces stress taken by 8. When taken, you must **replace** one of your character's existing aspects (other than their high concept, which is off-limits) with an aspect that represents the profound change to the character resulting from the harm they've taken.

By default, there is no option to recover from an extreme consequence. It has become a part of the character now. At your next major milestone you may rename it to reflect how you've come to terms with it, but you can't go back to the original aspect.

Between major milestones, a character may only use this option once.

Faster Contests

Some groups may feel contests involve too many attempts to create advantages per exchange. For those groups, try the following method: In each exchange of a contest, each participant may choose only one of these three options:

- Make the overcome roll for their side (**page XX**).
- Roll to create an advantage, but no teamwork bonus (**page XX**).
- Provide their teamwork bonus to their side's overcome roll or another's attempt to create an advantage. Don't roll.

Full Defense

Sometimes a player (or GM) may want their character to go all-in on using defend until their next turn, rather than taking an action on their turn. This is called **full defense**.

When declaring full defense, you must be clear about the **focus** of your efforts. By default, you are defending yourself (from attacks and efforts to create advantages on you), but you may wish to specify someone you're protecting, or a defense against a particular group of aggressors, or a particular effort or outcome you wish to oppose.

While on full defense you get a +2 to all defend rolls relevant to your declared focus.

If nothing comes of it and you haven't rolled to defend at all by the time your next turn comes around, you gain a boost (**page XX**) as you've gotten the opportunity to prepare for your next action. This offsets "losing a turn" because you focused your efforts on defending against something that didn't happen at all.

Obstacles

The defining quality of enemies is that they can be attacked and taken out. By contrast, the defining quality of **obstacles** is that they can't. Obstacles make scenes demonstrably more difficult on the PCs, but the PCs cannot simply fight them. Obstacles must be circumvented, endured, or rendered irrelevant.

While most obstacles are features of the environment, some might be characters that can't be taken out using conventional methods. The dragon might be a boss, but it might just as easily be a hazard obstacle. The animate statue keeping you from getting to the evil wizard might be a threat, but it could also be a block or a distraction. It all depends on the adversary's function in the scene, and how PCs must deal with it.

Obstacles don't appear in every scene. They serve to accent enemies in the scene, to make them more threatening or memorable, but overuse of obstacles can be frustrating to the PCs, particularly those focused on combat. You *can* use them to give less combative PCs something to do during a fight, though.

There are three kinds of obstacles: hazards, blocks, and distactions.

Hazards

If an obstacle can attack the PCs, it's a **hazard**. Fire jets, rolling boulders, or a sniper too far away to be dealt with directly—they're all hazards. Every hazard has a name, a skill rating, and a Weapon rating (**page XX**) of 1 to 4.

The hazard's name is both a skill and an aspect; that is, the name defines what the hazard can do, and its skill rating defines how good it is at doing that, but the name can also be invoked or compelled like any aspect.

Generally speaking, a hazard's skill rating should be at least as high as the PCs' highest skill rating, if not a little bit higher. A hazard with a very high skill rating *and* a very high Weapon rating will likely take out a PC or two. You could also make a hazard with a lower skill rating but a high Weapon rating, making for something that doesn't hit often but hits hard when it does. Reversing that makes a hazard that hits frequently but doesn't do much damage.

A hazard acts in the initiative just like the PCs and their enemies do. If your rules require everyone to roll for initiative, hazards will roll with their rating. On its turn each exchange, a hazard acts as implied by its name, and rolls with its rating. If it attacks and succeeds, add its Weapon rating to its shifts. Hazards can attack or create advantages; they can't be attacked, and they don't overcome obstacles.

If a player wants to overcome or create an advantage against a hazard, they'll face passive opposition equal to the hazard's rating.

Blocks

Where hazards exist to hurt the PCs, **blocks** prevent them from doing things they want to do. Blocks *can* cause stress, though they don't always. The chief differences between blocks and hazards is that blocks don't take actions and are more difficult to remove. Blocks provide passive opposition in certain circumstances, and can threaten or cause harm if not heeded.

Like hazards, blocks have a name and a skill rating, and the name is both a skill and an aspect. Unlike hazards, a block's skill rating shouldn't be much higher than one step above the PCs' highest skill rating; otherwise, things can get frustrating quickly. A block can have a Weapon rating as high as 4, but it doesn't need to have one.

Blocks only come into play under specific circumstances. A **Vat of Acid** only matters when someone tries to cross it or gets thrown into it. A **Chain Link Fence** only affects someone who tries to get past it. The **Animate Statue** only prevents entry into a specific room.

Blocks don't attack and don't have a turn in the initiative order. Instead, whenever a block would interfere with someone's action, they'll have to roll against the block's rating as a set difficulty. If the block can't cause harm, it simply prevents the PC from taking the action they wanted to. If it can cause harm and the PC fails to overcome the block, the PC takes a hit equal to the amount by which they missed the target.

