2d20 System SRD: Core Rules

System Resource Document for 2D20 System RPGS, 2022 Edition

This Chapter covers the core rules of the **2D20 System**, which will be used throughout the rest of the game. These rules are the foundation for the other rules in the game, and will be referenced regularly in other Chapters, and every player should have a basic understanding of these concepts during play.

Scenes and Situations

Just like the events of a TV show, a movie, or a novel, gameplay in the **2D20 System** is structured in **scenes**. Each scene may cover a few minutes of events, up to an hour or so, during which the characters attempt to achieve a goal, overcome a problem, or otherwise engage in significant activities. Collectively, scenes are the building blocks of a game session, and serve as a foundation for gameplay.

Anyone familiar with works of fiction will have a decent idea of what a scene looks like: the characters talk and act within a single location, towards resolving some conflict or challenge present. Then, once that conflict is challenge is resolved, the action moves to a new location, or even to different characters, and the whole cycle begins again. The key here is that scenes are the interesting parts of the story, and thus they skip past the parts of the story that aren't interesting. Different groups may have different standards as to what is and isn't interesting, so this concept is deliberately flexible.

Setting the Scene

The Gamemaster has the responsibility for setting up scenes that Players will play through, and on deciding when they end. The Players have free reign to do as they wish within that scene, and the Gamemaster can react though the actions of Non-Player Characters, and by spending Threat to trigger logical and consequential changes in the environment and situation. When events within that scene have concluded, and nothing else can be done in that place right now, the Gamemaster should end the scene and move onto the next one.

Establishing a Scene

A scene is defined by its location, the events occurring there at a specific time, and the people who are there. These elements are all facts about the scene that can influence the actions that characters wish to and are able to attempt. In the **2d20 System**, these facts are collectively regarded as **Traits**. Each Trait is a single word or short phrase, which describes a single significant fact about whatever it is the Trait belongs to.

As Traits represent *significant* facts, they represent the things that are important to know about the scene, the kinds of elements which are most obvious when a scene begins. Imagine the details that are most obvious when a scene begins in a movie or TV show, or the elements the author describes as scenes unfold in a novel. There may be lots of insignificant facts, but they're just that – insignificant – so they don't need to be defined. If something becomes important, it becomes a Trait. If a Trait stops being important, or stops being true, it stops being a Trait.

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 serve to detract from the players' immersion in the situation, but sits better with players who want to engage with the game's mechanics in more depth.

Traits are useful for the Gamemaster in adjudicating what is and what isn't possible – as well as how difficult some activities are to attempt – and can provide players with an aid to imagining the situation and figuring out how their characters can interact with it.

There are a handful of broad categories that denote what a given Trait applies 'to', and whether a character might be affected by a Trait. These are primarily a guideline for the GM, but they're useful for everyone to know.

- A **location** Trait is some fact or detail about the location itself. A scene should probably have at least one location Trait, a simple description of what the location is, such as "city street", "rowdy tavern", "dense forest", or similar, and these Traits will exist for as long as the location does. Characters are affected by location Traits when they interact with the location itself.
- A **situation** Trait describes something that is happening in the scene. Darkness, notable weather (heavy rain, thick fog, snow), or some circumstantial fact or presence in the scene (bustling crowds, heavy traffic, and so forth) are situation Traits. They affect any character in the scene, but they can often be changed through character action.
- A **personal** Trait describes the nature or state of a character or creature. In some cases, this may be some innate and permanent quality, such as the species of an animal or alien, which defines

how the creature interacts with the world. In others, it may be something potentially changeable like a mood, emotion, or belief, or an injury or other hindrance. Characters are affected by their own personal Traits, and those of any characters they interact with.

- **Equipment** Traits describe a single item, object, or tool. They're permanent – so long as the item functions, the Trait exists – and can be passed between characters as desired. An equipment Trait affects the character using that item to perform some appropriate activity.

Traits have no specific or exact duration. They exist so long as they represent something that is true. As soon as what a Trait represents stops being the case, the Trait vanishes (or changes to one that reflects a new situation, such as *darkness* being replaced by *brightly-lit* when a location's lights are turned on). Similarly, to remove a Trait from a situation, it needs to stop being true, typically through the actions of the characters.

When establishing a scene, the Gamemaster assigns whatever Traits they feel are relevant and appropriate, thinking of the environment and current circumstances. The Gamemaster should be open with this process, and allow players to suggest Traits at the start of the scene, and allow for Traits to change as the scene unfolds.

Permission and Difficulty

The effect that Traits have upon the game is more than just descriptive: they help the GM determine what is and what isn't possible, and how easy or difficult things are to achieve. In rules terms, they do one of the following things:

- The Trait has no impact on the activity, and does not have any effect.
- The Trait is beneficial, allowing an activity to be attempted that could not be attempted otherwise.
- The Trait is beneficial, and makes the activity easier.
- The Trait is detrimental, preventing an activity from being attempted which would otherwise be possible.
- The Trait is detrimental, and makes the activity more difficult.

If a Trait should have a particularly potent or intense effect – a larger effect than those listed above – the GM should simply make it multiple identical Traits, essentially creating a single Trait that has the effect of many. This can be denoted simply by adding a number after the name of the Trait.

Positive and Negative Traits

Some Traits are specifically good or bad for some characters within a scene, normally because of the actions of those characters. Where most Traits are inherently neutral – they don't naturally favour anyone – many of those created during a scene will 'belong' to a specific character and may tend to be more helpful to one side or another.

A positive trait is inherently good for its owner, and might include favourable circumstances, useful equipment, and similar.

A negative trait is inherently bad for its owner and might include injuries or other inconvenient circumstances.

