

# 2d20 System SRD: Gamemastering 2D20

System Resource Document for 2D20 System RPGs, 2022 Edition

This Chapter deals with the ins-and-outs of running a game using the **2D20 System**, providing a mixture of advice, guidance, useful rulings, and GM-specific rules. It also provides additional details and explanations of the GM's most potent mechanic in the **2d20 System**: Threat.

## Being the Gamemaster

The role of the Gamemaster is equal parts narrator, cast member, and referee. The GM is still a player in most regards – they're there to enjoy themselves as much as everyone else is – but they also have a number of significant responsibilities. Roleplaying games are collaborative experiences, and the GM is the one responsible for framing scenes, adjudicating the rules, and trying to ensure that all the players' characters get a chance to shine.

The GM's responsibilities take numerous forms, and they are consequently both the most active and most passive player at the table – the most active because they must remain aware of everything going on, and respond to everything the players do, but the most passive because it is the players' decisions that drive the game most of the time.

Over the course of a game session, the GM should try to link past events and plans for the future together to create a sense of continuity, which is important for making adventures feel like they take place within a world that responds to the players' decisions.

## Gamemastering 101

Given the importance of the Gamemaster's role, it is vital that they prepare for the game accordingly. While some players are comfortable just turning up for a session and getting on with the game, it takes practice and experience for a GM to be able to run a game comfortably without preparation. It is important that the GM be comfortable with these important elements of their role:

- **Know the Rules:** The GM should endeavour to be as familiar as possible with the rules for the situations that might come up in play. This doesn't mean knowing the rules inside-and-out, but the GM should at least understand the core of the rules enough to make reasonable rulings, and if a particular set of rules are likely to come up in play, it's worth re-reading them before the game to re-familiarise.
- **Know the Plot:** The player characters are often confronted with the machinations of scheming adversaries and other dangerous foes. It is essential that the GM provides these plots and schemes to give the players something for their characters to confront. They must develop broad settings and specific locales, characters to serve as allies, rivals, enemies, and bystanders, and dangerous agendas and perilous plots for the player characters to stop. Roleplaying games are a group effort, so the GM should always leave room for the players to make their mark and be ready to adapt to whatever impact their decisions have upon the game.
- **Be Prepared:** In many groups, the GM is the one who is responsible for making the game run smoothly. This may include providing pencils and paper, dice, or other useful gaming aids – though some players may insist on providing their own. Some GMs may prefer to hold on to

character sheets between sessions, ensuring that they're all in one place. Keeping track of the little details like this helps to keep the game moving.

## The Gamemaster's Responsibilities

Being the GM requires a different approach to being a player, best summed up by the list of responsibilities that follows. These should guide the way to run a game using the **2d20 System**, or any roleplaying game.

### Presenting Problems

It is the GM's first responsibility to present the problems, perils, and challenges that the player characters encounter. Problems can manifest in a variety of ways: it could be something as overt as a battle, or as subtle as a conspiracy. Problems can range in size from the incidental to the monumental: a broken light bulb can complicate a firefight or investigation, while a massive conspiracy could influence and encompass dozens of more immediate challenges.

Among the greatest tools in the GM's arsenal for presenting problems are Complications and Threat. They allow the GM to bring immediate challenges and difficulties into play, turning what may seem like a straightforward scene into something more dynamic and complex. Having a character's gun jam when he's laying down suppressive fire is often enough to shift the flow of a fight with very little effort.

### Let the Players Be Awesome

To both balance and feed the first responsibility, the second is that the player characters should be presented in a positive light – they are the protagonists, the heroes, the main characters of the story. Each player should have ample opportunity for their character to shine. It is important to remember that, while the GM may be responsible for setting up the threats, challenges, and adversaries the player characters will face, the GM is not the players' adversary, but one player amongst many, albeit one with a different role to play. The GM cannot 'win' the game by beating the players, and such a victory would be hollow considering the vast array of threats at a GM's disposal and the freedom they have to employ them.

Every problem presented to the players is an opportunity for their characters to demonstrate some aspect of themselves: their strengths, their flaws, their preferences, or their personalities. A bar brawl is a chance for the retired soldier to crack some skills. An uncooperative guard or informant is a great chance for the wealth or persuasive characters to show off their talents.

Problems should not stop the characters: if they stop, then the game may stop too. Instead, a problem gives the characters something to do now, that could lead to something else. Interesting complications in a character's life are conducive to an ongoing game, and they give the players extra ways (and incentive) to interact with the game world.

### Decide How NPCs Respond and Interact

Once everything else is in place, the GM needs to make choices on behalf of the NPCs present in the scene. This will vary considerably based on who the NPCs are and what they're doing: a criminal in a gunfight has a different range of possible actions to a politician in a press conference. Half of this responsibility is being able to interpret the situation an NPC is in, to determine the right kind of choices available. The other half is knowing who the NPCs are, so that the GM can determine what kinds of actions they are likely to take.

## Bringing in the Rules

An important part of the GM's responsibilities is determining when the rules are needed to determine the outcome of a situation. A lot of the time, this will be obvious – once the bullets start flying, the combat rules are necessary – but there are occasions when there is a choice to be made. The rules exist as a guide and a framework to give the GM and the group the means to resolve risky or difficult actions, and they should be able to handle a wide range of circumstances if employed with a little common sense and imagination.

It is important to remember, however, that the GM does not have to adhere perfectly to the rules. Sometimes, a strange situation may occur that does not quite fit to any of the rules as written. At other times, the GM may not remember the precise rule for a situation. Whatever the situation, it is far preferable to improvise something on the spot and keep the gaming moving, rather than bring everything to a halt while the GM searches the rulebook for an answer. The rules exist to support the game, but keeping the game going is more important than sticking strictly to what's written.

Indeed, the rules have been written more as a toolbox than a set of instructions for this reason: so that the GM can use as little or as much as they feel comfortable with, and with strong parallels between different parts of the rules so that learning one part of the rules brings familiarity with other parts.

## Running Scenes

Each adventure is composed of several scenes, with the Gamemaster and Players all having opportunities to drive the action and determine what happens next. This will play out something like this:

- **The GM frames the action:** The Gamemaster describes the scene, based on how previous scenes concluded. It's useful to think about a few key pieces: who is present, what is happening, where and when is the scene occurring, and why are these events happening.
- **The GM establishes Traits:** The Gamemaster notes down any Traits that are applicable to the current scene, as well as if any are Advantages or Complications. This picks out the most significant or most obvious elements of the scene, and thus provides players with a few obvious things to interact with.
- **The Players act:** The Players tell the Gamemaster what they want to do. This might be handled in a freeform manner, or it might be structured using the conflict rules, with a specific order in which Players act.
- **Resolve Action:** The Players and GM determine the outcome of the players' actions.
- **GM responds to the action and narrates the consequences:** The Gamemaster then responds to the Players' actions, describing what happens as a result.
- **Repeat:** A scene may be complete with only a single action on the part of the players, or the players may wish to take more actions in response to the consequences they've just faced.
- **Wrap-up:** Once a scene is complete, the GM provides any extra narration needed to wrap things up.

These steps are explored in more detail below.

## Framing the Action

It's the Gamemaster's responsibility to establish each scene. This is, arguably, the GM's biggest responsibility: scenes are the structure within which the action happens and provide the shape and structure for the situations that the players will confront and overcome (or fail to overcome). As a result, the GM should give plenty of consideration to five core questions about a scene when establishing it. These questions shouldn't take long to answer, and many will have fairly obvious answers, especially as the game progresses, as each scene may answer the questions for the next.

1. **Where is the scene set?** Where a scene occurs defines the layout, terrain, and the likely occupants. A busy shopping mall will be a very different environment to an isolated forest clearing, both in terms of layout and terrain, but also in the type of scene that is likely to occur there.
2. **When is the scene set?** Time is as important as place in a lot of ways. This can be absolute, with locations changing at different points in time (for example, doors are more likely to be locked at night, if a location is normally only occupied during the day, and obviously locations at night will be lit differently, if at all), but it could also be relative, with the amount of time passed since the previous scene affecting things like the readiness of adversaries or the aftermath of previous events.
3. **Who is in the scene?** This might be allies, adversaries, bystanders, or (likely) a mixture thereof. The GM may also wish to consider the possibility of other characters "nearby" who aren't present in the scene immediately, but who might arrive during the scene – such as reinforcements for adversaries who call for backup, or characters who are due to arrive at a specific time. This all will likely take cues from where and when the scene takes place – you'll likely encounter different characters on a city street at night than inside an office building during the day. When it comes to the player characters, the players decide which of them is present – the GM cannot decide that some of the player characters aren't there without the players' agreement.
4. **What is happening?** The who, where, and when are all fair and good, but the scene would not be worth playing out unless something of note was happening. This could be a goal of the player characters, the motivations of some adversary, or some event completely independent of either protagonist or antagonist. What is happening in a scene can be something that started before the scene began, or it can be something that begins while the player characters are there. For the most part, the "what" of a scene should be significant to the player characters, or to the overall adventure.
5. **Why is this happening?** This is also crucial, though the GM may keep this secret from the player characters – determining why something is happening can be the players' drive to continue the adventure. This will often link into a wider storyline that spans the whole adventure, but this doesn't have to be the case.

When the GM established a scene, they have free reign to answer these questions in any way they see fit, but the answers should have a reasonable link to the adventure or to the player characters' actions. In general, a scene should follow logically from the scene before it, and many scenes should be driven by the players' decisions as to where to go and what to do.

