



Bullseye v1.0

Design by Justin D. Jacobson



About v1.0

This is the first print version of the Bullseye system, dubbed v1.0 in the spirit of its design in the manner of a computer operating system. The Bullseye system has been in development for more than five years. It is fully playable as is, without further modification or enhancement. However, I have lofty goals for the system, which demand its release to other users in order to fully implement.

For starters, Bullseye has always been intended to be an organic product. Unlike most games, the design process was never intended to stop upon initial publication. It will only stop when I am no longer capable of improving it. Thus, the first version of Bullseye cannot, of necessity, be the last. Exposure to additional users will expedite and enhance the refinement process.

Secondly, as a multi-genre system, Bullseye must have exposure to a variety of users with different goals and requirements in order to test and expand its adaptability. Additional users will test the system in additional genres by an order of magnitude. This, in turn, will allow me to identify further refinements or to advise future users of important features or limitations.

Thank you for purchasing Bullseye v1.0 and investing your time in its development. You are among the very first users of the system. I expect you will not find many bugs, if any, but I am counting on your ability to suggest refinements. You might identify a glitch in the mechanics, or you might just find a typographical error. In either case, your feedback—of any nature, on any facet—is critical to the further development of the system. You can provide that feedback in any number of ways:

1. **Direct E-mail.** You can e-mail me with any comments or questions you have about the system. I have set up a separate e-mail address just for Bullseye-related communication: bullseye@bluedevilgames.com. Please include the word “Bullseye” in the subject line so I can properly train my spam filter.
2. **Voice/Chat.** I am always happy to engage in extended conversation about the development of Bullseye. You can call me directly at (954) 937-1970. I am also on Skype for voice or chat; my Skype name is [bluedevilgames](#).
3. **Bullseye Forum.** I have a forum set up especially for Bullseye: <http://bluedevilgames.yuku.com/forums/4/>. I check that forum routinely.
4. **Independent Blog.** If you engage in extended play, I heartily encourage you to set up an independent record of your play, such as a blog. This can be a separate blog or an identifiable tag (such as “Bullseye”) within an existing blog. Please provide me with a link so I can identify and assimilate your results.

Reserve Your Setting: In exchange for your investment of time and money, I am offering a deal. I intend to release the next version of Bullseye under an original license, including the right to publish settings using the Bullseye system and logo. I will be excluding a few settings from the license. On or before November 18, 2008, you may notify me of a specific idea for a setting. If so, I will include your request in the exclusion, giving you the exclusive right to release such a setting. This offer is only good to those who have purchased the print edition of v1.0.

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Introduction

1.1

Introduction

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES



Bullseye is a “role-playing game”. The term is often glossed over or even derided, but it is apt.

It involves “role-playing” in that the participants take the role of other personas in the course of play. In the imaginary game world, they describe the actions of these personas or “characters”. In doing so, they create an alternate world. This is sometimes referred to technically as the “shared imagined space” because it doesn’t need to be a “world” at all. It might be something as grandiose as the entire galaxy or as mundane as your own home.

It is also a “game” in that it is a competitive form of play that follows a set of rules. It does not share all of the trappings of competition found in other games. For example, the participants do not keep score, and there is no defined period of play. Indeed, there is no winner, in the traditional sense. The competition arises in the form of conflict, as the characters confront obstacles and try to overcome them to achieve their goals.

Above all, a role-playing game should be fun. That is the goal of the endeavor.

Abbreviation: role-playing game (RPG)

Resource: <http://www.indie-rpgs.com/articles>



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Introduction

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Game Moderator

In order to play Bullseye you need at least two participants. (Having 4-7 participants is ideal.) One of the participants takes the role of the “game moderator”. The other participants are called “players”. (See 1.1.3)

As the name suggests, the GM presides over the proceedings. She can have many different responsibilities, depending on the specific play group. She often organizes the game sessions and has the ultimate responsibility to make sure they run smoothly. She encourages the Players: to get into the moment, to pay attention, to utilize their characters’ abilities. She often (but not of necessity) takes a leadership role in the group. Within the context of the game itself, her most important duties are to: (1) create conflict, (2) operate non-player characters, (3) implement the rules, and (4) arbitrate checks.

Create Conflict: An engaging game requires conflicts to oppose the Players’ characters. The game will devolve into tedium if the Players’ characters simply go through the motions of rote daily life or if they achieve their goals without opposition. It principally falls on the GM to create these opposing forces (though she should take cues from the players in doing so). (See 2.0). This conflict might take the form of vicious combat, sizzling debate, awkward courtship, or many more. Similarly, the GM should endeavor to link unified conflicts to create satisfying story arcs and link unified arcs to ensure a fun campaign.

Operate Non-Player Characters: As an adjunct to creating conflicts, the GM operates the non-player characters. All of the characters other than the player characters are non-player characters (NPC). She describes their actions; she speaks for them; she sets the targets that represent them. Sometimes, these characters will oppose the player characters; sometimes, they will assist them.

Implement Rules: While it is helpful for the Players to know the rules, it is critical for the GM to do so. She must enforce the rules (or recognize when it is beneficial to bend them). Although all participants should collaborate to create the game, the GM makes the final decision about which rules will apply in the game.

Arbitrate Checks: The foundation of the Bullseye system is the check. (See 2.1). The GM makes the final determination about each check, including when to make one, what modifiers apply, what the target is, and what the result of the check means. She narrates the in-game representation of the mechanical result roughly half of the time.

You will note that many of the GM's duties involve making "final" decisions or determinations. In a group dynamic it is valuable to have someone who serves that role. Given the specific dynamic found in Bullseye, the GM is a natural fit for it. However, as the name makes clear, the GM serves as a moderator, overseeing and managing the proceedings, but not dictating them. She should solicit insight and opinions from the other participants and encourage discourse to maximize the enjoyment for all.