Positive and negative traits can cancel out one another: a character may seek to create a positive trait to negate the effects of a negative one (such as securing a source of light to help see through darkness), or they may suffer a negative trait that negates a positive trait they possessed.

There are numerous ways, described throughout the rules, that both Players and GM alike can produce traits. In general terms, where a trait may appear or vanish freely or without cost, creating a positive or negative trait normally comes at some cost, or because of some sort of trigger.

[Begin Sidebar]

What Hinders You Helps Me

When a situation would allow a positive or negative trait to be created, the character who creates them may create the opposite type of trait and apply it to someone on the opposing side. For example, a character who would suffer a negative trait may choose to give their enemy a positive trait instead, or they can impose a negative trait upon an enemy instead of granting themselves a positive trait. This still needs to make sense in the context of the scene, and the GM may veto any traits that don't make sense.

[End Sidebar]

Tasks and Skill Tests

Characters in **2D20 System** games are presumed to be skilled, competent, proactive individuals, knowledgeable in their chosen fields and with enough basic familiarity in other fields to ensure that they can engage with and overcome almost any problem or obstacle, given time and the right tools. However, there are situations where a character's success is in doubt, or where failure or mishap is interesting. This is where **Tasks** come into play.

A Task begins with the desire to achieve something. A player states what they want to accomplish, and how they intend to get it. The Gamemaster then judges, based on the current situation (represented by the scene's Traits), whether the character can achieve that goal. The GM will then determine one of three answers:

- **Yes:** The character can achieve that goal without effort or challenge.
- **No:** The character cannot achieve that goal.
- **Maybe:** The character might be able to achieve their goal… but success is uncertain.

The first two answers are easy enough to handle: the player states their intent, the GM says "yes" or "no", and play continues from there.

The third answer is where **Skill Tests** come into play. Because there's doubt as to the outcome, a Skill Test determines what happens.

[Begin Sidebar]

No, But…

It's important to remember that the GM's answer to a Task may only be temporary. A character may not be able to achieve their goal *right now*, but that doesn't mean that this will always be the case. Specifically, a character may change the situation through their actions… which is a key element of Traits.

This is a key part of how Traits and Tasks interact. A Trait can influence whether a Task is possible or not, and changing that Trait, or applying a different one, can change that possibility.

These rules presume that, given sufficient time, the correct tools, and the opportunity to concentrate, a character will be able to succeed at just about anything they set their mind to. Failure is not a matter of inability, but of insufficient time, inappropriate (or absent) tools, or some manner of obstacle or interruption. A course of action may be deemed impossible not because the character cannot ever do it, but because they don't have the means to do it at that precise moment. Finding out a way to make the impossible possible is part of the adventure.

[End Sidebar]

[Begin Sidebar]

What's at Stake?

The Gamemaster should have a clear idea of what a Skill Test is for, and what will happen if the test succeeds or fails. In general, one of the following is likely to be true:

- The Skill Test is an attempt to achieve something: if the test succeeds, the character gets what they want, if the test fails, they don't get it. This might be to create, change, or remove a Trait currently in play.
- The Skill Test is to avoid or resist a danger. In this case, success mean that the character avoids the danger, while failure means that they suffer the danger they sought to avoid.
- The Skill Test is to achieve something, but there's something at stake as well. Success means that the character got what they wanted and avoided the consequences, while failure means that they suffer the consequences instead, or must choose to face the consequences if they want to achieve their goal.

Players should be informed of the potential outcomes for success or failure before the Skill Test is attempted. The player characters are assumed to be capable enough to know the most likely outcomes for their actions.

[End Sidebar]

Attributes and Skills

While examined in more depth in **Chapter 3: Characters**, it's nevertheless useful to have a brief overview of these elements of a character here as well, as they feed directly into the subject of Skill Tests.

A character has several **Attributes**, which encompass their innate capabilities. A character's Attributes range from 7 to 12.

A character then has several **Skills**, which cover the character's training and expertise in specific fields. A character's Skills range from 1 to 5.

A character also has Focuses, which are categories of specialisation, representing advanced training and practical experience in specific fields. Focuses do not have a specific rating of their own.

For any given Skill Test, a character will add together a single Attribute and a single Skill to determine the **Target Number** for that Test. The character may also use a single Focus.

Attempting a Skill Test

A Skill Test involves rolling two or more d20s, and follows a specific process. The following explanation mentions several ideas that will be described fully later in this Chapter.

- The Gamemaster chooses which **Attribute** and which **Skill** are appropriate for the Skill Test being attempted, as well as if any of the characters Focuses apply. This might be stated by the rules text, or the Player may suggest a combination, but the Gamemaster has the final say. Add together the Attribute and the Skill chosen: this is the **Target Number** for the Skill Test.
- The Gamemaster sets the **Difficulty** for the Skill Test. This is normally any number from 0 to 5, but in some extreme cases can go higher. Some Skill Tests may have a default Difficulty listed in the rules, but circumstances (such as those represented by Traits) can affect those basic Difficulties. The Difficulty is the number of successes the Player must generate to successfully pass the Skill Test.
    - Once a base Difficulty has been determined, the GM and/or the players may choose to adjust it further by spending **Momentum** or **Threat**. These changes are one-time effects,

- The player takes two d20s, and may choose to purchase up to three additional d20s by spending **Momentum** or adding to **Threat** (see "**Improving the Odds**", later). Once additional dice have been purchased, if any, the Player rolls their dice pool.
- Each die that rolls equal to or less than the Target Number scores a single success, and each die that rolls a 1 is a **Critical Success**, which scores two successes instead of one.
    - If a Focus applies, then each die that rolls equal to or less than the Skill being used is a Critical Success. There is no extra benefit for having more than one applicable Focus, or for rolling a 1 when you have an applicable Focus.
    - Each die that rolls a 20 causes a **Complication**.
- If the number of successes scored equals or exceeds the Difficulty of the Skill Test, then the Skill Test has been completed successfully. If the number of successes scored is less than the Difficulty of the Skill Test, then the Skill Test has failed.
    - If the number of successes scored is greater than the Difficulty, each success above the Difficulty becomes a single point of **Momentum**.
- The Gamemaster describes the outcome of the Skill Test, and if the Test was successful, the Player may spend Momentum to improve the result further. After this, the effects of any Complications are applied.