To reiterate, because this is important: the GM may be the one in control of establishing each scene, but those scenes should frequently come about because of the decisions that the players have made. If the players have found a lead in a mystery, then the players may state that their next step is to follow that lead, which answers some of the GM's questions about the next scene.

Now, that isn't to say that things will play out as the players desire. There's nothing to prevent the GM from having the group ambushed on the way to another destination, for example (though don't overuse this, as it gets boring fast), or to have the scene involve some factor or element the players didn't predict.

This balancing act is part of the challenge of being the Gamemaster: balancing the players' choices and intentions with the influence of things beyond the players' control. Too much in favour of players, and the game will seem predictable or lack a challenge, while too many things outside of player control can make the players feel like they can't make an impact.

Once the fundamental questions of the scene have been answered, the GM's next job is to flesh that out and present it to the players. This has two aspects, narrative and mechanical, which feed into one another.

The narrative side of this is simply describing what the player characters can perceive – the sights, sounds, and even smells, tastes, and sensations of being in a specific place, at a specific time, with a specific group of people, and so forth.

The mechanical side relies on that description and builds upon it. The most important details present in the scene receive mechanical weight and representation as **Traits**, as described in **Chapter 1: Core Rules**. The GM should point out and note down a few Traits for the scene, which serve both as part of the description of the scene and highlight elements that the players might want to try interacting with or obstacles that they may need to overcome.

Sometimes, some of these Traits may be **Advantages** or **Complications**, if they are biased one way or another, or if characters involved have made a point of establishing some beneficial features, but most Traits established at the start of a scene should be ordinary Traits that don't inherently favour one side or the other, such as *Crowded Streets* or *Dark* or *Howling Wind*, and so forth.

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#### Scene Framing Tricks

There are a few tried and true ways for the GM to vary scene framing to produce different effects, feelings, and styles. Using them separately, or in conjunction with one another, can give the GM a wider range of ways to present new scenes.

- **Why Are You Here?** Sometimes a scene will begin without a clear idea of why the player characters are there. This is common at the start of adventures, especially when framing the opening scene. The simple trick of asking each player why their character is present can both inform the situation and provide ideas and context that the GM may not have thought of.
- **Framing After Arrival:** The GM does not need to frame a scene with the characters walking in the front door: that's likely to become boring and predictable quickly. Often, what the characters want to achieve is already known when the scene is established, so it's sometimes useful to skip

the ‘empty space’ of the scene. Instead of describing the characters arriving, describe them already there (they arrived a while ago, and are in the middle of their business) or leaving (they’ve done what they wanted to do and are now on their way out).

- **In Medias Res:** This is a Latin phrase meaning “in the middle of things”. Occasionally starting a scene in the middle of the action – during a chase, a gunfight, an intense interrogation, or similar – is an interesting way to shake things up. Used at the start of an adventure, it can also be referred to as a “Cold Open” (essentially, skipping the introduction and starting ‘cold’), especially when combined with “Why Are You Here?” above; used in this way, these techniques can kick off an adventure in a powerful and memorable way. These kinds of scenes will often lead into, or foreshadow, something later, but an alternative type of *In Medias Res* introduction may have nothing to do with the main plot (or *appear* to have nothing to do with it), instead serving as an opportunity to show off the protagonists’ skills in a quick action scene.

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### Traits on the Fly

Traits don’t need to be formally defined. If the GM and players are comfortable with it, the matter of Traits can be left informal, handled by the GM as a natural part of play. Indeed, this makes it easier to emphasise or deemphasise different Traits as the situation demands.

In this situation, the GM applies the influence of Traits by themselves as a natural part of adjudicating the game, without specifically referring to them as Traits: rather than having a *torrential rain* Trait in play, the GM simply applies the effects of the rain when they feel it’s relevant.

This does somewhat lessen the players’ ability to interact with Traits as a mechanic, but this may suit some groups who care less about the mechanics and more about the story.

### Traits Front and Centre

If emphasising Traits as a core part of the game, the GM is encouraged to note down Traits – or perhaps only the most important Traits – and place them in full view of all the players, perhaps on an index card or other note-paper. This allows the players to see what the most important parts of the scene are, as well as how that changes as the scene progresses, and interact with those Traits both in a narrative sense (as their characters) and a mechanical sense.

This can be a little distracting, or it can detract from the players’ immersion in the situation, but it sits better with players who want to engage with the game’s mechanics in more depth.

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Another element that requires the GM’s consideration here is Threat, which will be examined in detail later, but which should be thought about in brief here.

While the GM doesn’t have to spend Threat for anything they introduce as part of establishing a scene, that doesn’t mean that Threat can be ignored during this process. Rather, the GM may wish to consider a few different ways that Threat could be gained or used during that scene and establish those possibilities in their description of the scene. An example of this might be describing an alarm, which could be triggered to add to Threat, and the fact that there are other enemies nearby which could be called in by

spending Threat. Alternately, unstable terrain could be a few points of Threat away from crumbling or collapsing, shifting the scene's terrain. These kind of Threat triggers will be discussed in more detail later.

Once these things are done – and they will invariably take less time to do than they have taken to explain – the scene can begin.

## Playing Things Out

When the scene begins, players take the lead, and the Gamemaster steps back a little. Where setting scenes is where the GM has the most power, it is within scenes that the characters have an opportunity to shine, and the GM should endeavour to help the players show off their characters... especially where that means confronting those characters with challenging obstacles to overcome and deadly perils to survive, because seeing a character when things are hard is often the most satisfying way to engage with the game and the story.

During a scene, the GM's involvement is more limited, relying on the actions of NPCs and uses of Threat to alter things and respond to the actions of the player characters. This places the player characters front-and-centre in the action, while giving the GM the tools to amp up the tension and test the player characters' capabilities.

Within a scene, the players will want their characters to do things. It's the GM's responsibility to adjudicate those things, to decide if those things are possible, and to determine what happens afterwards. In a lot of cases, this will be a simple matter, as many of the things the player characters do will be things that anyone can do, and the outcome will be obvious. In the cases that aren't simple, however, the GM can rely on the rules for assistance.

When a player decides that they wish their character to do something, the rules and guidelines for Tests, described in **Chapter 1: Core Rules**, provide a foundation: each time this happens, the GM responds with "yes", "no", or "maybe".

- The Gamemaster should answer **Yes** if the action or activity is something that can be achieved easily and without risk or peril. The GM is free to frame this answer with some condition, such as explaining that the action will take time, or that it will draw attention, or have some other potential consequence; this kind of condition is often referred to as "**Yes, but...**"
- The Gamemaster should answer **No** if the action or activity is something that cannot be achieved at all. The GM is free to state that there might be some circumstances where the action could be performed, such as obtaining the right tools, special materials, or obscure knowledge, or specialised assistance; this is often referred to as "**No, but...**"
- The Gamemaster should answer **Maybe** if the action or activity is something that might be possible. In this case, the character may attempt a Skill Test to see if they succeed.

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## Action Assumptions

As a useful rule of thumb, the Gamemaster should assume that player characters are competent, driven, and capable when determining whether an action is possible. In general, a player character should be able to accomplish anything given enough time, the right tools, the right knowledge, the opportunity to concentrate, and the absence of serious risk or peril. Skill Tests (or "no" answers) will often come in situations where the character lacks one or more of those factors, framing the action as "can the

character achieve their goal *in this situation*". In a similar way, a character's Attributes and Skills can be thought of as how good the character is at applying their strengths and their knowledge when under pressure.

- Time comes from the situation, and time pressure is a common problem posed in adventures.
- Tools are either carried by the character, or must be located during play, and lack of tools is a common Complication.
- Knowledge is a little more ephemeral, and it may be innate to the character (represented by a Trait or a Focus) or come from research and study (taking time and effort to create an appropriate Advantage). Lack of knowledge may often lead to increased difficulty or increased chance of mishaps.
- The opportunity to concentrate relies on a lack of distractions. Action scenes such as combat are a common form of distraction.
- Absence of risk or peril allows a character to keep trying even if they make mistakes, succeeding through trial and error. A risky or perilous task means a character can't rely on being able to try again if they fail.

Similarly, this kind of framing also means that failure isn't a matter of incompetence: a character doesn't fail because they screwed up, but rather because something prevented them succeeding. They didn't have enough time, they didn't have the chance to focus, they didn't have the right tools, something or someone interrupted them, or something else of that nature.

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Skill Tests can also be used in a "yes, but" situation, if the player wishes to avoid the condition or consequence; this is an ideal situation to use the **Success at Cost** rule, as the test is about whether the character can avoid the consequence, rather than seeing if they can succeed. Similarly, "no, but" results can also prompt Skill Tests, as characters seek to engineer the circumstances that make an action possible. Additional guidance for GMing Skill Tests can be found in their own section, later in this chapter.

Regardless of how the action is resolved, however, the GM is responsible for describing what happens next. The situation will change in response to the actions of characters, both those of the players, and NPCs under the GM's control. The GM may ask the players for their input here, especially where the action heavily involves them – a player character's successes, and their failures, can be given to the player to narrate, within reason – but the GM gets to decide how the world around the PCs (and the NPCs in that world) responds to those actions.

This response can take many forms. The players' actions could see the scene concluded, with the consequences influencing the next scene, or those actions could be one small part of a larger sequence of events, with adversaries and allies taking their own actions, which in turn prompt more actions from the player characters, and so forth. This will vary based entirely on the scene itself: a scene that is merely a brief conversation between two characters may resolve quickly and with few or no dice rolls, while an intense chase or battle might take many rolls and a greater use of the rules to resolve.