Abbreviations: game moderator (GM), non-player character (NPC)

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ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Players



All of the participants other than the GM are players. Each player takes the role of a character in the game world. These characters are called player characters. Players are responsible for everything associated with their PCs. A player's primary duties are to: (1) create a character, (2) play the character, and (3) utilize the rules. The GM may establish guidelines or restrictions involving these duties, but the player is ultimately responsible for carrying them out.

Create a Character: Everything a player does within the game world he does through his character. Accordingly, it is important for the player to create a character that is fully realized. (See 3.3) The player must have a strong idea of what kind of person his character is. An investment of time and energy in this process is repaid many times over during the course of the campaign.

Play the Character: During the game, the player describes his character's actions, speaks for his character, and rolls the dice when his character needs to make a check. In some cases, the player will narrate the results of a given check.

Utilize the Rules: While the GM is the final arbiter of the rules, the Bullseye system relies on significant player input. Like a high-performance engine, its capabilities are best evidenced when it is pushed to the redline. For any given check, the player should negotiate fervently but honestly for the application of modifiers. With this right comes a concomitant responsibility: The player must exercise judgment and argue only for modifiers he genuinely believes are appropriate.

Abbreviation: player character (PC)



1.1.1

Introduction

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Tools of Play

Unlike board games, Bullseye is principally a game of communication and does not require a board or numerous pieces to play. In fact, you don't need anything beyond this book to play, and you don't even need that. A full version of these rules is available for free, in wiki format, at <http://bullseyegame.pbwiki.com/>. However, you might find that play goes more smoothly if you have the following items: writing utensils, paper, and a 20-sided die for each participant. Twenty-sided dice can be readily obtained at most game shops and on the internet. If you do not have a die available, you can use the die icon in the book or an on-line die roller, such as the Irony Games Dice Server. (See 1.2.1) You can also use the Bullseye Character Sheet, available as a free download on my website, to record information about the PCs.

1.2

Introduction

USING THE TEXT



I have organized the book in the style of a technical manual to ensure ease of reference and to facilitate learning of the material. The book is divided into separate sections based on thematically related concepts.

Section 1.0 presents introductory material, including an overview of RPGs generally and the Bullseye system. Section 2.0 describes the basic mechanic of the Bullseye system. Section 3.0 deals with characters—how they are defined and created. Section 4.0 presents rules for running expanded conflicts. Section 5.0 defines how narration works in the game. Section 6.0 gives advice on game moderation. Section 7.0 presents rules variants you can incorporate in your game. A character sheet appears at the end of the text.



1.2.1

Introduction

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Layout

The book is laid out with visual cues that make it easier to use.

Sections: Each section starts on a new page. This results in some additional “white space” but makes it easier to absorb and reference the rules.

Headers: Each page has a gray-shaded header that includes the section and sub-sections presented on that page. The header also includes a die icon with a number inside (*see* below).

Footers: Many pages have gray-shaded footers. There are separate footers for abbreviations (which identify new abbreviations introduced on that page) and for resources (which identify internet links to outside resources that offer additional information about the concepts introduced on that page).

Die Icon: The icon contained in the header allows you to play the game even if you do not have a die at hand. Use the icon when a check is called for, i.e., whenever you would normally roll a die. The participant making the check declares “right” or “left” and then opens the book to a random page. The participant uses the number inside the die icon on the page corresponding to the declaration.

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Introduction

USING THE TEXT

Language and Usage



Gender: Throughout the text, I use the masculine gender when referring to the players and their characters. The feminine gender is used when referring to the Game Moderator and non-player characters. I employ these conventions to avoid cumbersome language; in practice, anyone can take the role of a player or the GM.

Punctuation: As a matter of personal preference, I use the “logical method” of quotation mark punctuation common to the United Kingdom, Canada, and other countries. Thus, periods and commas appear within quotation marks only when they are part of the text being quoted.

Abbreviations: I note abbreviations at the bottom of each page where they first appear and at the end of the text in the Glossary of Abbreviations.

Typefaces: The section headers are rendered in Korataki, a modern-day version of a futuristic Asian font from the 1970s created by the Typodermic foundry. The sub-section headers and body text are rendered in Carnova, a modern font from the Typotheticals foundry especially designed for clarity at smaller sizes.

Style: As to other matters of style, I rely on *The Chicago Manual of Style* — 15th ed. (2003).

Resources: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quotation_mark, www.myfonts.com, <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>



1.3

Introduction

THE BULLSEYE SYSTEM

Role-playing games employ different systems of mechanics. These mechanics come in many different types and styles and generally provide a method for directing the flow of play. Thus, the specific mechanics necessarily result in a particular style of play. The Bullseye system is designed to facilitate fast, fun games. It relies heavily on the creativity, preparation, and skill of the GM. Its simplicity makes it a good fit for new GMs, but its robustness makes it ideal for experienced ones. More than with other systems, the more talented the GM is, the better the game.

At its core, the Bullseye system uses a pseudo-task resolution system with a 20-sided die as a randomizer and target numbers. These terms are explained more fully later in the book. In summary, when a character is involved in a situation that has an element of chance, the character's controller makes a check: He rolls a die, adds in all relevant modifiers, and compares the result against a target number. If the result exceeds the target number, the situation is resolved in the character's favor. If it falls short, the situation is resolved to the character's detriment.

The Bullseye system also incorporates the concept of degree of success or failure. Like in archery, it doesn't just matter if you hit the target. The better the shot, the better the result. In this case, the better the result of the check, the greater the success. Conversely, the worse the result of the check, the greater the failure.

The robustness of the system comes from the variables attendant to this fundamental system: When is a check made? What modifiers apply? What is the target? What does the result of the check mean? These questions are answered in greater detail later in the book.