Test Difficulty

When the Gamemaster calls for a Skill Test, they set a Difficulty for that Test. Many Skill Tests detailed elsewhere in this book list a basic Difficulty, which means the Gamemaster doesn't need to determine that baseline, but even those Skill Tests should be evaluated in context to determine if other factors impact how difficult the Skill Test is at that moment. The Gamemaster should also determine if the Skill Test is possible or not, given the circumstances and the methods at the characters' disposal.

Unless otherwise noted, most Skill Tests will have a basic Difficulty of 1, though more routine or straightforward Skill Tests may have a Difficulty of 0, and more complex or problematic Skill Tests will have higher Difficulties. After this, the Gamemaster then considers if there are any other factors in the current scene and environment, or affecting the characters involved, which would alter this basic Difficulty.

These factors typically come in the form of Traits — already described above — which will have one of the following effects:

- The Trait would not impact the Skill Test and does not have any effect.
- The Trait is beneficial, and allows the Skill Test to be attempted when it might normally be impossible.
- The Trait is beneficial, and reduces the Difficulty of the Skill Test by one.
- The Trait is detrimental, and increases the Difficulty of the Skill Test by one.
- The Trait is detrimental, and either prevents the Skill Test from being attempted when it might normally be possible, or the situation now requires a Skill Test when one would not normally have been required.

The Players should know the Difficulty of the Skill Tests they attempt: their characters are skilled professionals, who can easily evaluate how difficult an activity is. This allows the Players to determine what they'll need to do to have the best chance of success.

Difficulty	Descriptor	Example
0	Simple	Opening a slightly stuck door Researching a widely known subject Shooting a target at a shooting range at optimal range
1	Routine	Overcoming a simple lock Researching a specialist subject Shooting an enemy at optimal range
2	Average	Overcoming a complex lock Researching obscure information Shooting an enemy at optimal range in poor light
3	Challenging	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry Researching restricted information Shooting an enemy at long range in poor light
4	Difficult	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry, without the proper tools Researching classified information Shooting an enemy at long range, in poor light and heavy rain
5	Daunting	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry, without the proper tools, and in the middle of a battle Researching a subject where the facts have been thoroughly redacted from official records Shooting an enemy at extreme range in poor light and heavy rain

[Begin Sidebar]

GM Guidance: Setting Difficulties

Setting the base Difficulty of a Skill Test is more art than science in most cases, and Gamemasters will often learn to gauge and appropriate Difficulty with a little experience. Still, a little guidance is useful for Gamemasters using the *2d20 System* for the first time.

The biggest factor to consider is the chance of getting multiple successes on a roll. Scoring one success is relatively easy, and two successes is challenging but far from impossible, while three or four successes are tough to score reliably with only two dice. Five or more successes cannot be scored without buying additional dice. 1, 3, and 5, then, can be thought of as the points at which the odds change most dramatically.

Most of the Skill Tests in any given game session should have a basic Difficulty of 1. If a Test needs to be particularly challenging or arduous, or which is likely to require assistance to even complete, a Difficulty of 3 is a good starting point. A Test that should be extremely difficult should start at Difficulty 5. From those base points, adjust the Difficulty with the effects of Traits.

[End Sidebar]

[Begin Sidebar]

GM Guidance: Narrative Permission

It's useful, at this point, to discuss the concept of **Narrative Permission**. In short, this refers to whether some element of the fictional world around the characters would enable or prohibit the characters from

attempting certain actions. This is a key part of how the Gamemaster should adjudicate Skill Tests and Traits, as Traits can allow a Test to be attempted, or prevent a Test being attempted.

Narrative Permission is a powerful concept, and one that the Gamemaster has responsibility for adjudicating fairly. Most importantly, the Gamemaster should have a sense of whether permission for a Skill Test can be changed: if a Skill Test is not possible to attempt, what can the characters do to make it possible, or conversely, if a Skill Test is possible now, how might circumstances make it impossible?

Used carefully, this can be a tool to help the Players feel capable and decisive: if a certain course of action is impossible, but the Players can find a way to make it possible, it can be an opportunity to reward creativity and allow the Players to shape the story.

[End Sidebar]

Difficulty Zero Tests

Certain circumstances can reduce the Difficulty of a Skill Test, which may reduce the Difficulty to zero. At other times, a Skill Test may be so simple that it does not require dice to be rolled in the first place. If a Task is Difficulty 0, it does not require dice to be rolled: it is automatically successful with zero successes, with no risk of Complications. However, because no roll is made, it can generate no Momentum — even bonus Momentum from Talents, particularly advantageous situations, etc. — and the character cannot spend any Momentum on the Test's outcome either.

At the Gamemaster's discretion, a character can still choose to roll the dice against a Difficulty of 0 and can generate Momentum as normal (because zero successes are required, every success generated is Momentum), but this comes with the normal risk of Complications as well. This sort of Difficulty 0 Task can be quite useful if it's important to see how successful a character is, but there's no real chance of failure.

Opposed Tests

At times, a character will not simply be trying to overcome the challenges and difficulties posed by circumstances; instead, they may find themselves trying to best an opponent. These situations call for an Opposed Test.