Aside from the actions of GM-controlled characters (any NPCs not directly commanded by the players), the way that the Gamemaster can influence a scene in progress is by spending Threat, which will often

be generated by actions and events within the scene itself. These opportunities for Threat use will often be elements of the scene itself, described when the scene was introduced, or created by the actions of characters within the scene. This will be described in full in the **Threat** section, later in this chapter.

## Wrapping Things Up, and Moving On

Concluding a scene is as important as starting a new one; indeed, the two are linked, because how the Gamemaster ends one scene will feed into the start of subsequent scenes.

A scene concludes at a point where there is nothing worthwhile left to do in that place and at that time. If the players decide that they want to leave the area, then that's a call for a new scene. If the players haven't got anything else to do right now – perhaps they're on a stakeout, waiting for an enemy to arrive – then that's a call for a new scene too. If the group is split and the action needs to move to the other part of the group for a while, that's a new scene as well. In most cases, it should be obvious when a scene has ended, as scenes tend to come to a natural conclusion by themselves. The GM also has the means to conclude a scene prematurely, but this should be somewhat rare as it costs a considerable amount of Threat to do.

Concluding a scene often starts with a brief description of the state things are in as the scene ends, especially if the scene is dramatic or action-packed, perhaps describing the last fleeing enemy, or bystanders emerging in the aftermath, or the sounds of emergency services drawing near.

The GM should then ask the players what they want to do next. This, more than anything else, should provide a direction to take the adventure, even if things don't turn out quite how the players expect. The players may have an idea for this immediately, or they may want to discuss it amongst themselves briefly.

Alongside this, attend to minor rules “upkeep”: remind the players to remove all their current Stress, and end any other effects that last until the end of the scene (most Complications fall into this category), and to remove a point from their Momentum pool (if they have any left). If the scene was important or especially significant, consider awarding the players a Fortune point each.

The GM should also think about the events that took place in the scene, and then consider if any of them will have long-term consequences or repercussions, or if there are any threads or elements of that scene which haven't yet been resolved. These may not be immediately relevant in the next scene, but they might impact later scenes, lay the foundation for later adventures, or provide inspiration for Complications and uses of Threat in later scenes.

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#### No Time to Rest

One option the GM has at the end of a scene is to rush or hurry the players. If the next scene is only a short time later, with no opportunity to rest between them – perhaps the characters haven't had time to stop, or the next scene begins only moments later – the GM may spend 2 Threat to reflect this.

If the GM spends Threat for this, the players do not remove any of the Stress they've suffered, and lingering effects from the previous scene don't end... but they also don't lose any Momentum at the end of the scene. This connects the two scenes in such a way that the short-term effects from one scene carry over into the next.

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## Skill Tests and Challenges

Almost any activity where there is doubt in the outcome, where failure or Complications are interesting, or where the degree of success is important can be regarded as one or more Skill Tests. A single Skill Test represents an activity attempting to succeed despite resistance or conflict. Skill Tests should, realistically speaking, be actions completed in one sitting or a short amount of time: searching for clues, repairing a car, or negotiating with a suspect are all examples of a single Skill Test.

As outlined in **Chapter 1: Core Rules**, a Skill Test requires the player to roll two or more d20s, attempting to score equal to or less than a Target Number made from one of the character's Attributes and one of their Skills. It's the Gamemaster, along with input from the player involved, who chooses which Attribute and Skill combination to use for the Target Number, as well as which Focus applies, if any. It's also the GM's role to decide on the Skill Test's Difficulty, on what consequences there are for failure, and what effect Mishaps and Momentum may have on the outcome.

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### Rules as Written

In a lot of cases, especially in combat, different situations present default Attribute and Skill combinations, standard Difficulties, and standard consequences for failure, along with specific uses for Momentum and specific effects for Mishaps.

These are to provide a reliable, predictable baseline so that players can make reasonable plans and have reasonable expectations for how events may play out. However, the GM is free to change those details as circumstances dictate, if a situation is markedly different to the norm.

The GM should be careful about making such changes, and they should make any changes clear to the players in that situation so that they're aware that the situation is unusual in some way. It's also recommended that the GM be consistent in how and when they apply such changes, to maintain those reasonable expectations: players uncertain about what they can and can't do may be less willing or able to engage with the adventure.

In a similar way, the players can suggest changes of their own if the circumstances fit; perhaps they think a different Attribute might be more fitting in this case, or they want to use Momentum in a specific way not covered by the rules. The GM is encouraged to consider these, and possibly to negotiate with the players briefly about changes of this nature: perhaps a player-suggested method is possible, but it's riskier, so the Mishap Range goes up, or perhaps it alters the consequences of failure in some way.

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## Using Traits

Traits – including Advantages and Complications – form a framework that assists the GM while framing a scene, by highlighting circumstances that may affect characters in some way, shape, or form. Traits are a versatile tool, and a mixture of them is a useful way to establish situations and environments that characters can navigate or confront effectively.

In the simplest terms, a Trait is a description of something that has been given mechanical 'weight' – that description can influence the game mechanics. Traits always describe things that are true about the situation, location, or character, and in turn, if the thing that a Trait describes stops being true, the Trait

changes or vanishes as well. Traits aren't inherently advantageous or problematic, but they have the potential to be either or both those things. Traits help the GM define what is possible or impossible in a situation, and help the GM determine how difficult some things are to accomplish.

Traits can:

- Make an activity easier (-1 Difficulty on a Skill Test)
- Make an activity harder (+1 Difficulty on a Skill Test, or require a Skill Test where success would normally be automatic)
- Make an activity possible where it wouldn't be normally
- Make an activity impossible where it would normally be possible

In general, +1 and -1 Difficulty will be the most commonly-used effects of a Trait, but they are far from the only ones. The GM can use the existence of a Trait to justify various bonuses and penalties as the situation demands; these might be extra damage effects, bonus Challenge Dice to attacks or resistance, increased Mishap Range, heightened consequences, and similar effects. For example, if an enemy has a Complication that describes a weakness in its armour, that may grant an attacker the *Piercing 2* damage effect on their attacks.

The use of narrative permissions – deciding whether an activity is possible or not – is no less useful an option, particularly as those permissions can be *temporary*. Removing a Trait that makes a Skill Test impossible or creating an Advantage that makes the impossible possible are good ways to handle abstract or unusual approaches to problem-solving mechanically, and they can help the players and GM alike add extra impact to the events unfolding.

Traits are most often created at the start of a scene, and last for as long as they remain true... which is normally the end of that scene. If the next scene takes place in the same location, then Traits relating to that location may remain, but ones tied to people, situations, or which are time-sensitive, may change accordingly. Persistent character Traits will naturally follow the character around, though temporary ones (reflecting minor injuries, emotional states, and similar) may not linger in the same way. Situational Traits – typically including the kinds of Advantages and Complications that characters can create – seldom last long, normally vanishing after a few rounds in combat, or lasting until the end of the scene at most.

Especially potent Traits may be stacked: this is indicated by a number after the Trait's name. A *Dense Smoke 2* Trait will have twice as much effect on the situation as an ordinary Trait, perhaps increasing Difficulties by 2, or having two different effects.

### Advantages

Advantages are Traits that are inherently advantageous to characters and will only ever provide a benefit. Advantages come about mostly from equipment, Momentum spends, or Threat spends in the case of NPCs. They reduce Difficulties for characters attempting Skill Tests related to the Advantage, or make that Task possible where it normally wouldn't have been. Advantages can be shared, as either a new location or situation Trait, or can be personal to a character as a Character Trait. The GM may spend Threat just as players spend Momentum, creating Advantages for NPCs during a scene. Advantages can never create a problem for their owner, though they could prove problematic for the owner's enemies – characters may create an Advantage that hinder enemies rather than helping themselves.

## Complications

Complications are Traits that get in the way or complicate a character's actions. They either increase a Skill Test's Difficulty or make it impossible where normally it would have been possible. Complications allow for creative additions or changes to your scenes and is the type of Trait the Gamemaster has most control over during play. This creates a new obstacle for the Player Characters, which may set up new encounters and new challenges, especially when combined with existing ones. But Complications aren't insurmountable, and Players should be able to overcome those setbacks with a Skill Test (normally Difficulty 2) or a short Challenge.

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### Adjudicating Traits, or “Because X, Y”

Handling Traits in play may seem daunting, especially if there's a lot of them in play. In practice, however, judging whether (and how) a Trait applies can be quite straightforward. Each Trait can be placed into a simple statement, such as one of those below, and if that statement makes sense, then it applies. If it doesn't make sense, then it doesn't apply.

- Because I am [Character Trait], this activity is...
- Because of [Situation or Location Trait], this activity is...
- Because I have [Equipment Trait], this activity is...

The end of each of those statements is one of “easier”, “harder”, “possible”, or “impossible”.

At the simplest level, that's as far as the GM needs to go: if the statement ends with “easier”, reduce the Difficulty, if the statement ends with “harder”, increase the Difficulty. If the statement ends with “possible”, then the activity can be attempted while the Trait applies, while if it ends with “impossible”, then it can't be attempted while that Trait applies.

[End Sidebar]

## Test Difficulty

Difficulties represent how challenging a Skill Test is, based on environment, opposition, obstacles, and similar factors. Traits are a key part of this, and while most basic Skill Tests have a Difficulty of 1 or 2, it's important to remember that the GM sets the final Difficulty, and thus can increase the required number of successes accordingly. Traits representing hazardous environments, obscurity of information, a lack of preparation or appropriate tools, or other problems can all increase the Difficulty of routine Skill Tests. If it feels appropriate that a situation should increase the Difficulty of a Skill Test, then the GM has the freedom to do that.