Characters may try to force someone into a block as an attack. If you do this, you'll roll to attack as normal, but add a Weapon rating equal to half the block's Weapon rating (rounded down, minimum 1).

Finally, some blocks can be used as cover or as armor. This is situational—for some blocks, it simply won't make sense. You probably can't hide behind a **Vat of Acid**, but a **Chain Link Fence** *is* effective protection against a baseball bat, probably preventing the attack altogether.

When someone's using a block as cover, decide whether it mitigates or negates the attack. If it negates it, the attack simply isn't possible. If it mitigates it, the defender gets an Armor rating equal to half the block's skill rating (rounded down, minimum 1).

Use blocks sparingly. Blocks make it harder for PCs to take certain actions—so they can be frustrating if you overuse them—but they can also lead the players to think creatively. They may see an opportunity to turn blocks to their advantage. If they figure out how, let them!

Sometimes players will just want to remove blocks outright. To do so, make an overcome roll against a set difficulty equal to the block's rating plus two.

Distractions

Where hazards attack the PCs directly and blocks prevent them from taking certain actions, **distractions** force the PCs to figure out their priorities. Of the obstacles, distractions are often the least mechanically defined. They also don't necessarily make the scene mechanically harder. Rather, they present the PCs with difficult decisions. Here are the distraction's parts:

- A distraction's **name** is a brief, punchy representation of what it is. It can be an aspect, if you need or want it to be.
- A distraction's **choice** is a simple question that codifies the decision it gives to the PCs.
- A distraction's **repercussion** is what happens to the PCs if they don't deal with the distraction. Some distractions might have multiple repercussions, including repercussions for *successfully* dealing with the distraction.
- A distraction's **opposition** is its passive opposition against PCs rolling to deal with it. Not every distraction needs to provide opposition.

If you're afraid the PCs will deal handily with a fight you've got in store, adding a distraction or two can force them to decide whether it's more important to trounce the bad guys or deal with the distractions.

Dealing with a distraction should always have a clear benefit or, failing that, not dealing with a distraction should always have a clear consequence.

Examples of Obstacles

Hazards

- Great (+4) **Machine-Gun Turret**, Weapon:3
- Superb (+5) **Distant Sniper**, Weapon:4

Blocks

- Fair (+2) **Chain Link Fence** , Great (+4) difficulty to remove
- Good (+3) **Vat of Acid**, Weapon:4, Superb (+5) difficulty to remove

Distractions

- **Bus Full of Civilians—Choice:** *Will the bus plunge off the bridge?*
Opposition: Good (+3)
Repercussion (leave them): All of the civilians on the bus die.
Repercussion (save them): The villain gets away!
- **The Glittering Gem—Choice:** *Can you take the gem from the pedestal?*
Repercussion (leave the gem): You don't get the (priceless) gem.
Repercussion (take the gem): You activate the traps in the temple.

Scale

Scale is an optional subsystem that you can use to represent supernatural beings which operate on a level beyond the general range of capabilities of most characters in your game. Usually you don't need to worry about the impact of scale within your game. There may be times, however, where it's desirable to present the characters with a

threat bigger than they typically face—or an opportunity for the characters to punch outside their usual weight class.

As an example—you may wish to change the list to something more suitable to your setting—we'll present you with five potential levels of scale: Mundane, Supernatural, Otherworldly, Legendary, and Godlike.

- **Mundane** represents characters without access to supernatural power or technologies that would boost them beyond the capabilities of humans.
- **Supernatural** represents characters who do have access to supernatural powers or technologies reaching beyond human capacity but who are still effectively human at the core.
- **Otherworldly** represents unusual or unique characters whose powers set them apart from the normal concerns of humanity.
- **Legendary** represents powerful spirits, entities, and alien beings to whom humanity is more of a curiosity than a threat.
- **Godlike** represents the universe's mightiest forces: archangels, gods, faerie queens, living planets, and so on.

When applying scale to two opposing forces or individuals, compare the sides' levels and determine who is higher, and by how many levels. They get *one* of the following benefits on any rolled action against their lesser:

- +1 per level of difference to their action *before* the roll
- +2 per level of difference to the result *after* the roll, *if* the roll succeeds
- 1 additional free invoke per level of difference to the results of a successful create advantage action

Frequent and rigid application of scale rules may put player characters at a distinct disadvantage. Compensate by generously affording those players opportunities to subvert scale disadvantage in clever ways. Viable options include researching a target for weaknesses, changing the venue to one where scale doesn't apply, or altering goals so that their opponent cannot leverage their scale advantage.