With each Opposed Test, there will be a single character attempting to do something, and another seeking to resist or avoid the first character's attempts. These are the active and reactive characters, respectively. If there are more characters on each side, treat additional characters as assistants.

Both characters attempt a Skill Test normally, with a base Difficulty of 1, which may be adjusted by circumstances. If the situation dictates, each character may have a different Difficulty for their respective Tests. The outcome of the Opposed Test depends on both characters' Test results.

- **Active Character Succeeds, Reactive Character Fails:** The active character achieves their goal, and their Test is successful.
- **Active Character Fails, Reactive Character Succeeds:** The active character fails to achieve their goal, and the reactive character's Test is resolved. Some Opposed Tests have a specific additional outcome for the reactive character's Test.

- **Both Characters Fail:** The active character fails to achieve their goal, but the reactive character gains no additional benefit.
- **Both Characters Succeed:** Compare the total Momentum generated on each character's Skill Test. The character with the higher Momentum wins, and achieves their goal, but loses one Momentum for each Momentum their opponent scored. The loser then loses all the Momentum they generated, and may not spend any. In the case of a tie, the active character wins, but loses all the Momentum they generated.

Complications

Things don't always go entirely to plan. When attempting a Skill Test, each d20 that rolls a 20 causes a Complication, which comes into effect once the Test has been resolved. Complications do not prevent a character from succeeding, but they may impede later activities, or they may simply be inconvenient, painful, or embarrassing.

Complications can take a few different forms, but the two most common are negative traits, and Threat.

The Gamemaster may use a Complication to inflict a negative trait upon a character, which should relate in some way to the action that the character has just performed. As normal for a negative Trait, this will normally increase the difficulty of some Skill Tests the character wishes to attempt or makes certain actions impossible.

Alternatively, if the Player doesn't wish their character to suffer a Complication, or the Gamemaster doesn't wish to inflict a Complication at that point, the Complication can instead be "bought off" by adding two points to the Threat pool. The Gamemaster may do this and then immediately spend the Threat to create a different effect. This is discussed more in **Chapter 6: The Gamemaster**. If an NPC suffered a Complication, the Gamemaster may choose to buy off the Complication by removing two points from Threat.

Some other sections of the rules may suggest specific effects for Complications.

There are other possibilities for Complications beyond these, however. A useful alternative during a Conflict is to impose some immediate restriction or penalty – some problem that lasts a single Turn or Round, such as losing the ability to use an option that is normally available. This will be discussed more in **Chapter 3: Conflict**.

Complication Range

Some circumstances can make a Skill Test uncertain, though not necessarily any more difficult. These factors increase the Complication Range of a Test, making it more likely that Complications will occur. A character has a Complication range of 1 normally, meaning that they suffer Complications for any d20 that rolls a 20. Increasing the Complication range by one means that Complications will occur for each d20 that rolls a 19 or 20 for that Test. Increasing the Complication range by two means Complications will occur on an 18, 19, or 20, and so forth, as summarised on the following table.

Complication Range can never be increased to more than five.

Complication Range	Complications Occur On…
1	20
2	19, 20

3	18, 19, 20
4	17, 18, 19, 20
5	16, 17, 18, 19, 20

Success at a Cost

Some Skill Tests can't really be failed outright; rather, there is uncertainty as to whether the Test can be completed without problems. In such a situation, the Gamemaster may allow characters to Succeed at a Cost, either stating this before the Test is attempted, or providing the option after the dice have been rolled. If this option is provided, then a failed Skill Test still results in a successful outcome, but the character also suffers one automatic Complication, in addition to any that occur because of the dice. These Complications function exactly as if those generated by the dice.

Though the Test has produced a successful outcome, Momentum cannot be spent to improve the outcome of a Skill Test that has Succeeded at Cost. Momentum can only be spent on the Test if it was successful.

In some cases, the 'cost' can be increased further, at the Gamemaster's discretion, causing the character to suffer more than one automatic Complication on a failed Test. This should be made clear when the option to Succeed at Cost is presented.

Improving the Odds

Even the most driven person cannot give their full effort one hundred percent of the time; in tense situations, they need to conserve their energy, capitalise on opportunities, and be willing to take risks to triumph. Thus, the *2D20 System* provides a few ways for characters to improve their chances of success, by buying additional d20s to roll on a Skill Test. Extra dice allow a character to score more successes, and thus reach higher Difficulties or simply generate more Momentum.

A character cannot purchase more than three additional d20s by any means.

The normal method of buying additional d20s is by spending **Momentum**, as discussed later. In brief, this is paid from the group's Momentum pool (because it's done before a Skill Test is rolled), and costs 1 point of Momentum for the first d20, two Momentum for the second d20, and 3 Momentum for the third d20.

As with any Momentum spend, a player may choose to add to **Threat** instead of spending Momentum, perhaps if there isn't enough Momentum left in the pool. The cost remains the same as buying dice with Momentum – 1 Threat for the first die, 2 for the second, 3 for the third. Players may even choose to pay part of the cost with Momentum and part with Threat.

If a character buys some dice with Momentum and some with Threat, the cost remains unchanged: the first die costs 1, the second costs 2, and the third costs three, regardless of how the cost is being paid.

Teamwork and Assistance

Many Skill Tests can benefit from teamwork. If the situation allows, several characters can work together as a team when attempting a Skill Test. When more than one character is involved in a Skill Test, one character is the leader, and the other characters are assistants. The Gamemaster has the final say on whether a character can assist — there might be only limited space that keeps people from helping, for example — or apply limitations or additional penalties, such as an increase to the Complication range (+1 to Complication range for each assistant after the first). The Gamemaster should be wary of allowing more than one assistant on most Skill Tests.