Structuring the timing of these Difficulties in a game session can also be a consideration. Starting a scene with a Difficulty 4 or 5 test isn't recommended unless the scene absolutely demands it; there's always the possibility to ramp up the Difficulty of Tests as the action progresses, using Complications and by spending Threat. On the other side of things, if something is necessary for the story to continue, then keep the Difficulty low or allow Success at a Cost to ensure that a failed Skill Test can't easily stall progress. In general, a variety of Difficulties, rising and falling throughout the session, is often an appropriate tool for pacing an adventure.

Environmental Traits adjust the Difficulty of Skill Test, based on whether they are helpful or a hindrance to a character, and such a Trait may be beneficial in some ways and problematic in others: a heavily-crowded area may make it easier to avoid notice, but it'll make rapid movement more difficult. Think carefully about the circumstances of a scene, taking note of the Traits, Advantages, and Complications, and judge the Difficulty accordingly.

Finally, making judgements based on the mood and preferences of the players is also key to the Difficulty of Skill Tests. Few groups enjoy constantly having to beat the odds by facing an abundance of Difficulty 4 or 5 tests, while some revel rising to such challenges. If the group has just faced off against a difficult opponent, tension will have been running high, so allowing a few easier Skill Tests will help release that tension, giving players a bit of a break and allowing them to generate some much-needed Momentum. And, sometimes players just have a bad night with a string of unlucky rolls; nobody thinks badly of a GM who eases off the pressure when the dice are falling badly, if it allows the fun and the story to continue.

#### [Begin Sidebar]

##### Threat, Momentum, and Test Difficulty

While Traits – particularly Advantages and Complications – can have a lasting impact upon the Difficulty of Skill Tests, short-term Difficulty changes can often come about because of uses of Momentum or Threat.

These options can be used when a situation becomes momentarily more Difficult, either because of the vagaries of some environmental factor (such as smoke, or a crowd, or something similar; this may be represented by a Trait, where the Trait alone may not be reason enough to increase the Test's Difficulty) or because of the actions of another character creating a distraction, obstruction, or other problem.

Regardless of how they are used, increasing Difficulty by spending Momentum or Threat must be done before the decision to buy bonus d20s for that Test is made: it would be decidedly unfair to see if a player wants to buy any dice before choosing to increase the Difficulty.

#### [End Sidebar]

##### Risks, Costs, and Consequences

A crucial part of adjudicating a Skill Test, and one commonly overlooked, is the effects of failure. If the Skill Test is to avoid some dangerous effect or situation, then the effects of failure are obvious: the character didn't avoid the danger. But in situations where a character is attempting to achieve something, it is important to determine what will happen if they fail to achieve their goal; after all, if there's no cost or consequence for their failure, then why didn't they just succeed automatically?

Risks, costs, and consequences are all different ways to express “what goes wrong”. They don’t necessarily represent something going irrevocably wrong, but rather help to provide the GM with a sense of nuance about what could go wrong from a Skill Test, and in turn convey those potential problems to the players. There’s a lot of overlap between the three ideas, but in general terms, they can be described as follows:

- A **risk** is something that *might* happen because of a Skill Test. It isn’t guaranteed to happen, but it could occur if the player suffers a Mishap. It doesn’t change whether the Test succeeds, but it might still change the outcome one way or another.

- A **cost** is something that must be paid or faced to get a desired outcome, but which can be avoided. This turns up with the option to **Succeed at Cost** (where a failed Skill Test allows the character to get minimum success if they also suffer a Mishap), but the GM may frame a cost for allowing a Skill Test to be attempted in the first place.
- A **consequence** is something that *will* happen because of action; it might be the result of a failed test, or it might come automatically if the Test is even attempted.

When setting the Difficulty of a Skill Test, the GM should consider the things that could go wrong. These can naturally serve as inspiration for how to handle any Mishaps that may occur, but they can also serve as the result of a failed test. Similarly, if a player wants to attempt something that is particularly tough or challenging, or which shouldn't be too straightforward to attempt, it may be worthwhile considering a cost for that Test. These are all powerful tools for the GM, that can be interwoven with all the other rules of the game to create something thrilling, dynamic, and evocative.

Of course, it's easy to simply say "think of the things that could go wrong", but it's harder to do that in practice, at least without some guidance or experience. Fortunately, fiction provides us with a variety of different problems that occur frequently, and which can serve as inspiration.

- **Price:** A straightforward problem is a price, usually in the form of lost resources. This might be a character's Assets, Reloads, or some other tangible resource, but it could easily be a loss of Momentum or Fortune (though Fortune loss should be used sparingly as a problem), or adding to Threat, or even something like losing an Advantage or suffering a Complication.
- **Harm:** Equally straightforward: suffering damage and risking injury or trauma is useful as a risk, cost, or consequence. A quick damage roll (either physical or mental), or the application of some Fatigue are appropriate instances of this problem.
- **Revelation:** The character reveals something that they didn't intend to, such as something they know, or even where they are. Alternatively, the character may learn something that they wish wasn't true which could complicate later actions, such as finding that the enemy leader has extra guards, or that they are about to head somewhere else. Revelations can be useful ways for the GM to introduce new ways to spend Threat or set up other problems like time pressure.
- **Confusion:** The character miscommunicates or otherwise creates uncertainty, leading to upset, poor timing, offense, or misunderstanding. Only applicable where there's an audience, confusion can lead to problems with teamwork or make it so that an adversary responds in an unexpected manner.
- **Waste:** Like price, but where a price is intentional, waste is the misuse or misapplication of resources. This is useful in situations where a character might already have the option to use those resources: a character firing a gun may lose Reloads by wasting ammo, for example. Alternatively, waste may represent being inefficient or reckless in some other way, perhaps with a character leaving themselves exposed to reprisals, or putting themselves in a position where they can't easily follow-up (in a conflict, a character may find themselves unable to keep the initiative or make a reaction, or they lose some other defensive benefit).
- **Ineffectiveness:** The effect of the Skill Test is less than expected in some way, or the character's success is only partial or incomplete. The character still gets the minimum of what they wanted to achieve, but that success is imperfect and may result in problems. This might reduce the damage of an attack, or it may mean that a distraction doesn't occupy an adversary for as long as desired.

- **Overkill:** The character succeeds *too well*. The character becomes a victim of their own success, gaining unintended effects from the outcome. A lie told to gain access somewhere causes the guard to treat you as a VIP. A disguise attracts the attention of people other than your intended target. A bomb to blow a hole in a wall also makes the ceiling above unstable. A gunshot goes through the target and hits a bystander as well.
- **Delay:** Sometimes, things just take longer than anticipated. This is already built into the rules for time pressure, where a Mishap can cause the Skill Test to take an extra Interval, but it can apply just as well to other situations. Perhaps a delay allows the enemy to prepare for the characters' arrival, or it allows pursuing guards to catch up. Perhaps a delay means the character can't join the rest of the group in the next scene (maybe they'll turn up part-way through the scene instead of at the start), or it means they can't be chosen to act first in the next Round.
- **Closed Path:** A possible problem is that a specific way of doing something is no longer possible, at least in the short term, and the characters will have to find a different approach. A character tries picking a lock to find that the door is bolted shut. A character can no longer rely on a specific informant or ally. Witnesses are too scared to come forward.

In practice, many of these may end up having similar outcomes, but they are useful starting points to consider when deciding the outcomes of different Skill Tests.

More than that, they can also be used to help structure problematic situations: a situation may be presented as a series of overlapping, interlocking problems, each of which is part of a Trait, and each of which can be 'disarmed'. This kind of structure is ideal for Challenges, and it's a great way to design heists and similar situations.

Of course, the nature of a problem is only half the story. The GM should also consider the severity of problems. This should be relatively straightforward most of the time, but it's worthy of consideration anyway, as it can be a useful 'lever' for the GM to adjust during play.

The severity of a problem is, in short, how big the problem is. This is something independent of how difficult the Skill Test is – a Skill Test can be extremely difficult, but with only relatively mild consequences, or it could be easy, but with a major cost.

As a basic guide, we can approach a severity from the perspective of Mishaps, as that ties neatly into the existing framework of Skill Tests – a risk represents a potential Mishap effect, and unsurprisingly the Success at Cost rule ties neatly into the idea of cost, which covers two of the ways these problems are commonly used. While it doesn't really cover consequences, it's a useful enough baseline to work with. Mishaps have two universal outcomes – create a Complication or add 2 to Threat – which means that they are useful for quantifying a problem. If a problem is equivalent to two Mishaps, then it's equal to 4 Threat, for example.

And, just as with Difficulty, the GM may spend Threat or apply Traits and Complications to increasing the severity of a problem (though a single Trait or Complication should only have a single effect on a Skill Test at a time). For example, if an area of building has the *Unstable* Trait, then the GM may use this to add to the severity of Tests to cross that terrain, while a *Poorly Lit* Trait might make Tests for observation somewhat ineffective rather than more difficult. This is where consequences can come in, with Traits providing justification for problems occurring on failed Skill Tests.

The Threat section, below, provides guidance for how differing amounts of Threat spent can translate into mechanical effects. In general, however, there's no hard-and-fast way to measure or quantify some problems: the GM should rely on their judgement and experience, and how the players respond to the problems they face.

#### [Begin Sidebar]

##### Player-Driven Problems

While problems are mainly a consideration for the Gamemaster, players can have some input here.

As already noted, a problem may be represented or caused by something else present in-game, typically a Trait or Complication; players can engage with and eliminate the problem by attempting to remove or circumvent that Trait. This is a useful way of presenting traps and similar artificial hazards, and it encourages creative approaches to problem-solving.