1.3.1

Introduction

THE BULLSEYE SYSTEM

Design Goals



Bullseye is intended to be a streamlined, multi-genre system. The primary design goals are:

1. **Clarity.** The Bullseye rules will be perfectly clear. Each game term will be selected judiciously to express its exact function. Each rule will be expressed so that it can be fully understood without requiring repetition or actual play.
2. **Organization.** The Bullseye rules will be organized intuitively. They will flow logically from one concept to the next to facilitate comprehension. They will be cross-referenced and annotated where necessary. The rules will include a superlative table of contents and index.
3. **Functionality.** Bullseye will be work as intended. Play will be possible virtually immediately upon reading the rules. Play will be possible with a variety of groups and on short notice. Character and adventure creation will be easy and efficient.
4. **Adaptability.** Bullseye will support any number of genres with equal aplomb and limited work. Bullseye will be released under a license to permit customer creation, publication, and dissemination of supplements and settings with near-absolute freedom. The license will be clear and unequivocal as to its terms.
5. **Enjoyability.** Bullseye games will be fun for all participants.



1.3.2 Introduction THE BULLSEYE SYSTEM Strengths and Weaknesses

Although Bullseye is intended to suit many genres, it does have a definitive play style, which makes it better suited for some games than others.

Bullseye features quick character creation and the ability to run games on the fly, making it perfect for pick-up games or last-minute sessions. Bullseye uses a 20-sided die, which is a “wide” randomizer, yielding a broad range of results on any given check. This makes Bullseye simultaneously well suited for both gritty and fantastical games.

Bullseye focuses almost exclusively on the direction and content of the story narration. It lacks the tactical elements of games with more extensive mechanics. Similarly, Bullseye characters are broadly created. Players looking for more strictly defined character roles should look to other systems.

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Introduction

THE BULLSEYE SYSTEM

Comparison to d20 System



The core of the Bullseye system is the d20 system, found at the heart of *Dungeons & Dragons* and *d20 Modern*. It offers a vaguely familiar, if greatly streamlined, framework of play. In some ways, it *feels* the same. Trivially, for example, you roll the same 20-sided die. Some of the terminology is the same. The core mechanical concepts are the same. Play, in the form of “encounters” and “adventures”, is structured the same.

Conversely, Bullseye departs from the d20 system in several significant ways. Character structure and creation are vastly different, more open-ended in the Bullseye system. The d20 system is largely exception driven in its use of feats and class abilities to break existing rules. There are no “opposed rolls”. Additionally, more recent iterations of the d20 system have focused more on tactile, miniatures-based play.

Most importantly, in reading and applying the rules in this text, forget everything you know about the d20 system. Run the game exactly as it is written.

2.0

Conflicts

2.1

Conflicts

CHECKS



The foundation of the Bullseye system is the check. When the story reaches a point of “significant indeterminacy”—such as when a character attempts to do something important that involves an element of chance—it is resolved with a check. The GM asks the player to make a check. The player proposes all modifiers he thinks are relevant. The GM accepts or rejects these modifiers and announces all other modifiers she determines apply. All of the applicable modifiers are combined to generate a total modifier. The player rolls a die and applies the total modifier. This result is called the yield. (See 2.1.2)

The yield is compared to a target number. If the result of the check exceeds the target number, the character succeeds at doing what he was trying to do. If the result of the check falls short of the target number, the character fails to do what he was trying to do. A tie represents a stalemate—success and failure in equal measure. The difference between the yield and the target number is called the spread. (See 2.4)

The yield itself represents the general quality of the character’s effort. The target number represents the difficulty of the task being attempted or the effort of the opposing force. The spread indicates the degree of success or failure. These terms are discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections of this book.



2.1.1 Conflicts CHECKS When To Roll

Technically, a check could be employed whenever a character tries to do anything that carries an element of risk. However, the purpose of play is to have fun. There is nothing inherently fun about rolling a die. The fun arises from the moment of tension, when the fate of the characters rides on the outcome of that roll. In determining when to call for a check, Bullseye uses the “significant indeterminacy” test. That is, the situation must be important and it must involve an element of uncertainty as to future events. If the act of making a check is either futile or superfluous, it should be eschewed. If the impact of the result—in success or failure—is trivial, there is no impetus to call for a check.

Players should not concern themselves with what will or won't trigger a check. Only the GM can call for a check. A player may *suggest* a check, perhaps noting a potential outcome the GM has failed to appreciate, but even this should be avoided. The players should concern themselves only with what their characters are trying to do in the game world. The GM determines if and when a check is necessary. (See 6.1)

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CHECKS

Yield



The final number obtained by adding the result of the die roll and the total modifier is called the yield and is abbreviated as “Y”. It represents the overall quality of the attempt. The higher the yield, the better the effort. To use a mundane example, if the character is jumping, a higher yield indicates a higher jump. If the character is recovering from a wound, a higher yield indicates that he recovers more fully and more quickly. If the character is planning an assault on the enemy fortress, a higher yield indicates that his plan is more effective. If a character calls on his knowledge to answer a question, a higher yield indicates that he recalls more information. If a character fires his gun, a higher yield indicates that his aim is truer. Higher is always better.

The table on the following page presents an array of yields and their possible interpretations. You do not need to refer to the table during play; however, it can give you a good basis for interpreting any given yield. While the table presents entries in increments of 5, it is important to remember that a yield one unit higher than another is incrementally better.

Abbreviation: Yield (Y)



21.3 Conflicts CHECKS Yield Table

Yield (Y)	Narrative Description	Examples
-5	Abysmal	An unskilled person performing ineptly <i>and</i> under poor conditions.
0	Poor	An unskilled person performing ineptly <i>or</i> under poor conditions; an average person performing ineptly <i>and</i> under poor conditions.
5	Mediocre	An unskilled person performing adequately <i>or</i> under good conditions; an average person performing ineptly <i>or</i> under poor conditions.
10	Average	An average person performing adequately <i>and</i> under ordinary conditions.
15	Above Average	An average person performing well <i>or</i> under favorable conditions; a highly skilled person performing ineptly <i>or</i> under poor conditions.
20	Good	An average person giving his best effort <i>or</i> under perfect conditions; a highly skilled person performing adequately <i>and</i> under ordinary conditions.
25	Great	A highly skilled person performing well <i>or</i> under favorable conditions; an elite person performing ineptly <i>or</i> under poor conditions.
30	Excellent	A highly skilled person giving his best effort <i>or</i> under perfect conditions; an elite person performing adequately <i>and</i> under ordinary conditions.
35	Superb	A highly skilled person giving his best effort under perfect conditions; an elite person performing well <i>or</i> under favorable conditions.
40	Peerless	An elite person giving his best effort under perfect conditions.