To assist with a Skill Test, the Player must describe how their character is assisting the Skill Test's leader. If the Gamemaster agrees, then each assistant rolls 1d20, using their own Target Number, and their own Focus (if any), to determine if any successes are scored. So long as the leader generates at least one success, then all successes generated by the assistants count towards the result. The Assistants' dice can generate Complications as normal.

Assistants do not have to use the same Attribute, Skill, or Focus as any other character involved in the Skill Test; indeed, assistance can often be best provided by someone contributing something different. Assistants may only ever roll 1d20 while assisting, and cannot purchase additional d20s of their own. In a Conflict, assisting a Skill Test is considered to take up the assisting character's Turn.

Momentum and Threat

Whenever a character succeeds at a Skill Test and scores a greater number of successes than the Difficulty, then these excess successes become Momentum, a valuable resource that allows characters to complete their task more quickly or thoroughly than normal, succeed with style, or otherwise gain additional benefits. Each success above and beyond the Difficulty of a Skill Test becomes one point of Momentum, which the character may use immediately, or save for later.

[Begin Sidebar]

Bonus Momentum

Some situations, items, and talents grant a character **bonus Momentum** under specific circumstances. This is added to the amount of Momentum the character may spend in that circumstance. Something which grants bonus Momentum may specify that it may only be used in a specific way, such as buying dice, increasing difficulty, or some other purpose.

Regardless of how it is granted, bonus Momentum cannot be saved: if it is not used when it is granted, it is lost.

[End Sidebar]

Spending Momentum

The normal use for Momentum is to improve the outcome of a successful Skill Test, such as gaining more information from observation or research, inflicting more damage with an attack, or making more progress with an ongoing problem.

Immediately after determining if a Skill Test is successful, the GM will describe the outcome of the Test. Momentum may then be spent to improve this outcome, or provide other benefits. Momentum used in this way doesn't need to be declared in advance, and each point can be spent one at a time as required. For example, a character may spend one Momentum to ask the GM a question, and then decide if they want to spend any more Momentum for more information once they've gotten an answer. Thus, Momentum cannot be wasted by being used on something that wasn't necessary.

Most uses for Momentum can only be used once on any given Skill Test, or once (by each character) in any given Round in a Conflict. Some uses of Momentum can be used repeatedly, and will be clearly noted as such, normally by noting that their effect is "per Momentum spent" or by marking that use as "repeatable". These uses of Momentum can be used as many times as the character wises and is willing and able to pay for them.

Once a character's Skill Test has been resolved, any unspent Momentum is added to the group's pool, as described below. Momentum that cannot be added to the group pool – because the group pool is already full – is lost if it isn't spent.

Saving Momentum

As noted above, characters can save their unspent Momentum, rather than letting it go to waste. This saved Momentum goes into a group pool, which can be added to or used by any character in the group, representing the benefits of their collective successes. **The group pool cannot contain more than six Momentum at any time.**

Whenever a member of the group wishes to spend Momentum, they may spend points from the group pool. This is in addition to any generated during a successful Skill Test. As normal, Momentum only needs to be spent as required, so a character doesn't need to choose how much Momentum they wish to take from the group pool until they choose to spend it, and it doesn't need to be spent all at once.

At the end of each Scene, one point of Momentum from the group pool is lost: Momentum must be maintained, and will not last forever.

NPCs don't save Momentum in this fashion. Instead, they interact with the Threat pool, described below.

[Begin Sidebar]

Timing Momentum

The majority of uses of Momentum come immediately after a successful Skill Test, to improve the outcome of that Test. However, a few important uses for Momentum happen at other times. These options have their own restrictions on how and when they are used, which will be made clear in the text.

Buying extra d20s, and increasing an opponent's Test Difficulty are the two most common examples of this.

[End Sidebar]

Threat

Much as the player characters generate and spend Momentum, the GM generates and spends Threat. The GM makes use of Threat to alter scenes, empower Non-Player Characters, and generally make things challenging, perilous, or unpredictable for the Player Characters. Threat is a method by which the game, and the GM, builds tension: the larger the Threat pool, the greater the likelihood that something will endanger or threaten the Player Characters. Strictly speaking, characters don't know about Threat, but they will have a sense of the stakes of a situation, and the potential for things to go wrong, and these things are what Threat represents.

Throughout the game, the Gamemaster will gain Threat, and spend it to create problems or change the situation. In this way, Threat mimics the rise and fall of tension that builds throughout a story, eventually culminating in a high-tension finale.

Threat comes from action, much as Momentum does. PCs and NPCs alike will increase Threat during play, and that Threat is spent by the GM to create consequences and raise the stakes during different scenes. In this way, Threat serves as a visible "cause and effect" for the game, with actions and consequences linked by the rise and fall of the Threat pool.

The Gamemaster typically begins each adventure with two Threat for each Player Character, though this can be adjusted based on the tone and underlying tension of a given adventure: if the stakes are high, the GM may begin with more Threat, while a calmer, quieter situation may reduce the GM's starting Threat.

Threat and Player Characters

Player Characters can add to Threat in a few ways.

- **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.

- **Complications:** Whenever a Player Character suffers one or more Complications on a Skill Test, they or the GM may choose to add two points to Threat to "buy off" the Complication.
- **Escalation:** At times, the GM (or the rules) may rule that a specific action or decision risks Escalation, by making the situation more dangerous or unpredictable. This may be using lethal force in a game where such violence is frowned upon, or carrying heavy weapons into a populated area. If a character performs an action that risks Escalation, they immediately add one to Threat.

Player characters typically do not spend Threat: it is spent to challenge or threaten them.