The other way that players might wish to engage with problems is by adjusting risk and reward. A player may offer to face a problem, or a more severe problem, in exchange for increasing the benefits of success (typically manifesting as bonus Momentum for a successful Skill Test). For example, a character may feel that they could search an office for incriminating evidence more effectively if they weren't concerned about making noise, increasing the risk of being heard but making it more likely that they'll find what they're looking for.

#### [End Sidebar]

### Challenges

An over arcing goal or complex situation may call for a Challenge to be structured by the Gamemaster. Challenges are a series of Tests, or even Extended Tests, arranged in such a way as the outcome of one influences or allows for another Task. A Basic Challenge should have its Key Tests described to the Players, these Tests being the tasks the Player Characters need to complete before the overall problem has been overcome. These Key Tests can be attempted and completed independently of each other, however, there are a variety of interesting ways to structure Challenges as we'll explore below:

#### Linear Challenges

Skill Tests in a linear Challenge happen one after the other in a series of rolls. The first Skill Test must be completed before the second can be attempted, and so on. This is a limited way of structuring the Challenge but does give clarity to the Players on what they need to do. While it can be a little limiting to player creativity, sometimes situations call for a very specific response or course of action. Linear Challenges are a good way to add a little depth to a Challenge without the need for a lot of bookkeeping.

#### Gated Challenges

In a Gated Challenge the Key Tests can only be attempted once specific Tests in the Challenge have been completed. This provides the Players with a little more flexibility, allowing them to approach the Challenge from several angles, or choose from branching options. When building Gated Challenges, you should note your final Task or objective in the middle or at the end of your structure, then place the other Key Tasks around it, indicating what Tasks must be completed before the Players can move onto the others.

## Group Challenges

When a whole group is attempting a Challenge, it's important to remember who is helping and where. If a character is Assisting another, then they can't help another character — they can't be everywhere at once! Once a Skill Test has been completed, however, it's feasible that those characters are available to work on another Task. Their attention is also focused on that Test, even if the scene is taking place with the whole group in a confined space. A character who tries to assist on every Task doesn't provide enough help to anyone. Always use common sense and the circumstances to decide if a character can or can't assist or attempt a Task. It may be that completing a Task frees them up for another and you should always let the story inform your choice.

## Non-Key Tests

Players may want to spend time preparing for a Key Test, making rolls that don't attempt to complete the Key Test but instead prepare for it in some way. That's not a problem and, in this case, you should use your best judgement to frame the Task, and its Difficulty. If successful, completing a non- Key Test could lower the Difficulty of the Key Test or add an Advantage to it, but it alone will never complete the Key Task.

## Timed Challenges

Combining the pressure of time, or a deadline, to any of the above structures can add tension to the scenes in which the Challenge takes place, and you should always have consequences in mind if time runs out. You should have a clear idea of how many Intervals the Challenge takes, normally around 2-3 times the number of Key Tests, and you should have a good idea of how long that Interval is: half hour, an hour, a day? Once that's framed, keep a track of how long Test attempts have taken and how long the Player Characters have left — and if they aren't aware of that you can build tension by telling them! Task attempts always take 2 Intervals of time, because Players can reduce that to 1 Interval by spending Momentum (though it can also increase due to Mishaps). Also bear in mind that if Players wish to prepare for Tasks, that will take time, too. Don't be afraid to tick off some Intervals in the process. Ultimately, a combination of time and the structures above can bring some variety to the game and add in some tension or climax once the final Key Tasks are being attempted.

## Opposition

Adversaries may be able to interfere with the Player Characters' plans or even to attempt the same Challenge. In this case, the GM may wish to consider what kind of opposition they provide and how to use that in the Challenge.

Disruption provides an increase in Difficulty but nothing more, and this could come in the form of traps or preparations NPCs have made before the Player Characters started the Challenge. This is great if the NPCs knew the Player Characters were coming or were clever enough to put into place contingencies if they think their plans would be interfered with.

If the NPCs are present and can act at the same time as the Player Characters, the GM may want to make the Tasks in the Challenge Opposed Tasks. This represents the NPCs trying to accomplish the same thing as the Players but for a different reason or outcome. It could also be opposition in the form of sabotaging the Players' actions. As with Opposed Tests, new Advantages or Complications may arise from Momentum or Threat spends, or failed rolls.

Contested Challenges form a race for either the Players or the NPCs to complete the Tasks first. In this case, you should resort to a turn order, much like Conflict in *Chapter 7*. Both sets of characters will attempt a Task but one after the other, back and forth, until every character has been able to act. Take as many rounds as you need for one side to complete the Challenge, at which point the group that didn't complete it has failed. It could be that you lock off Tasks based on who succeeds first — in which case, the side who cannot attempt the Key Test should take appropriate steps and attempt Tests to unlock that Key Test again. In this situation, the groups effectively take control of certain Tasks once complete, and it should only be done if there are multiple ways of completion, as in a Gated Challenge.

The GM should be mindful that groups of characters attempting the same Tests can meet and, if they have different goals, may come into conflict. The GM should thus always be ready for the groups to clash, with the conflict serving as a backdrop for the Challenge.

## Threat

Threat has been discussed briefly in **Chapter 1: Core Rules**, and then mentioned frequently throughout the other chapters of these rules. While that description is sufficient for players, the Gamemaster needs a deeper understanding of what Threat is, what it represents, what it does, and how it can be employed in play.

At its simplest level, Threat is a mechanic that can be used to raise the stakes of a scene or even a whole adventure. It allows the GM to alter and manipulate elements in a scene without direct action from NPCs, providing and shaping twists, turns, and challenges for the player characters to overcome.

The Gamemaster begins each adventure with a set amount of Threat based on the number of players in the game, as well as numerous means and opportunities to gain more during play. Each adventure will also have numerous opportunities to spend that Threat to empower NPCs, change the situation, and create problems for the player characters. In this way, the Threat pool grows and shrinks as character act and react in each scene.

Threat is a means of building tension – the more Threat the GM possesses, the greater the likelihood that something will endanger or imperil the player characters. Strictly speaking, the player characters don't know how much Threat the GM has, but their instincts may tell them when something seems too easy, or they may "have a bad feeling" when danger draws near, giving them a sense of the peril that awaits them.

As the adventure progresses, the GM may spend a large amount of Threat in one scene, creating a difficult and dangerous situation... but also producing a release of tension afterwards as Threat is now low, or they may choose to allow Threat to build over successive scenes, spending little or none of it until a climactic event occurs. In this way, Threat mimics and emulates the rising and falling tension of dramatic storytelling, often culminating in a grand finale.

## The Principles of Threat

A tool for pacing and dramatic storytelling aside, Threat is best thought of as an abstract representation of all the things that might go wrong at any given moment. It's all the unknown variables, and the unfolding conspiracies, and the malign influence of powerful foes, and the clamour and clangour of battle, and the chaos that can erupt when tension runs high. It's *Murphy's law* ("anything that can go

wrong, will go wrong") quantified, and it's the bullets in *Chekov's gun* (a dramatic principle whereby elements introduced into a story must pay off or they are superfluous).

During a scene, Threat is one of the two methods by which the Gamemaster can influence events; the other being the actions of NPCs. As a result, it is powerful and evocative if used well, and it is extremely versatile... but it is also finite, with the quantity often defined by the actions that take place in the scene. But, where some ways of gaining and spending Threat are straightforward and self-explanatory – in any instance where a player character could use Momentum, an NPC can use Threat, for example – others may require more work from the GM to use in a satisfying way. Key to this are the following principles:

### Foreshadowing

It is never a bad idea to describe ways that Threat could be gained, or effects can be triggered by spending Threat, in advance of using them. During the action, the GM may describe a problem that could occur. By describing this problem in advance, if the GM uses that problem to gain or spend Threat, it doesn't come "out of nowhere", and thus feels like an organic part of the situation rather than something arbitrary.

Traits can provide a solid basis for this: if a walkway or bridge is unstable, then a Trait which reflects that can be ample justification for uses of Threat, and this can easily be included when establishing the scene to begin with. During a scene, Mishaps, the effects of failed Skill Tests, or the cost (see page @@) to attempt or succeed at something can all be used as opportunities for the GM to introduce new uses for Threat. Another way may be for the Adversaries to create an Advantage: like any Trait, an Advantage can serve nicely as foreshadowing here.

In addition to making a use of Threat seem natural and fitting, foreshadowing also gives the players a chance to try and prevent or avoid that problem. This may turn into an extra objective for the player characters to pursue, or they may decide that they've got too much to do already and ignore that potential problem.

### The Spotlight

When the GM gains or spends Threat, the resulting effects can serve to draw attention to specific themes and ideas, or to certain elements of a scene, or to an individual character. This in turn creates new opportunities for the players to engage with the situation. In general, using Threat to highlight things can make the game more engaging for the players, compared to simply using Threat to make things more difficult.

With a **thematic spotlight**, the GM can use Threat to pick out a specific concept that is particularly central to the adventure or to the campaign. Spending Threat to introduce specific types of challenge or problem, that encourage a specific approach: large numbers of enemies and frequent reinforcements can encourage a subtle, considered approach, favouring stealth and guile. Alternatively, the GM may use Threat to dissuade a certain type of action: in a game where lethal force is frowned upon, the GM can declare that player characters attempting to kill enemies add to Threat, while NPCs attempting to use deadly force must spend Threat; this extra level of cost to trying to kill can guide player choices, and it helps to create adventures where trying to negotiate with or subdue enemies is more commonplace than simply shooting them in the face.