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CHECKS

Opposition



When the time for a check arrives, knowing the quality of the PC's effort is only half of the equation. It is also necessary to identify and appreciate the nature and magnitude of the opposition. Every check is opposed by something; otherwise, there would be no indeterminacy and no need to call for a check.

Opposition can come in many forms. It might be the locked door the character is trying to get through or the armed opponent forbidding access. It might be the difficulty of the poem the character is penning or the lover whose passions he is trying to stir. Identifying the opposition permits the Narrator to set the target to represent it. (*See 6.2*)

Opposition is represented by the target. (*See 2.3*)



2.2 Conflicts MODIFIERS

Checks are not made in a vacuum. For any given situation there can be a variety of factors favoring or working against the character. These factors are represented by modifiers to the roll. Factors that benefit the character are represented by bonuses; factors that hinder the character are represented by penalties. Bonuses are represented by “+” signs; penalties are represented by “-” signs. The amount of the modifier is referred to as the “magnitude”. All modifiers bear the notation “M”. For example, “+2M” denotes a +2 bonus to the check; “-3M” denotes a -3 penalty to the check.

When the GM calls for a check, she identifies all modifiers that apply. Even factors that the character would not be aware of should be identified openly. The GM should also solicit suggestions from the players. This is an opportunity for the player to negotiate for the application of appropriate bonuses. Unique but reasonable applications should be encouraged.

Modifiers come in several varieties based upon their source: qualities, situation, and impairment. These various types of modifiers are described in the following sections. The number and nature of modifiers that may apply to a given check are restricted; these restrictions are discussed in their respective sections.

The sum of all modifiers applicable to a given check is referred to as the “total modifier”.

Tracking applicable modifiers in anticipation of a forthcoming check can be confusing. The easiest method is to use the die to keep track. Identify an appropriate modifier and turn the die so that it shows the current total modifier. Identify another modifier, add or subtract from the total modifier showing, and re-orient the die so that it shows the updated total modifier. Continue this process until all relevant modifiers have been identified and applied. The number showing on the die represents the total modifier to apply to the check. Additionally, players should note frequently used total modifiers on their character sheets, e.g., attacking an opponent with a particular weapon.

The table on the following page offers sample modifiers and their meanings. You do not need to refer to the table during play; however, it can give you a good basis for generating appropriate modifier values. While the table presents entries in increments of 5, it is important to remember that a modifier one unit higher than another is incrementally better.

Abbreviation: Modifier (M)

2.2.1 Conflicts

MODIFIERS

Modifier Table



Modifier (M)	Narrative Description	Examples
-10	Major Handicap	Driving through an obstacle course in dense fog; running on an ice-covered sidewalk; playing golf with a broken arm; building a table without any tools; firing a gun prototype.
-5	Moderate Handicap	Driving in heavy traffic at night; running on a muddy sidewalk; playing golf with a sprained wrist; building a table with an incomplete set of tools; firing a regular gun for the first time.
-1	Minor Hindrance	Driving in modest traffic; running on a wet sidewalk; playing golf with a blister on your hand; building a table with worn tools; firing an unfamiliar gun.
0	No Effect	Average conditions; appropriate equipment; no special aptitude or disability.
+1	Minor Boon	Driving in little traffic; running on a track; playing golf after a refreshing nap; building a table with quality tools; firing a gun similar to one you fired before.
+5	Moderate Benefit	Driving on a wide, empty street; running with a tail wind; playing golf after taking a lesson with a pro; building a table with new power tools; firing a gun similar to one you were trained with.
+10	Major Benefit	Driving on a closed track; running downhill; playing golf after receiving personal instruction with a pro for six months; building a table with fine wood and top-of-the-line power tools; firing a gun identical to one you were heavily trained with.
+15	Overwhelming Benefit	Driving on an open salt flat; running in a zero-g environment; playing golf after receiving cybernetic implants; building a table with computer-assisted tools; firing a gun after receiving a training chip implant.
+20	Ultimate Benefit	Driving a computer-controlled vehicle; running with magical shoes; playing golf after drinking a strength-boosting potion; wishing for a genie to create a table for you; firing a gun with a homing mechanism.



2.2.2 Conflicts MODIFIERS Quality Modifiers

All characters have qualities. (See 3.1) These qualities represent all of the various, relevant characteristics of the character, including physical or mental attributes, training, resources, and beliefs. Qualities have both a name and a modifier. The name establishes the quality's relevance to any given check. If a quality is relevant to a check, the player applies its associated modifier.

Examples: “Trained by Swordmaster Karn himself +4”, “Very intelligent +5”, “A million bucks in the bank +6”, “My trusty pocket watch +2”, etc.

Thus, in a fencing duel, a character with the example qualities above might apply his “Trained by Swordmaster Karn himself” quality and apply a +4 bonus to the check.

2.2.3 Conflicts MODIFIERS Situation



The specific circumstances present when a character makes a check confer modifiers on that check. Situational modifiers include a number of possibilities. These might be temporary conditions affecting the character or his opponent directly, environmental conditions or conditions related to when the task is being attempted, the quality of the implement being used, assistance from an ally, hindrance from an enemy, or anything unique to when and where the task is attempted.

Examples: The character's commander gives a rousing oration before battle; the character is suffering from the flu; the character is under the effect of a spell that makes him lucky; it's winter; it's dark; it's noisy; the character uses a rope to climb the wall; the character uses a ladder to climb the wall; the laser gun is a top-of-the-line model; the laser gun is broken; the character's bodyguard gives him a boost; the character's archenemy taunts him from afar; etc.

Whether the modifier is a bonus or a penalty and the magnitude of the modifier is determined by the GM based on the nature and severity of the situation.