Threat and the Gamemaster

The Gamemaster may add to Threat in the following ways:

- **Threatening Circumstances:** The environment or circumstances of a new scene may be threatening or perilous enough to warrant adding one or two Threat to the pool automatically. Similarly, some NPCs may generate Threat simply by arriving, in response to changes in the situation, or by taking certain actions. This also includes activities that escalate the tensions of the scene, such as NPCs raising the alarm.
- **Non-Player Character Momentum:** NPCs with unspent Momentum cannot save it as PCs can: NPCs don't have a group Momentum pool. Instead, an NPC may spend Momentum to add to Threat, adding one Threat for every Momentum they spend.

In return, the Gamemaster can spend Threat in several common ways:

- **Non-Player Character Momentum:** The Threat pool serves as a mirror for the Players' group Momentum pool. Thus, NPCs may use Threat in all the ways that Player Characters use group Momentum.
- **Non-Player Character Threat Spends:** On any action or choice where a Player Character would normally add one or more points to Threat, an NPC performing that same action or making that same choice must spend an equivalent number of points of Threat.
- **Non-Player Character Complications:** If an NPC suffers a Complication, the Gamemaster may buy off that Complication by spending two Threat.
- **Complication:** The Gamemaster may create a negative Trait by spending two Threat. This must come naturally from some part of the current situation.
- **Reinforcements:** The Gamemaster may bring in additional NPCs during a scene. Minor NPCs cost one Threat each, while Notable NPCs cost two. Note that this does not apply to NPCs present at the start of the scene, only additional NPCs who arrive while the scene is playing out, and there must be some logical reason why those reinforcements have arrived and where they've come from.
- **Environmental Effects and Narrative Changes:** The Gamemaster may trigger or cause problems with the scene or environment by spending Threat.

Fortune

Fortune and Determination are similar mechanics, and your game will only use one or the other.

Player Characters have access to a special resource called Fortune. Fortune reflects the fact that the Player Characters are the game's protagonists, with ambition, drive, and miraculous luck beyond that of most people. Such individuals shape their own fates by action and will, and the fate of the world around them often follows suit. Whether they are regarded as heroes in any traditional sense, Player Characters are larger than life.

Fortune can be used to pull off exciting stunts, provide an edge during tense situations, or otherwise help to advance the story. To best take advantage of this, however, there needs to be a steady flow of Fortune points made available to the players. Gamemasters are encouraged to award Fortune points to the Player Characters regularly, because it is a tangible way of reinforcing the grand and dynamic ways of the characters, and increasing the involvement of the players. The more each player participates in making the game thrilling, the plot twisting, and their characters memorable, the more chances they will get to do more of the same.

Each Player Character begins each adventure with three Fortune points, and cannot have more than five Fortune points at any time. Any excess points are immediately discarded.

There are a few ways in which Fortune points can be spent.

- **Perfect Opportunity:** A Fortune point may be spent during a Skill Test to change any die so that it automatically rolls a 1 (and thus generates two successes automatically). This option must be selected before any dice are rolled on that Skill Test.
- **Moment of Inspiration:** A Fortune point may be spent to re-roll all the character's dice in their dice pool. This option may be selected after the dice have been rolled.
- **Surge of Activity:** The character may spend a Fortune point to immediately take an additional Major Action on their Turn, as soon as the first one has been resolved. This option has no immediate use outside of Conflicts. See **Chapter 3: Action and Conflict** for more detail.
- **Undefeated:** The character may spend a Fortune point when they are Defeated – either when they are Defeated, or at some point later in that scene – to immediately return from defeat. See **Chapter 3: Action and Conflict** for more detail.
- **Make It Happen:** The Player immediately creates a trait for the Character that applies to the current scene. This may be used before rolling the dice on a Skill Test, and it can affect the Skill Test it has been created for.
- **Useful Trick:** Your character immediately gains the use of a single Talent they do not possess. This talent remains for the rest of the current scene.

Regaining Fortune Points

The Gamemaster may sometimes award a Fortune point to a single player in the group for particularly noteworthy action — perhaps one player came up with the perfect plan to thwart the enemy, made a bold sacrifice for the benefit of the group, gave a memorable in-character speech, or perhaps uttered a funny quip that diffused the tension and made everyone at the table laugh.

Other times, the Gamemaster may choose to award Fortune points to all the players based on their progress in a campaign, or during the transition between key scenes. Fortune points make excellent

rewards when characters reach a certain narrative milestone, defeat an important villain, solve a mystery, or survive a tense encounter. They can also be spent immediately, and thus provide instant gratification.

As a general guideline, the Gamemaster should award players with one to three Fortune points per hour of gameplay, depending on the course of play and the rate they are being spent.

Beyond refreshing Fortune points at the start of each session, there are a few ways player characters can gain Fortune points during play.

Rewards

First and foremost, Fortune points are given by the Gamemaster during gameplay to reward players for good roleplaying, clever plans, successfully overcoming difficult challenges, using teamwork, or otherwise making the game more fun for all. Players may have other opportunities to gain Fortune points by achieving certain goals within an encounter, reaching a milestone in the story, or choosing to be the one to suffer the Complications of some dire event. As a general guideline, there should be two to three opportunities for players to gain Fortune points per hour of play. In each of these cases, the Gamemaster should determine whether the point is warranted, and award a single point per instance.

It's generally useful for the Gamemaster to ask the players to keep their Fortune points visible, such as using tokens, for the Gamemaster to judge how plentiful they are amongst the characters. If Fortune points are being handed out too often and the players are each at the maximum, then the Gamemaster can either hand them out less often, or can increase the challenges the player characters face, encouraging their use. If the players are frequently low or out of Fortune points, then it's a good time to evaluate if the encounters are too challenging, or if the players are not accomplishing meaningful goals within the course of play, or even having a good time. Adjustments can then be made to improve that situation. A good rule of thumb would be that each player has, on average, about half of their Fortune points at any given time.