A **situation spotlight** draws attention back to a specific part of the current scene. This might be to a specific place within the environment, such as the GM spending Threat to make a crumbling building start to collapse, or it might be a specific character, such as a leader or priority target (often using an ability unique to that character). It might even be a single objective: the GM may spend more Threat on adversaries trying to reach a specific location or attack a specific character, if that aids their goal. This can be a useful way to add urgency to a situation, especially if things have seemed too easy for the players up until that point. Alternately, the GM may wish to try adding one or two to Threat periodically (either in general, or because of NPC actions, like setting explosives or performing a dark ritual) to represent a ticking clock or escalating problem, to urge the players to action if they're being overly cautious.

A **character opportunity** is a situation where attention is drawn to a player character. This can resolve itself in a few: the GM may present a problem which that character is ideally-suited to solve, allowing that character to show off for a bit, or it might change circumstances which play to a character's personality or backstory, engaging the player by bringing their part of the story to the fore, often by facing them with a dilemma or a tough choice. Occasionally, the GM may wish to play to the weaknesses of a specific character or put them in a situation where their strengths become a liability, but this should be done sparingly if at all, as some players can feel picked on, making the game feel adversarial rather than collaborative.

#### [Begin Sidebar]

##### Dithering

Sometimes players spend too long debating a situation and don't spend enough time actually doing things. This can suit some groups fine – many groups enjoy an intricate, carefully-devised plan – but other groups may end up going talking in circles, needing a little nudge to get them to decide on a course of action (even if it's as simple as who goes next in combat).

In these situations, particularly in time-sensitive situations like combat, the GM may wish to announce to the group that their debating and time-wasting will add to Threat... and if this doesn't stir them to action, add 2 points to Threat.

This Threat could even be spent right away to change the situation in such a way that makes the players react and gets the game moving again.

#### [End Sidebar]

##### Causality

Because Threat is in large part provided by character action, it helps provide a balance to the game, ensuring that the "pressure" that the player characters apply to a situation is met with equal force by their opposition.

Threat serves as a visible cause-and-effect for players taking risks and facing the problems that come along with it: the GM's use of Threat feeds from circumstances in-game: the protagonists push their luck, and fate pushes back. This provides the players with an understanding of how their choices influence the problems they face and gives the Gamemaster a clear license to create those problems on the fly.

The causality of Threat means providing a narrative link between the ways that Threat is gained during a scene, and the effects that come from spending Threat. It doesn't have to apply to every time the GM gains or spend Threat, but a few key instances can help a feel of continuity and verisimilitude.

A good example of this might be a character adding to Threat to buy dice when climbing a crumbling cliff, and the GM spending some of that Threat later to make the cliff begin to subside, or enemies sounding an alarm, which adds Threat points which the GM then spends to bring in reinforcements.

### Proportionate Resistance

Because Threat can often be gained through the actions of the player characters, this means that the players have considerable control over the amount of Threat the Gamemaster has available during a scene. Cautious, reluctant, or careful players may give very little Threat (as may new players who aren't comfortable with the idea of empowering the GM), while aggressive or determined players can flood the GM with additional Threat.

Players reluctant to add to Threat may find themselves Momentum-starved at crucial moments, making higher-Difficulty Skill Tests and other challenging situations more difficult to overcome, while players more comfortable with giving the GM Threat can blast through difficult situations with relative ease, as they'll always have the extra dice and other benefits they need, and can generate extra Momentum accordingly.

Thus, the GM should watch the group's behaviour, and their approach to Threat, to help guide decisions made during the game, such as numbers of enemies and Difficulty of Skill Tests. The GM's use of Threat should also be adjusted accordingly: if players generate a lot of Threat, then that Threat can be used to put pressure on those players in turn, so that the players have a degree of control over how big a challenge they will face.

If the players are wary of Threat, and reluctant to provide the GM with any, then the GM should use Threat sparingly; Threat use may need to be rationed anyway, as there isn't as much available. Also, using effects that alter the circumstances rather than just amp up the Difficulty can be good for the game in general: players wary of Threat often feel afraid of it being used to "punish" them later, so using it in more narrative and less confrontational or adversarial ways can help. It can also help if Threat is used in small quantities, rather than saving up for a bigger effect: a large pool of Threat can seem ominous, especially for players expecting some big, catastrophic expenditure.

If the players give Threat freely, then the GM should use Threat eagerly and often: using Threat roughly as often as the players generate it is a good benchmark, simply to avoid a flood of Threat. Players that give Threat freely tend to fall into one of two categories: players looking for a challenge, and players who don't regard Threat as particularly threatening. In the former case, spending Threat gives the player what they want. In the latter case, spending Threat regularly means that the player doesn't come to regard adding to Threat as consequence-free – an ever-growing pool of Threat may seem intimidating, unless the GM never spends any of it, at which point it may seem to have no bearing on play at all.

In either case, the GM can still regulate the flow of Threat – spending it more frequently than it is gained will reduce the size of the Threat pool and make the situation less tense, while spending it less frequently than it is gained allows the pool, and the tension it represents, to grow.

### Status Gauge

An interesting use of Threat doesn't rely on how Threat is gained or spent: instead, it considers simply how much Threat there is. The overall quantity of Threat can be used as a gauge for the situation currently playing out. This is a useful trick when handling games focussed on infiltration or subterfuge (though it works in other situations too), as the amount of Threat can provide a useful guide for how NPCs will act: higher Threat means adversaries will be alert, wary, and quick to respond, while bystanders may withdraw from the area or hide if startled.

This provides a greater sense of feedback for Threat, with an effect more visible and pervasive than individual uses of Threat. It is especially valuable in situations where the peril is contained within the local environment – such as a single building, a compound, or some other restricted area – or where there is some supernatural phenomenon in play that Threat can represent... or both, such as a haunted house or similar environment.

If the situation is one where Threat will fluctuate heavily, Threat can cue a change in NPC behaviour: if high Threat means that an enemy is alert and vigilant, then spending Threat for that enemy can represent the effort and intensity of their search, which will pass in time. As Threat decreases, those enemies will relax their efforts, let their guard down, and go back to their normal patrols, but an increase in Threat will increase their alertness again. This produces a degree of dynamic feedback, where actions that feed and draw from Threat influence the situation in passive ways as well as more active and immediate ones.

### Gaining Threat

The Gamemaster begins every adventure with a set amount of Threat, based on both the number of players and on the underlying tension and danger of the adventure itself. By default, this is 2 Threat per player character, but some adventures may begin with a larger or smaller number.

- A **low stakes** adventure begins with 1 Threat per player character. These adventures are likely to be simple, straightforward affairs. This is useful for short one-off games, while in a campaign it suits low-key adventures that serve as a reprieve after a few tense adventures.
- A **high stakes** adventure begins with 3 Threat per player character. These adventures are likely to be high in action, drama, and uncertainty. In a campaign, several adventures may lead up to a high stakes adventure, building in tension over time.
- A **catastrophic** adventure begins with 4 Threat per player character. These adventures are likely to be explosive, whether literally or figuratively, and are ideally suited to climactic struggles against major adversaries. They should also be extremely rare, being built up to over the course of a campaign.

Once an adventure has begun, the Gamemaster can spend and gain Threat as they see fit. The GM gains Threat through a variety of situations and circumstances, as described below.

### Threat from the Player Characters

A significant source of Threat is the player characters, who can add to Threat through their choices and through random chance.

**Instead of Momentum:** Whenever a player character could spend Momentum, even if they do not have any Momentum left to spend, they may choose to pay some or all the cost by adding to Threat. Each

point of Threat added to the GM's pool counts as one Momentum towards whatever use of Momentum the player character wishes to use. NPCs allied to the player characters generate Threat in this way as well.

This is a simple option, but one entirely at the discretion of the players, and as already discussed, different players will have different attitudes to giving the GM Threat.

**Mishaps:** Whenever a player character suffers one or more Mishaps on a Skill Test, they or the GM may choose to add two points to Threat to "buy off" the Mishap.

A bit of random chance means there'll often be a trickle of Threat coming from the players over the course of an adventure. The GM can adjust this by altering the Mishap range of different Skill Tests (where appropriate), and that change of Mishap range comes naturally from mental damage (fear and panic make characters more prone to mistakes), but it still depends on how the dice fall and cannot be relied upon.

**Escalation:** The GM – or the rules – may note that specific actions or decisions risk Escalation, making a situation more dangerous or unpredictable. If a character performs an action that risks Escalation, they immediately add one to Threat.

The GM should be consistent in this, and instances of Escalation should be appropriate to the theme and style of the game. However, use of lethal force, or carrying heavy or military-grade weapons into a populated area, are both actions that commonly risk Escalation. The GM should declare that an action risks Escalation, and then allow the player character to choose whether they wish to continue with that choice: springing an Escalation cost on a player after the fact is unlikely to be well-received.

### Other Sources of Threat

The GM has a couple of other ways of generating Threat, which give them additional control over how much Threat is available and how that reflects the events going on in the game.

**Threatening Circumstances:** The environment or situation of a new scene may be threatening or dangerous in some way, adding one or two Threat to the pool automatically when the scene begins. Some NPCs may generate Threat simply by turning up (this is covered by the *Menacing* special ability, in **Chapter 4: Adversaries and NPCs**), in response to changes in the situation (often noted in the NPC's special abilities or talents), or by taking certain actions. Sometimes, the environment may have specific ways of increasing Threat when interacted with: an alarm that can be triggered, heavy or dangerous machinery that can be activated, or flammable materials that could burn or explode.

This method is easy to abuse, but it can be fun for the players if used carefully and thematically. Actions and situations that generate Threat are more interesting in play than effects that simply generate Threat automatically, as they help reinforce a sense of cause-and-effect as well as being something that the players can try to interrupt or prevent. Allies with the *Menacing* ability are an interesting idea too – it's a nice compromise for having a capable friend, as their presence draws attention that helps offset their abilities.