Proficiency: Some tasks require the use of tools, weapons, or special equipment. If the item in question requires some knowledge or training to use properly, a character attempting the task without such proficiency suffers a penalty to the check. A proficiency penalty might arise if the character has no qualities suggesting that he has experience with the item in question.

Equipment: Using an item of average quality for its ordinary purpose confers no modifier. Equipment confers a bonus if it is of high quality and a penalty if it is of low quality. This modifier may also reflect special qualities, e.g., the item is magical, computer-guided, cursed, possessed by a demon, etc

Assistance: In some instances, other characters can actively assist a character attempting to do something. The ability to assist, the number of assistants, and the level of assistance vary according to the circumstances and the task being attempted. The magnitude of the modifier is determined by the assisting character's own effort and abilities.



2.2.4 Conflicts MODIFIERS Impairment

Impairment is a special type of modifier. Every character has a depletable quality. As the character's depletable quality decreases, he becomes impaired and suffers a penalty to all of his checks. The magnitude of the penalty is determined by the extent of the impairment. (See 3.2.3)

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MODIFIERS

As Comparative Measurements



The magnitude of a modifier is an accurate measurement of what it represents. A character with the quality “Strong +5” is stronger than a character with the quality “Strong +2”. However, modifiers merely influence the outcome of a task. Accordingly, it is readily possible that unexpected outcomes will occur. For example, if two characters are engaging in a test of strength, the character with the highest Strength bonus is indeed stronger than the other. However, it is possible for the weaker character to win any given opposed check between them. Such an outcome does not refute the fact that he is still the weaker character. It merely represents the influence of other factors—notably the quality of the effort and the vagaries of chance.



2.3 Conflicts TARGETS

Checks opposed by mundane NPCs or inanimate forces are compared against a target. All targets bear the notation “T”. For example, “15T” denotes a target number of 15. The more difficult the conflict being confronted, the higher the target. When the GM calls for such a check, the first thing she does is set the target and announce it to the players.

The table on the following page offers sample targets and their meanings. You do not need to refer to the table during play; however, it can give you a good basis for generating appropriate target values. While the table presents entries in increments of 5, it is important to remember that a target one unit higher than another is incrementally more difficult.

Abbreviation: Target (T)

2.3.1 Conflicts TARGETS Target Table



Target (T)	Narrative	Examples
0	Nearly Certain	Walking down the street; seeing your hand in front of your face; intimidating a small child.
5	Easy	Climbing a ladder; pretending to be asleep; looking a word up in a dictionary.
10	Average	Performing your ordinary job competently; finding your wife in a crowded room; reciting an old joke.
15	Hard	Swimming across a river; driving a car on a busy street; recalling the names of the first ten presidents in order.
20	Challenging	Jumping over a 6-foot ravine; passing as a member of the opposite sex; riding a wild stallion; tracking a deer through the woods; counterfeiting an official government document.
25	Daunting	Escaping from a straight jacket; performing a successful amputation; solving an intricate chess problem; walking a tightrope at full speed; catching a snake with your bare hands.
30	Heroic	Identifying a wine's vintage by taste; cracking the lock on a bank vault; hearing a wrong note played by one member of an orchestra.
35	Herculean	Swimming the English Channel; piloting a light plane through a tornado; performing a solo version of <i>Othello</i> flawlessly.
40	Nearly Impossible	Killing an elephant with your bare hands; finding a needle in a haystack; climbing Mount Everest without gear or a guide.



2.4 Conflicts SPREAD

Spread is the difference between the yield of a check and the opposing target or yield. Spread bears the notation “ Δ ”. For example, “ $+5\Delta$ ” denotes a positive spread of 5, i.e., the yield of the check exceeded the target by 5. Similarly, “ -4Δ ” denotes a negative spread of 4; i.e., the yield of the check fell short of the target by 4. Expressed as a formula: Spread = Yield – Target ($\Delta = Y - T$).

The higher the spread, the greater the degree of success or failure. At the conclusion of a check, the magnitude of the spread guides the participants in narrating the specific details of the event. On a successful check, a small spread indicates that the character has merely prevailed in the conflict but has not gained any additional advantage. A large spread indicates great success beyond simply prevailing. Perhaps the character was quicker or more efficient than expected or enjoyed some other, incidental benefit. On a failed check, a small spread indicates that the character has fallen just short of his goal. A large spread indicates that the character has failed miserably. Perhaps the character suffered an injury, broke the tool he was working with, or suffered some other, incidental setback.

Sometimes a better result might indicate a distinct (but still related) benefit. For example, if a character is trying to pick a lock, a high yield might mean that he is able to pick it very quietly or very quickly. If the yield is particularly high, he might complete the task both quietly and quickly. Rarely, a high yield might result in little practical difference. If the character needs only to open the lock and neither speed nor silence offer any benefit, it is sufficient enough to know that the character has performed well enough to accomplish the task. Generally, though, participants should strive to use the magnitude of the spread to inform the narration.

The table in the next section offers sample spreads and their meanings. You do not need to refer to the table during play; however, it can give you a good basis for determining appropriate spread results. While the table presents entries in increments of 5, it is important to remember that a spread one unit higher than another is incrementally more successful; a spread one unit lower is incrementally less successful.

Abbreviation: Spread (Δ)

2.4.1

Conflicts

SPREAD

Spread Table



Spread (Δ)	Narrative	Examples
-20	Utter Catastrophe	Inadvertently shooting yourself in the foot; stumbling and falling prone in front of one of the guards; never having heard of the Revolutionary War.
-15	Significant Failure	The bullet is a dud; slipping and discharging your gun in front of the guardhouse; incorrectly recalling a grossly inaccurate date when the Revolutionary War ended.
-10	Notable Failure	Widely missing the target; stepping into the light in front of the guardhouse; failing to recall when the Revolutionary War ended.
-5	Narrow Miss	Shooting a few inches off-target; snapping a twig just past the guardhouse; recalling only the general period when the Revolutionary War ended.
0	Mere Success	Barely striking the target; sneaking past the guardhouse; recalling the date the Revolutionary War ended.
+5	Solid Success	A hard hit; moving past the guardhouse quickly and quietly; recalling the date and place where the Revolutionary War ended.
+10	Notable Success	A grievous blow; getting by the guards without leaving a trace; recalling all relevant facts of the end of the Revolutionary War.
+15	Significant Success	Striking a critical point on the target; sneaking past the guardhouse and leaving a false trail; having a full understanding of all of the factors involved in the end of the Revolutionary War.
+20	Flawless Victory	Striking the deathblow; sneaking past the guardhouse and luring the guards in the opposite direction; holding your own in scholarly discourse with a leading historian about the end of the Revolutionary War.