Voluntary Failure

Characters may choose to voluntarily fail a Skill Test, allowed at the Gamemaster's discretion. This should only be invoked when the Player Character has something significant to gain, or something significant to lose, when the Skill Test is being made. The Test is failed automatically, with no dice rolled, and with no risk of Complications. Voluntarily failing a Skill Test provides the Gamemaster with one point of Threat, and the Player Character immediately gains one point of Fortune in return.

Voluntary failure cannot be used on a Skill Test that uses the success at cost rule, nor can it be used on a Difficulty 0 Skill Test.

Traits

Finally, Player Characters may have one or more personality traits or personal agendas that can complicate their lives. Each Player Character may have one or more Traits associated with their background, as described in **Chapter 2: Characters**. The player chooses when to have these Traits come into play in a negative fashion, creating an immediate Complication for their character and earning one point of Fortune. The Gamemaster may suggest instances where these features can easily come into play, but the final decision on when a feature is invoked always comes down to the player.

Determination

Fortune and Determination are similar mechanics, and your game will only use one or the other.

Player Characters have access to a special resource called Determination. Determination reflects the fact that the Player Characters are the game's protagonists, with ambition, drive, and grit beyond that of most people. Such individuals shape their own fates by action and will, and the fate of the world around them often follows suit. Whether they are regarded as heroes in any tradition sense, Player Characters are naturally prominent and influential people.

Determination can be used to pull of exciting stunts, provide an edge during tense situations, or otherwise help to advance the story. Characters gain and spend Determination from acting in accordance with their beliefs, represented by their **Values** (or by their **Drives**, if you're using that variant, described in **Chapter 2**). When a character's Values aid them in what they're seeking to achieve, they get the opportunity to spend Determination, while they can gain Determination when a character's immediate goals and their Values conflict with one another.

Each Player Character begins each adventure with one Determination point and cannot have more than three Determination points at any time. Any excess points are immediately discarded.

Spending Determination

When you attempt a skill test, or are otherwise in a difficult situation, and one or more of your Values would be helpful in your current situation, you may spend a point of Determination.

When you spend a point of Determination, you may choose one of the following benefits:

- **Perfect Opportunity:** Determination may be spent during a Skill Test to change any die so that it automatically rolls a 1 (and thus generates two successes automatically). This option must be selected before any dice are rolled on that Skill Test.
- **Moment of Inspiration:** Determination may be spent to re-roll all the character's dice in their dice pool. This option may be selected after the dice have been rolled.
- **Surge of Activity:** The character may spend Determination to immediately take an additional Major Action on their Turn, as soon as the first one has been resolved. This option has no immediate use outside of Conflicts. See **Chapter 3: Action and Conflict** for more detail.
- **Undefeated:** The character may spend Determination when they are Defeated – either when they are Defeated, or at some point later in that scene – to immediately return from defeat. See **Chapter 3: Action and Conflict** for more detail.
- **Make It Happen:** You immediately create a trait for the Character that applies to the current scene. This may be used before rolling the dice on a Skill Test, and it can affect the Skill Test it has been created for.
- **Useful Trick:** Your character immediately gains the use of a single Talent they do not possess. This talent remains for the rest of the current scene.

Gaining Determination

When you attempt a skill test, or are otherwise in a difficult situation, and one or more of your Values would make your situation more difficult, then the GM may ask you to make the following choice:

- **Comply:** you choose to give in to your Value, suffering a Complication as a result. This complication may make your chosen course of action more difficult, or it may even prevent you attempting that action, instead requiring you to try something else. Discuss with your GM as to how this should play out. Once this has happened, you gain a point of Determination.
- **Challenge:** you choose to go against your Value. You cross out the challenged Value, as it is no longer as vital to the character as it once seemed, and then continue to resolve the current skill test or situation. Once this has finished, you gain a point of Determination. See the *Recovering Values* sidebar on how to handle crossed-out Values.

During play, you do not have to rely solely on the GM to provide prompts to gain Determination; you may suggest to the GM that a situation is might be a test of your character's Values in this way.

[Begin Sidebar]

Recovering Values

If any of your Values are crossed out, then you are less certain of your beliefs, and of your place in the universe. It takes time, reflection, and counsel to clear away that uncertainty. A crossed out Value can no longer be used until it has been rewritten.

When a scene ends during which you contemplated personal matters or discussed them with another character, and you did not spend or gain any Determination during that scene, you may ask the Gamemaster to allow you to recover a Value. If you don't do this during play, it will happen automatically between adventures, should no suitable opportunities arise.

When you recover a Value, select a single Value which has been crossed out, and write a new Value to replace it. This could be a small change, if the character's beliefs have shifted slowly or become more nuanced and complex, or it could be a big change if the character's underlying sense of self has been shaken.

Once this is done, the Value is now recovered and may be used freely, though you cannot challenge a Value which has already been challenged and recovered during that adventure (people's core beliefs do not change that often).

[End Sidebar]

Challenges

A Challenge is any circumstance, situation, or sequence of events which requires multiple Skill Tests to overcome. There are a few different ways to structure a Challenge, depending on the nature of that Challenge and how the GM wishes to present the situation. These different options can be combined as the GM sees fit, providing a toolbox for structuring a wide range of different problems for the characters to overcome.

A Challenge can exist on any scale, with some serving as the core of a specific scene, while others act as a framework that connects different scenes together, with individual parts of the Challenge serving as the basis for different scenes.