**Adversary Momentum:** Adversary NPCs with unspent Momentum may spend that Momentum to add to Threat, as they lack a group Momentum pool to save it in. Each Momentum spent adds one to Threat.

This is an important option, as it can allow the players' enemies to build up Threat through their normal actions. A useful trick here is to have "minions" who generate Momentum on their Skill Tests which then gets used by their leader, or to use smaller battles with enemies who dump all their Momentum into Threat rather than spend it on themselves, creating a fight that was "suspiciously easy" to build up to a later scene.

## Spending Threat

The Gamemaster's options for using Threat are more diverse and numerous than the ways of generating Threat, and this is deliberate: there are always more things you could use Threat on than there is Threat to spend on those things.

**Adversary Momentum:** Threat serves in part as a mirror of the players' Momentum pool. Thus, Adversary NPCs may spend Threat in all the ways that the Player Characters can use Momentum.

A simple and straightforward option. It is entirely possible to run a game using the **2d20 System** and only use Threat for this purpose, ignoring all the narrative elements of Threat to use it as "evil Momentum".

**Adversary Threat Costs:** On any action where a player character would be required to add one or more points to Threat, an Adversary NPC performing the same action or making the same choice must spend an equivalent number of points of Threat.

Again, simple and straightforward. This is less a use and more a cost, a way to balance the scales by ensuring that Adversaries pay for things just like the player characters do.

**Adversary Mishaps:** If an Adversary NPC suffers a Mishap, the GM may buy off that Mishap by spending two Threat.

Once more, a natural counterpart to how the rules work for player characters.

**Complication:** The Gamemaster may create a Complication by spend two Threat. This must come naturally from the current situation.

This can be a useful way to generate Complications without waiting for Mishaps to occur, but it should be used sparingly. Ideal opportunities for this option include failed Skill Tests, or from NPC actions (akin to spending Momentum to generate an Advantage), but as a rule of thumb, a Complication should only ever occur because something happened, rather than appearing out of nowhere.

**Reinforcements:** The GM may bring in additional Adversary NPCs during a scene. Minor NPCs cost one Threat each, while Notable NPCs cost two Threat. A group of Minor NPCs costs Threat equal to half the number of NPCs in the group, rounded up. In a conflict, this should be done at the start of a round, with the reinforcements able to act during that round as normal. This does not apply to NPCs who are present at the start of the scene, only additional ones who arrive while the scene is in progress. There must be some logical reason why those reinforcements have arrived and where they've come from.

This is a powerful tool, in part because it allows the GM to scale a conflict according to the player characters' abilities on the fly. Justifications for reinforcements are easy to devise – the example police officer NPC is a good example of this – and it can be used to refocus an action scene on its objectives rather than simply trying to defeat all the enemies (the player characters can't "defeat all the enemies" if there's an endless supply of enemies).

The last option, Environmental Effects and Narrative Changes, requires a more in-depth examination, so it receives its own section, below.

### Environmental Effects and Narrative Changes

The options a GM has for using Threat are not limited to those primarily-mechanical options discussed above. Indeed, many of the most potent and most dramatic options have a more far-reaching effect than simply buying extra dice or altering test Difficulty.

Dramatic scenes often play out in exciting environments, whether crumbling stairs in ancient ruins, the turbulent shallows of a river crossing, the bustling indifference of a busy city, a rocky cliff with waves thundering against the jagged shore, the offices and cubicles of a steel-and-glass skyscraper, or the strobing lights and pounding music of an underground nightclub, or even more evocative locations. When describing scenes, the GM will already have defined what the environment is like, and they should typically aim to have the environment enhance the scene: a scene with an evocative backdrop will be much more memorable and interesting. There's no reason to use bland or uninteresting locales, as the Gamemaster has control over where each scene takes place.

Furthermore, the Gamemaster can use Threat to bring that environment to the fore, putting the environment into motion in some fashion, or by taking obvious elements from the Traits and other description, and emphasising or developing them. Similarly, the GM can employ Threat to perform a few different narrative tricks and techniques that can add twists, turns, and other story elements to the game. Either way, these effects cost Threat.

As a rule of thumb, environmental and narrative effects of this sort come in a few distinct categories.

- **Incidental Effects** cost one Threat, and they appear in play as things such as flickering lights, unstable floors, and thick smoke. These don't cause a significant problem, but it might increase the Mishap range of a Skill Test by one, make some routine action require a Difficulty 1 Skill Test when success would normally be automatic, or require a Difficulty 1 Skill Test to avoid a problem. This effect may come from something which is persistent but varied, representing that problem at its worst: the unstable floor may give way a little, making a character stumble, while billowing smoke may obscure vision at the worst moment, hindering vision for a split second. The effect applies to a single character when the Threat is spent; extra Threat may be spent to affect additional characters, though it shouldn't affect too many characters at once.
- A **Change of Circumstances** is more significant, and such an effect should cost at least two Threat. An environmental effect like this can be represented by taking an existing location or situation Trait, and then replacing it with another Trait of the same type (such as going from bright light to deep darkness), or by adding a new Trait that alters the situation in some way, shape, or form. It may make an area more difficult to traverse or force a different route to be found (such as blocking a path with thick mud or falling debris). Each Trait changed, added, or removed costs 2 Threat, and some changes of circumstances could see several Traits change in quick succession.
- **Immediate Hazards** inflict damage suddenly on a single character. Physical damage can come from factors like fire, collapsing structures, falling, dangerous chemicals, traps, and other perils. Mental damage might represent horrific or demoralising sights, as well as other shocks or scares. The number of points of Threat spent determines how much damage is inflicted, as well as if any

damage effects apply. The amount of damage and the damage effects chosen should make sense for the environmental hazard represented: an explosion of fuel or other flammable chemical could have the *Area* and *Persistent* effects, for example, while glimpsing a horrific visage might have the *Piercing* effect. An immediate hazard applies its effects instantly, but characters affected may attempt a Skill Test to resist or avoid the effects, and the easier the hazard is to avoid, the less Threat it costs (to a minimum of one).

- **Lingering Hazards** are effects applied to an area (one zone), which deal damage to anyone within that area, at the start of each round that they remain in that area. This may represent something physical, like a raging fire, choking fumes, or a room flooding with corrosive chemicals, or something mental, like the constant sounds of agonised screaming, or spending time in somewhere adorned with grisly remains or an unnatural, unsettling ambience. The GM should spend the Threat to create this effect when the player characters first become of it, though it should still come naturally from the scene description and associated Traits. Remember that, while it affects a whole area and potentially multiple characters, cunning players may figure out ways to use it against their enemies. The amount of Threat required for this depends on the amount of damage, and the damage effects chosen.
- **Dividing the Group** can complicate the player characters' plans like nothing else. Perhaps a door slams shut behind part of the group, or a section of floor collapses beneath them, or a means of climbing like a ladder or staircase breaks. Whatever happens, some circumstance has contrived to separate the group temporarily. When used, the Gamemaster splits the group into two, choosing how many and which characters end up in which part of the group. The Gamemaster then pays Threat equal to the number of player characters in the larger of the two parts of the group. The two parts of the group cannot directly interact with one another while divided – though they may still be able to communicate by shouting or using phones or radios – and reuniting the group will require some time and effort. At the very most, the separation lasts only until the end of the current scene.
- A **Reveal**, like the problem of revelation described on page @@, shows the player characters some fact that they wish wasn't true. This could be an ally betraying the player characters, or it could be the discovery that that the situation they're in is an ambush, or that there's a bomb in the room. This sets up a new situation, changing the nature of the scene – perhaps a social conflict or stealthy approach becomes a combat, or perhaps there's now a challenge to overcome, or time pressure that applies. A Reveal costs 4 Threat.
- A **Reversal** is a significant turning point or change of fortunes, and the Gamemaster may only use this once per adventure. By spending two Threat per player character present in the scene, the Gamemaster ends the scene immediately, with the situation unresolved. The Gamemaster describes how the situation escalates or deteriorates in a major way – such as an overwhelming number of enemy reinforcements or some other imminent catastrophe – and then the scene ends. The reversal cannot be used to harm or kill the player characters directly, only to radically change their circumstances, and the players should be given a few moments to discuss their new situation before the Gamemaster sets a new scene. As the GM chose how the previous scene ended, they can use it to set up the next scene in a specific way. To compensate the player characters for facing this reversal, they also receive a Fortune point each.

#### *Hazard Damage and Threat Costs*

Effect	Threat Cost	Notes
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3[CD] damage	2	Base damage for a Hazard
+2[CD] damage	+1	Can be stacked multiple times
Area	Multiply total cost by 2	Apply cost modifier from Area last. May only apply to <i>Immediate Hazards</i> .
Destructive	+1	
Drain	+1	
Intense	+3	
Knockdown	+1	
Persistent X	+(X divided by 2)	Round fractions up
Piercing X	+(X divided by 2)	Round fractions up
Snare	+1	
Stun	+1	
Vicious X	+X	
Applies to more than one Zone	+3	May only be used with <i>Lingering Hazards</i> .
Does not affect Adversaries	+3	May only be used with the <i>Area</i> damage effect or <i>Lingering Hazards</i> .

[Begin Sidebar]

#### Environmental Actions

In a conflict, when the situation is split into Rounds and Turns, it may sometimes be useful for the GM to set aside a Turn every Round for the environment to take actions.

Strictly speaking, the environment isn't doing anything deliberately, but this provides a convenient point at which the GM can handle those moments where the scene itself adds to or spends Threat for environmental or narrative effects (as opposed to spending it on characters directly).