2.4.2 Conflicts SPREAD As Base Depletion

Mechanically, spread also determines the base depletion of any check in which the depletable quality is at issue. For example, if the depletable quality is health, the spread of any check representing a combat, hazard, or similar event is the base damage. Anything that can cause depletion has a depletion modifier indicating its impact on the depletable quality. Similarly, characters have depletion modifiers that reduce the depletion they suffer on a failed check. To determine the amount of depletion caused by a specific event, apply all relevant depletion modifiers to the spread.

The table in the following section offers sample depletion modifiers and their meanings, using health as the depletable quality. You do not need to refer to the table during play; however, it can give you a good basis for determining appropriate depletion modifiers. While the table presents entries in increments of 5, it is important to remember that a depletion modifier one unit higher than another is incrementally more depleting.

24.3 Conflicts

SPREAD

Depletion Modifier Table



Depletion	Narrative	Examples
-20	Virtually Harmless/ Supremely Protective	A fly; a feather; a case of hiccups; a nigh-impenetrable force-field.
-15	Extremely Safe/ Protective	A mouse; a piece of paper; the common cold; armor plating.
-10	Generally Safe/ Protective	A common housecat; a fork; a hot summer day; a bullet-proof vest.
-5	Relatively Safe/ Protective	A large dog; a baseball bat; some rancid meat; a motorcycle helmet.
0	Barely Dangerous/ No	A horse; a hunting knife; a small jolt of electricity; ordinary clothing.
+5	Relatively Dangerous	A wolverine; a battleaxe; exposure to arctic conditions.
+10	Generally Dangerous	A gorilla; a .45 handgun; plutonium poisoning.
+15	Extremely Dangerous	A great white shark; a cannonball; a roaring blaze.
+20	Supremely	A dragon; a disintegration pistol; a bioengineered



2.5 Conflicts QUICK 10

In many cases, a player may use a result of 10 in lieu of actually rolling the die. The player takes 10 and adds any relevant modifiers, producing the yield for the check just as if he had rolled a 10 on the die. A Quick 10 is useful in situations where a particularly high roll would not help the character and where a low roll would be a particular nuisance. A player may not use a Quick 10 for checks where a depletable quality is at issue. The GM may also prohibit a player from using a Quick 10 if the check involves something significant to the development of the story, such as the culmination of an investigation. A player must declare that he is using a Quick 10 prior to making any roll.

If a player uses a Quick 10 and fails the check, he suffers the result of the failure. In such a case, the GM may still allow him to address the conflict again using the standard method. However, the GM may deny the request if a repeat attempt is inappropriate given the particular circumstances.

3.0

Characters

3.1

Characters

QUALITIES



PCs are the players' personas in the game world. This persona is comprised of two equal parts: the narrative elements and the mechanical elements.

The character must be fully realized just like a character in a novel, complete with hopes and dreams, virtues, and vices. When the player describes his character's actions or speaks for his character, it should be plausible and natural.

The character is also composed of a variety of bonuses, penalties, and other qualities that impact the rules. When the character attempts a task and the GM calls for a check, the player must identify which of these mechanics might apply.

Mechanically, PCs are comprised of qualities, which are themselves comprised of descriptive phrases and modifiers. These qualities serve both a narrative and mechanical function. The text is a narrative description of the quality; the modifier affects the checks the player makes on the character's behalf related to that quality.



3.1.1

Characters

QUALITIES

Forms

Qualities are categorized generally according to their source: core, intrinsic, experiential, material, and negative.

Core: Each character has a single quality that is of primary importance to the character. The core quality is fundamental to the character. Although this core quality can be of any type, it is often represented as a personal creed or motto.

Intrinsic: These qualities represent natural physical and mental elements. Though they might be honed over time, these qualities are inherent, inborn, and innate. Intrinsic qualities might include descriptions of strength, agility, hardiness, intellect, astuteness, charisma, etc.

Experiential: These qualities represent skills and knowledge acquired through training and experience. Though innate abilities might impact their use, these qualities are something that most anyone can learn to do at some level. Experiential qualities might include descriptions of schooling, occupational training, hobbies, and even life-changing moments.

Material: These qualities represent assets and tangible items that can be acquired and transferred as necessary. Though they are often materially valuable, these qualities can include specific or singular items, more general descriptions of means, or items of purely sentimental value. Material qualities might include descriptions of magic swords, signature rides, family heirlooms, and even P&L statements.

3.1.2

Characters

QUALITIES

Descriptions



Ideally, the descriptive part of a quality should be evocative and concise. It should capture the flavor and spirit of the character and the particular game in both nature and word choice. “Crack shot” might be a good quality for a Wild West game; less so for a game set in biblical times. In such a game, “sling hand guided as if by David” might be a better choice, even though they essentially cover the same ground.

A quality should be sufficiently narrow so that it cannot be applied in every circumstance. “Awesome” is a poor quality. Likewise, “jack-of-all-trades”, “seen it all before”, and “I can pull anything from my magic bag”.



31.3 Characters QUALITIES Magnitude

All qualities have a magnitude, indicating the degree of the bonus or penalty associated with it. The greater the magnitude, the more influence the quality has on any related check.