The Basic Challenge

A basic Challenge is, as the name suggests, the most straightforward form of Challenge, and is the basis for the other forms of Challenge discussed later. A Challenge consists of two or more Skill Tests, of a type and Difficulty determined by the GM. These Tests are the core of the Challenge, and are crucial activities that must be completed to overcome the Challenge, and they are referred to as Key Tests. Once all the Key Tests have been completed successfully, the Challenge is complete.

The Key Tests can be attempted in whatever order the characters wish, and characters may attempt other Skill Tests during a Challenge; these do not contribute directly to completing the Challenge, but can be used to create Traits, generate Momentum, fend off a threat or other problem, or otherwise do something helpful for the group.

Structuring Challenges

There are other ways for the GM to structure a Challenge, however, which can make the situation more interesting or challenging.

Linear Challenges arrange the Key Tests into a specific order, where each Key Test must be completed before the next can be attempted. This can be fairly limiting, but is good for situations where there are multiple difficult stages.

Gates Challenges require a little more effort for the GM to set up, but can be quite versatile and represent a wide range of different situations. In a Gated Challenge, some Key Tests can only be attempted if one or more other Key Tests are completed first (representing things that need to be done in a certain order, or which require set-up). This also allows for the GM to create a branching choice, where taking one path opens one set of Tasks and closes off others. The Gamemaster must determine the "victory conditions" for the Challenge, and inform the players of this: it will normally be a single Key Test, or one of a small number of possible Key Tests, each of which are locked behind different choices. The Gamemaster might want to present a flow chart that shows how the Challenge progresses and which Key Tests "unlock" restricted ones.

[Begin Sidebar]

Group Challenges

While not strictly a way to structure a Challenge, this option is useful to consider. Group Challenges are intended to be completed through collective effort, rather than by a single person, often because it takes place over a relatively short space of time and is too much work for one character. In a Group Challenge, whenever a character attempts or assists a Skill Test – whether it is a Key Test or not – they may not assist in other Tasks during the remainder of the Challenge, and any other Skill Tests they attempt during the Challenge increase in Difficulty by one. This Difficulty increase is cumulative.

[End Sidebar]

Opposition in Challenges

In some circumstances, characters may be working against an opposing force. There are a few ways to resolve this, depending on what the Challenge represents, and the nature of the opposition.

Direct Opposition: The opponents directly resist the Skill Tests attempted, turning them into Opposed Tests. This may also add extra hazards or consequences to those Skill Tests, as the opposition may create

extra problems on failed Tests. This is common for social interactions, or attempting to avoid guards or pursuers, where the obstacles are people.

Contests: The opposition is attempting to complete the same objective, or a similar one, and the winner is the one that reaches their goal first. The Gamemaster selects one side to have Priority at the start of the Challenge; this will be the Player Characters unless the GM spends 2 Threat. Then, each side attempts a single Skill Test towards their Contest, starting with the side that has Priority; once each side has attempted a Test, the sequence begins again. The side that doesn't have Priority may gain Priority for the next round of Tests by spending 2 Momentum, if they succeeded at their Test. Whichever side completes their Challenge first gains some greater benefit (or may even prevent the other side from finishing).

Conflict: Discussed in depth in **Chapter 3: Action and Conflict**, the opposition have different, mutually-exclusive goals to the characters, and the sequence of events is split into Rounds and Turns.

Time Pressure

Adding time as a concern to a Challenge can increase tension and make a situation more exciting.

At the start of the Challenge, the GM determines an interval: this is a set time period, normally a few minutes or hours, which serve as a basic unit of time taken for each Skill Test: fifteen minutes, or half an hour are both good baselines for this. Each Skill Test attempted takes two intervals to attempt as standard, whether it succeeds or fails. Characters may spend 2 Momentum on a successful Test to reduce this by one interval. On a failed test, a character may add 2 to Threat to reduce the time taken by one interval, representing cutting their losses and giving up on the failure early. The GM may use Complications to make attempted Tests to take longer, adding one interval per Complication; for this reason, Tests under time pressure often succeed at cost (the Test isn't failed, it just took longer than planned). This applies to any Skill Tests attempted during the Challenge.

How these intervals interact with the Challenge is up to the GM. Normally, the GM will determine a total amount of time that the Challenge must be completed within; this will normally be 2-3 intervals per Key Test required, with fewer intervals representing more pressure. The GM should define some consequence for the characters failing to achieve their goal in time.

If different parts of the Challenge can be attempted in parallel, the GM can also use intervals to determine who is and who isn't busy at any given moment. This works well as a resource/people management problem, especially if the GM varies the number of intervals that individual Tests take to complete.

[Begin Sidebar]

Varied Intervals

As standard, a Skill Test takes two intervals to attempt, before adjustments for Momentum spent, Threat paid, and Complications suffered. However, this does not have to be the case: the GM may decide that an especially complex activity may take more than two intervals to attempt. In this case, a successful Test allows the character to spend 2 Momentum per interval reduced, down to a minimum of 1, and characters cutting their losses on a failed test may reduce the time taken by 1 interval for every 2 points they add to Threat, again down to a minimum of 1.

[End Sidebar]

[Begin Sidebar]

Variable Time Limit

Sometimes, a time limit will represent something that will happen at a specific time, unless the characters can successfully avoid it, such as attempting to defuse a bomb before it detonates.

However, other time limits may represent something that can be delayed: perhaps the arrival of a guard, messenger, or other troublesome person. In these situations, characters may attempt Skill Tests in order to increase the time limit. A successful Test adds one interval to the remaining time, plus an additional interval for every 2 Momentum spent. Complications may reduce this by 1 interval each, and a failure with a Complication, at the GM's discretion, may mean that the remaining time is actually *reduced*, as the delaying tactics have the opposite effect.

[End Sidebar]