Aspects and Scale

Active situation aspects sometimes represent a supernatural effect. In these cases, the GM may determine that invoking the aspect grants the additional benefit of its scale. Furthermore, a supernaturally created aspect can justify scale on some actions even without an invoke, such as in the case of a veil or high-tech camouflage suit; you need not invoke **Veiled** to gain Supernatural scale when sneaking about.

Does Scale Apply When Supernaturally Creating an Advantage?

If you are creating an advantage and *there is no opposition*, rather than rolling you simply gain the aspect with one free invoke. That aspect grants scale as previously described.

If you are creating the advantage *on someone else to their detriment*, such as casting **Entangled by Animated Vines** on your foe, you may gain scale on your effort to create the advantage.

If you are creating an advantage via supernatural means and *an opposing party can directly impede the effort via physical or supernatural interference*, your scale may apply against their defend roll.

Otherwise, you create the advantage without scale, but later use of that aspect grants scale when appropriate.

Time Shifts

When determining how long it takes characters to do something, you may want to use a more systematic approach to decide the impacts of success, failure, and "at a cost" options. How much longer or faster? Let the shifts decide, using these guidelines.

First, decide how long the task takes with a simple success. Use an approximate quantity plus a unit of time: "a few days," "half a minute," "several weeks," and so on. Approximate quantities for use include: half, about one, a few, or several of a given unit of time.

Then look at how many shifts the roll exceeds or misses the target by. Each shift is worth one quantity-step from wherever your starting point is.

So if your starting point is "a few hours," then one shift faster jumps the quantity down to "about one hour," two shifts down to "half an hour." Going faster than "half" drops the unit down to the next smaller (hours to minutes, etc) and quantity up to "several", so three shifts faster would be "several minutes."

In the case of slower, it's the same process in the opposite direction: one shift slower is "several hours," two is "half a day," three is "about one day."

Ways to Break the Rules for Big Bads

Between combining skills and creating advantages for teamwork (**page XX**), a group of PCs can really overwhelm a single opponent. This is fine if you want to respect the advantage of numbers, but not great if you want to present a "big bad" that's the equal of the whole group.

But remember, for monsters and other big threats it's acceptable to break the rules (**page XX**)—so do so by looking at ways to counteract the group's usual advantage of numbers, while still giving them a chance. Here are a few suggestions for ways you might do that. You can use one or more of these in combination for especially difficult or terrifying final bosses.

Challenge or Contest Immunity

Both of these methods are about drawing out the final confrontation by running the group through a clock-is-ticking-down activity before they can actually go after the big bad directly.

With **challenge immunity**, your big bad cannot be affected directly (mentally, physically, or both) until the group beats a challenge (e.g., dismantling the source of its power, figuring out what its weakness is, etc). The big bad, meanwhile, can act freely and may attack them during their efforts, oppose their overcome or create advantage efforts with its defend rolls, assail their free invokes with its own overcomes, or prepare for their eventual breakthrough by creating advantages of its own.

With **contest immunity**, the group must win a contest to be able to directly attack the big bad—and the big bad gets to attack them while they're trying. If the big bad wins the contest, it gets to pull off its scheme and get away unscathed.

Expendable Minion Armor

Surrounding yourself with minions is one way to try to balance a big bad's side against

the PCs, but it only goes so far if the players can just decide to go after the big bad directly and ignore those pesky minions for a while.

But with **expendable minion armor** in play, a big bad may always succeed at a cost on its defend rolls against attacks by forcing a minion into the path of the attack. That minion doesn't roll to defend, they just take the hit that would have landed on the big bad otherwise. This forces the PCs to chew through the big bad's army before the final confrontation.

And remember, minions don't have to be *literal* minions. For example, you might write up one or more "shield generators", each one with a stress track and perhaps a skill for creating defensive advantages for the shielded big bad!

Reveal True Form

Okay, the group has thrown everything they've got at the big bad, and—*awesome!*—they just took him out. There's just one problem: that just frees him from his cage of flesh to reveal his true form!

With **reveal true form**, your big bad isn't just one character, it's at least *two* characters which must be beaten sequentially, each one revealing new capabilities and stunts, higher skill ratings, fresh stress and consequence tracks, and even new "rule breaks."

If you want to gentle this a bit, carry the consequences the big bad has already taken forward between forms, dismissing the mild ones and downgrading the moderate and severe ones by one step each.

Scale Things Up

You could **scale things up** to let your big bad operate at a higher scale than the PCs, using the scale option from **page XX**. You could do this even if scale isn't normally in play in your campaign—these rules need only apply when a big bad takes the field!

Solo Bonus

Players may enjoy a teamwork bonus, sure—but why not give your big bad a complementary **solo bonus** when they're the only one facing the heroes?

There are a few ways you could implement a solo bonus. You could use more than one of these, but be careful when combining them as they'll add up fast.