The table in the following section offers sample quality magnitudes and their meanings for experiential qualities. You do not need to refer to the table during play; however, it can give you a good basis for evaluating quality magnitudes. While the table presents entries in increments of 5, it is important to remember that a quality one magnitude higher than another has incrementally greater impact. Also note that PCs do not generally have individual qualities above +7; however, on most checks, PCs will be able to call on several qualities for a higher total bonus.

3.14

Characters

QUALITIES

Magnitude Table



Quality	Narrative	Examples
+0	Unskilled	A total novice.
+1	Minimally Trained	A beginner.
+5	Competent	An average worker.
+10	Professional	A high level of training.
+15	Expert	Among the elite in the field.
+20	Peerless	Best of the best.



31.5

Characters

QUALITIES

Examples

Core: Family above all else; return *Godstriker* to the dwarven hall; destroy all “bugs” on Rigel VII; avenge my pappy’s death.

Intrinsic: Strong like bull; supernatural healing factor; fastest gun in the West; an IQ of 162; photographic memory; “stick-to-itiveness”; a knack with the ladies.

Experiential: Twelve years training at the Kodokan; initiated into the Goldfinger Thieves Guild; weapons training cybernetic download; fought for the North in the War.

Material: Swiss bank account; cloak of invisibility; BFG; a friend at the Daily Inquirer; the ear of the president.

3.2

Characters

DEPLETABLE QUALITIES



All PCs have depletable qualities, which represent some transitory character quality that can be expended or diminished over time or as a result of certain events. The specific nature of the depletable quality is decided on at the outset of play and depends on the type of game the group decides to play. Often, the depletable quality is health, but it might be something else, e.g., sanity, faith, energy, etc. The nature of the depletable quality dictates the style of play as depletion represents the only true threat to the PC. Thus, using health as the depletable quality indicates that most of the important conflicts will deal with threats to the PCs' health.



3.2.1 Characters DEPLETABLE QUALITIES Relevant Checks

Once a depletable quality is selected, participants should determine what types of checks will impact it. Often this will be self-evident. For example, if the depletable quality is health, checks involving combat, disease, and other hazards are relevant. However, it is important that all participants understand generally what checks will impact the depletable quality. Moreover, checks impacting the depletable quality should be explicitly identified as such prior to rolling the die.

3.2.2

Characters

DEPLETABLE QUALITIES

Depletion



In any check involving the depletable quality, the result of the check determines depletion. To calculate depletion, take the resulting spread and apply all relevant depletion modifiers. The result, if a positive number, is the amount by which the depletable quality is reduced. The player subtracts that number from the PC's current depletable quality score.



3.2.3 Characters DEPLETABLE QUALITIES Impairment

As a PC's depletable quality is reduced, he suffers impairment, represented as a penalty. A PC who is impaired applies the impairment penalty to all checks he makes until the impairment is removed.

A PC suffers impairment at two different levels based on his maximum depletable quality score. At three-quarters of his maximum score (rounded down), the PC suffers a -2 penalty. At one-half of his maximum score (rounded down), the PC suffers a -5 penalty. For example, if a PC has a maximum depletable quality score of 42, he suffers a -2 penalty when his score drops to 31; he suffers a -5 penalty when his score drops to 21.

3.2.4

Characters

DEPLETABLE QUALITIES

Incapaciation



If a PC's depletable quality is reduced to one-quarter of his maximum score (rounded down), he is incapacitated. An incapacitated character can take no actions until the depletable quality is sufficiently restored to increase the score above the one-quarter mark.



3.2.5 Characters DEPLETABLE QUALITIES Retirement

If a PC's depletable quality is reduced to zero or below, he is out of the game. Depending on the nature of the depletable quality and the style of the game, this might but does not necessarily mean the PC is killed. In any case, the player must create a new PC to enter play.

3.2.6

Characters

DEPLETABLE QUALITIES

Restoration



A depletable quality that is below the maximum score can be restored. The method of restoration depends on the nature of the depletable quality and the style of the game. For example, in a fantasy game, it might be a healing potion or simply an extended rest. Usually, restoration requires an appropriate check, and the spread determines the amount restored. Generally, PCs should be restored to their full scores upon the completion of a story arc.



3.2.7 Characters DEPLETABLE QUALITIES Examples

Health: Measures a PC's physical condition and the absence of injury, disease, or other infirmity. Affected by combat, disease, and other hazards. Restored by rest and medical care.

Sanity: Measures a PC's mental health and stability. Affected by stress, exposure to unthinkable sights and traumatic situations. Restored by rest and therapy.

Faith: Measures a PC's devotion to a cause or ideal. Affected by personal tragedy and temptation. Restored by ritual, fraternity, and reflection.

3.3

Characters

CHARACTER CREATION



Player character creation starts with a general concept and then involves generating mechanical elements. Character creation is best accomplished as a group effort with the other participants often as part of the first session.

Mechanical elements are generated by expending a pool of points to acquire a set of qualities, a depletable quality value, and a depletion modifier value.



3.3.1 Characters CHARACTER CREATION Concept

Creating a character begins with a developed sense of what that character is all about. The character is the alter ego of the player within the game world. Thus, it should be a concept the player is comfortable with and excited about.

Players should consider numerous facets of their character, both psychological (hopes, dreams, fears, prejudices, beliefs) and physical (gender, age, height, weight, distinguishing features).

Players should describe the most important or notable of these elements and note them on a sheet of scrap paper.

3.3.2

Characters

CHARACTER CREATION Points



PCs start with base modifiers for each category of quality and a base number for their depletable quality. Players have 60 points to spend on additional elements as described in the following sections.



3.3.3

Characters

CHARACTER CREATION

Qualities

PCs only have one core quality at +8; they may not have additional core qualities and they may not increase or decrease their core quality modifier. PCs start with one intrinsic quality, one experiential quality, and one material quality, each at +7. Players may acquire additional qualities for their PC as follows:

Including the starting qualities, PCs may have no more than three of any type of quality (intrinsic, experiential, and material). Thus, a player may acquire up to two additional qualities of each type.

Additional qualities cost 2 points for each +1 associated with that quality. Thus, a player may spend 6 points to acquire a new quality at +3.