*For example: the action is taking place inside a burning building. Each Round, the situation adds 2 to Threat, as the state of the building worsens and the fire rages (and to encourage the player characters to get out quickly), and the GM can spend Threat to make the fire spread, to cause parts of the ceiling or floor to collapse, to make choking smoke billow out, and so forth. Gaining that Threat and spending it on those effects takes place on a specific Turn each Round, within the normal action order – so that the situation will get worse, but it won't necessarily get worse at the same point each Round.*

If the situation is especially severe, it may even warrant multiple Turns each Round, though in that case it may be wise to break up the situation into discrete problems, each of which receives a distinct Turn (to continue the above example, perhaps the collapsing building is one problem, and the fire is another).

[End Sidebar]

## Stripping It All Away

The **2D20 System** is, in many ways, a toolkit for the GM and players to use as they see fit to tell exciting stories and play out thrilling adventures, and, while there are a few rules present to provide a specific structure and 'shape' for different types of activity: traits, zones, combat, social conflict, stealth, chases,

various skill challenges, as well as common uses for Momentum, Threat, and Fortune, and mechanics for stress and damage.

But the truth is that none of these are necessary: they're useful, but not all tools are equally useful to all people and in all situations. It takes some more work and judgement from the GM, but it is entirely possible to handle any action, any activity, or any situation, using only Skill Tests.

In short: the Gamemaster asks the players what they want to do, the players decide on what do to, the GM decides whether that is or isn't possible, and how difficult it is, and the Skill Test is resolved accordingly. When the players want to spend Momentum, they suggest possible uses (or the GM asks if there's anything they want to accomplish with it), the GM says how much those uses will cost, and the players decide if they want to spend that Momentum. In return, the GM makes Skill Tests for the NPCs and uses Threat for various events and situations. The rules are still used, but it's a lot less formal, and a lot more ad-hoc.

That may seem a little daunting for a new GM, or a GM wanting to try the game without the structure of various sub-systems and mechanics, but it can be extremely rewarding, and it often happens quite naturally for GMs experienced with the **2d20 System**. A few suggestions, ideas, and guidelines for this kind of playstyle are presented below.

### No Traits

The function of Traits is one that can be handled entirely by a willing Gamemaster. Each Trait is simply a signifier of some significant factor that might influence things that happen in play, such as the actions of characters.

As noted in the “Traits on the Fly” sidebar, the matter of Traits can be left informal, handled by the GM as a natural part of play. Rather than specifically referring to Traits, the GM uses their knowledge of the situation to judge whether a task is possible or impossible, and whether it will influence the Difficulty of Skill Tests. Players can similarly propose that some external factors – something that would normally be covered by a Trait – might influence the activities they can attempt, and how difficult those activities will be.

Advantages and Complications still exist, in the sense that characters can still create advantageous situations and still suffer complicating ones, but their default function as Traits is less significant here than the narrative effects they represent.

This is probably the simplest step to take when stripping out parts of the **2d20 System**, as Traits are simply a way of codifying and highlighting the process of judging possibilities and difficulties.

### Simple Damage

A character is attacked, damage is rolled, and the character checks off a few Stress boxes, and maybe notes that they've suffered Harm. That's a normal part of the combat procedure, and it's mirrored in a few other sub-systems as well, like chases. But it doesn't have to be.

In this model, damage is simpler, though it's also deadlier and more abrupt. It can suit games where danger is less common but still to be feared, and it can suit games where such perils are swifter and more dangerous. It's also one less thing to track, and it means that distinctions between weapons, armour, and cover are no longer as important, allowing the game to focus on the characters – the GM

may judge that defeating an enemy with fists is more difficult than doing so with a knife or gun, but there's no difference in the consequences that come from getting hurt by one.

If a character is attacked or otherwise affected by something that could hurt them – physically or mentally – then they're Defeated immediately, and they can no longer do anything in the rest of the scene. If the attack or hazard was deadly, then they may even be dying, requiring urgent medical attention or the character dies or is otherwise rendered unplayable.

And that's it.

As an option on top of this, the GM can allow players to spend Momentum (2 is a decent amount) and Suffer a Complication to avoid being Defeated, representing a minor injury or collateral damage that occurs instead, and this last-minute avoidance can be allowed a finite number of times per scene (normally once, but the player can regain the use if they can catch their breath or regain their composure; the GM may allow a Talent that provides an extra use of this option).

### No Turn Order

Most scenes require no specific Turn Order – characters simply declare what they want to do, with the action passing from player to player as the GM and players desire, in whatever way feels natural. In this way, the flow of the action is more like a conversation between the players and the GM – the GM asks what the players want to do, one of the players asks if they can try something, a Skill Test is made and resolved, and then the GM asks another player what they want to do in response to that... and so forth until the scene is concluded.

There is no reason that this cannot be the case in combat. The strict action order for combat, and the selection of actions characters can attempt, is designed to direct the players to make choices, and to ensure that everyone has equal opportunity to try something in these tense situations. However, a mindful Gamemaster can achieve those ends in a more fluid, natural way by using the same conversational style as other scenes use.

In this style, it's often useful to provide a little structure for the action, even if only in guiding how the GM approaches each new scene and situation.

Once a scene is established, the first Skill Test the GM asks for is to bring the player characters into the scene, covering how they arrive at the scene, or otherwise defines what they are doing when the scene begins. This Test should be allowed to Succeed at Cost, and it serves as a basis for what the player characters are doing in that situation. This Test's outcome – regardless of what it is – serves as the basis for the rest of the scene going forwards: if the player characters are sneaking in, then the character leading their approach makes a Skill Test, and the result tells the GM and players if the group got into the scene unnoticed, or if they were noticed, delayed, or otherwise hindered (potential results from Mishaps), as well as giving them the chance to generate a little Momentum if they succeeded well.

After this initial Test, play continues as normal. And, just as the adventure is broken up into scenes, each scene can be thought of as a series of beats: a beat is the smallest division of action within a film or play, a single meaningful action, decision, or event that either drives the story forward or makes it change direction. Each beat is both an action in its own right and a reaction to the beats before it. Further, beats are of no fixed duration: a single long activity could be one beat, while several short actions could be several beats.

In game terms, a beat is when a character (player or non-player) attempts to do something (with or without a Skill Test), often involving a Skill Test, or when the GM spends Threat to make something happen. Each beat can then be followed with one of three words – “and...”, “then...”, or “but...” – which lead to the next beat, as the players look to the GM to see what happens next, or the GM asks one of the players how their character responds to that development.

A scene takes as few or as many beats as it needs to, and, as normal, a scene ends when the player characters can no longer do anything meaningful in that place or at that time.

## No Action Types

The lists of Free, Minor, and Major Actions are intended to provide the players with a wide and interesting selection of options during conflicts. Of course, this list is more a prompt – ideas to start the players thinking about what they can do, and to formalise things they’re likely to want to do – than an absolute listing of all the players’ options, and characters aren’t limited to those choices. Limitless choice can lead to “analysis paralysis”, as players spend ages trying to find the ‘best’ option, so a degree of guidance and structure is useful with some groups.

But not all of them. Greater freedom and flexibility can suit some groups extremely well, especially with the Gamemaster adjudicating how the rules for those choices work.

So, with this approach, characters don’t get a set quantity of actions each turn, or specific reactions. Rather, when the player wants to do something, the GM chooses if it’s a Skill Test or not, if it’s an Opposed Test, and what success and failure mean. And the GM can use this flexibility to give the players more options too.

When it comes to more complex or multi-faceted actions – such as moving and attacking – the GM should consider whether the component pieces are all part of a single activity (in which case, extra activity may be a given, or add to the Difficulty or Mishap Range), or if they’re distinct actions in their own right (in which case, they get broken up into their own things, perhaps allowing enemies to interrupt).

## No Zones

This approach massively reduces the amount of tracking of movement and location in game, relying on the collective imagination of the players, and a few simple guidelines, for handling movement and distance. The drawback to this is less ability to distinguish between different distances, which can be valuable for differentiating between types of ranged attack.

There are three broad bands of distance, in this variant. Naturally, this means to ignore any references to other ranges – Close, Medium, Long, or Extreme – or to zones.

- **Reach:** Anything within arm’s length of a character or object is said to be within Reach. Characters must be within Reach to make melee attacks, physically interact with objects and other characters, and so forth. A character within Reach of an enemy increases the Difficulty of any Skill Test that is not a melee attack by +1.
- **Nearby:** Most things within a conflict will be considered Nearby. A character can move into Reach of anything Nearby, or to anywhere else classed as being Nearby, and normal movement (a *Movement* Minor Action, if you’re using action types, or as a normal part of a Skill Test). Nearby is the normal state for most activities in a conflict.

- **Distant:** Some things in a conflict will be further removed from the action; these are Distant. A character can move to or from somewhere Distant if they specifically attempt to do so (if you're using action types, a *Rush* Major Action). Actions affecting Distant characters increase in Difficulty by +1.

Beyond this, the Gamemaster and players are responsible for tracking which characters are where, but the three categories above mean that fine distinctions are seldom relevant. In practical terms, a character can move almost anywhere in the environment within a single Turn, making movement a relatively simple consideration.

One extra consideration is blocking. As precise distances and positions are not tracked, hindering or blocking enemy movement is more difficult. This can be achieved to some extent by using Complications to impede the enemy, but that isn't the only way to handle this. A character may not move directly past an enemy such that they would have to move into, and then out of, Reach of that enemy to get past; moving into Reach of an enemy immediately ends a character's movement. The character can then attempt to move away in a subsequent Turn.