- The big bad gets a **bonus to skill rolls** that's equal to the group's maximum potential teamwork bonus (**page XX**) — the number of PCs acting against the big bad minus one (so a +2 vs a group of 3, etc). This bonus can't do better than double the big bad's affected skill, though, just as with PCs (or maybe you'll break _that_rule too).
- The big bad may **reduce the stress** of successful attacks by the number of opposing PCs divided by two, rounded up. If you're worried this will make the fight run too long, then hits reduced this way can't be reduced below 1.
- The big bad has **amplified invokes**: when making a *paid* invoke of an aspect, their bonus is equal to the number of PCs they face. No such luck with free invokes, but this makes every fate point spent utterly terrifying.
- The big bad may **suppress invokes**: when facing two or more foes, the opposition's invokes only provide a +1 bonus, or allow rerolls only, when used directly against the big bad. Optionally, the big bad might also remove the PCs' ability to stack free invokes.

The Threat is a Map (or a Hive of Characters)

In Fate, anything can be a character, so why not a map? When **the threat is a map**, your big bad has zones (**page XX**) which must be navigated to achieve victory.

As you detail your big bad map, each zone might have its own skills, aspects, and stress capacity. Some zones might contain simple challenges that must be overcome in order to move deeper into the creature. Each zone may take an action as a separate character against PCs occupying that zone, or in the case of a zone representing a limb or similar, may be able to attack adjacent zones as well. If a zone is taken out by one of the PC's attacks, it may be bypassed and no longer gets to take actions of its own, but the overall big bad isn't defeated until the heroes can reach its heart and kill it true.

This method works particularly well if your big bad is a truly gigantic monster, but need not be limited to that situation. You can use the idea of treating the threat as a collection of interconnected characters, without requiring that the PCs actually enter or navigate the big bad as a literal map. Used this way, you've got a hybrid between a map and expendable minion armor (**page XX**)—a **hive of characters**, after a fashion. Some parts of the big bad must be defeated before the players can hit where it is truly vulnerable, and those parts get to take their own actions in the exchange.

Whether you fully engage the map idea or simply build the big bad as a hive, you're sure to end up with a more dynamic fight where the big bad acts more frequently, and the players must figure out a plan of attack that eliminates the threat piece by piece before they can finally put it down.

Ways to Handle Multiple Targets

Inevitably, someone at your table will want to affect multiple targets at once. If it's allowed, here are some methods you can use.

If you wish to be selective about your targets, you may **split shifts**. Roll your skill, and if the resulting total is positive, you can split that total up however you like among the targets, who each get to defend against the shifts you assigned to them. You must assign at least one shift to a target, or you didn't target them at all.

Sophie faces a trio of goons and wants to strike at all three in a flurry of thrusts with her rapier. Thanks to an invoke and a good roll, her Fight roll comes in at Epic (+7). She assigns a Good (+3) attack to the one that looks the most veteran, and Fair (+2) to each of the other two, for a total of seven shifts. They each then roll to defend.

In some special circumstances, as with an explosion or similar, you may make a **zone attack** against everyone in one zone, friend and foe alike. Here, you don't split shifts; every target must defend against your total roll. The circumstances and method must be right for doing this; often the GM will require you to invoke an aspect or use a stunt to gain permission.

If you wish to create an advantage affecting a whole zone or group, **target the scene** instead: place a single aspect on the zone or the scene itself rather than placing separate aspects on each of the targets. This has the added advantage of reducing overall book-keeping. If someone insists on creating a separate aspect on each target, they should be constrained to the shift splitting method.

With any of these methods, all of the targets should occupy the same zone. The GM may allow the occasional exception due to method and circumstance.

Only one action type should be used—such as attacking several targets in one blow, solving two problems at once with overcome, or swaying the minds of a few key NPCs with create an advantage. A GM might allow two different action types under special

circumstances, but those actions should make sense for the skill used by both.

Weapon and Armor Ratings

Want to tap into a little bit of that combat equipment vibe other games have? Consider weapon and armor ratings. In short, getting hit by a weapon will damage you more, and having armor keeps that from happening. (You could model this with stunts, but using stunt slots might not feel right to you.)

A **weapon** value adds to the shift value of a successful hit. If you have Weapon:2, it means that any hit inflicts 2 more shifts than normal. This counts for ties; you inflict stress on a tie *instead* of getting a boost.

An **armor** value reduces the shifts of a successful hit. So, Armor:2 makes any hit worth 2 less than usual. If you hit but the target's Armor reduces the attack's shifts to 0 or below, you get a boost to use on your target but don't do any harm.

Choose your range of ratings carefully. Keep an eye on how likely they make a consequence (or worse) on a tie. We recommend a range of 0 to 4 at most.