Additional qualities may not be higher than +6.

3.3.4

Characters

CHARACTER CREATION

Depletable Qualities



PCs start with a depletable quality score of 20. Players may increase their PC's depletable quality score as follows:

A player may increase his PC's depletable quality score by 1 for each point he spends. Thus, a player may spend 15 points to have a depletable quality score of 35.

A PC's depletable quality score may not be higher than 60.



3.3.5 Characters CHARACTER CREATION Depletion Modifiers

PCs start with a depletion modifier of -0. Players may improve their PC's depletion modifier as follows:

A player may improve his PC's depletion modifier by -1 for every 4 points he spends. Thus, a player may spend 20 points to have a depletion modifier of -5.

A PC's depletion modifier may not be greater than -10.

4.0

Expanded Conflicts

4.1

Expanded Conflicts

OVERVIEW



In most cases, a conflict is resolved by a single check. However, if the story warrants it and the participants agree, they may expand the conflict, using an expanded resolution system. Expanded conflicts provide the participants with a method for drawing out the resolution to provide greater tension and the opportunity for reversals of fortune. Most expanded conflicts involve the PCs' depletable quality, but that is not required.

Generally, each side in the conflict generates a score for that conflict. The participants make a series of checks, decreasing the other side's score. When one side's conflict score is reduced to 0 or below, the conflict is over.

At the conclusion of the conflict, the winning side makes a final check using their remaining conflict score as a situational bonus.



4.2 Expanded Conflicts CONFLICT SCORES

Each side in an expanded conflict has a conflict score, which measures their standing in that conflict. The players involved in the conflict establish a single conflict score for their PCs. The GM establishes a single conflict score for the opposition, whether it is a single character, a group of characters, or an inanimate object or insubstantial concept.

The players' conflict score is equal to the total magnitude of all of the relevant qualities of each PC involved in the conflict. The opposition's conflict score is equal to the players' conflict score multiplied by the number of PCs involved in the conflict.

4.3

Expanded Conflicts

RESOLUTION



After the conflict scores are established, the conflict is resolved in a series of rounds. In each round, the GM and each player whose PC is involved in the conflict makes a check. The GM's yield is compared to the yield of each player. Where the GM's yield exceeds that of the player, the spread, modified by any appropriate depletion modifier, is subtracted from the players' conflict score. Where the GM's yield is less than that of the player, the spread, modified by any appropriate depletion modifier, is subtracted from the GM's conflict score. The checks are made and resolved simultaneously.

Even if the conflict involves the depletable quality, the checks made *during* an expanded conflict do not affect it.

The expanded conflict proceeds until one side has their conflict score reduced to 0 or less. The side with the highest conflict score at the conclusion of the expanded conflict wins.



4.4 Expanded Conflicts OUTCOME

After the expanded conflict is resolved, the winning side makes a final check, using their remaining conflict score as a bonus along with any of their qualities as normal. If players win, the player with the highest total modifier makes the check for their side. The results of this final check are treated as normal. If the conflict involves the depletable quality, it is reduced as normal based on the results of this final check.

5.0

Narration

5.1

Narration

WHO SAYS WHAT



The GM narrates the description of the current scene, setting up the nature of the conflict. The GM narrates the actions and speech of all of the characters other than the PCs.

Players narrate the actions and speech of their characters. They may narrate general details about the particular scene.

When a check is made, the participant with the highest yield narrates the resolution of that check, resolving the indeterminacy.

6.0

Game Moderation

6.1

Game Moderation

CALLING FOR CHECKS



Bullseye employs the significant indeterminacy test to indicate when a check is appropriate. A check should be made when the current state of the game is uncertain about something important.

However, one of the unique features of the Bullseye system is that spread (the amount by which a check exceeds or falls short of the target) indicates the degree of success or failure. In this way, the result of the check, beyond its mechanical impact, serves as a guide for the narrative element of the game. If spread would serve the narrative in both success and failure, a check is appropriate. In this way, the GM must call on her judgment in deciding when to make a check or when to simply say “yes” or “no” and move on.

Most resolution mechanics in RPGs are either distinctly task-based or conflict-based. More simply (indeed, overly simply), they either resolve what the character attempts to *do* or what the character desires the *outcome* of a situation to be. There is nothing inherently better about one system or another. Indeed, in many instances, the difference is semantic. For example, it is immaterial whether the character is trying to “climb the castle wall” or “infiltrate the castle.” The end result is the same in both instances. Indeed, in some circumstances, the task and the conflict might be the same. For example, a character might try to persuade the guard to let them pass. The act of persuasion is essentially the same in both types of systems.

I use the term “conflict” generally to signify any point in the story where the events to follow are indeterminate. I do not intend to evoke a particular type of system, and participants would be well served to avoid acting on preconceptions based on experiences with other conflict-resolution systems. Participants should not evaluate the existing state of the story to determine if a check is appropriate; it is the check’s usefulness in driving the story forward that determines when it is appropriate. In short: “Roll in service of the goal.”



6.2 Game Moderation SETTING TARGETS

At first, you might feel pressure about setting a “correct target” for any given check. In time, this pressure dissipates because (a) you get better at setting targets with experience and (b) you realize it doesn’t matter all that much. If you have reached a point of significant indeterminacy (and, if you’re calling for a check, you certainly should have), the result of the check will necessarily drive the story in an exciting direction. Similarly, using a d20 ensures a broad range of results, reducing the pressure to be meticulous in setting the target.

The important thing in setting targets is to maintain consistency over time. If the PCs are trying to sneak into a castle on one occasion, it should have the same target if they try to do so again on a subsequent occasion (unless circumstances have changed in the intervening time).

Similarly, you should always announce the target before the check is made. This transparency allows the players to provide input on the target. While you have final say on setting the target, you should consider any contributions from the players.

6.3 Game Moderation NEGOTIATING MODIFIERS



For any given check, you should permit the application of one modifier of each type of quality (core, intrinsic, experiential, and material). If a PC has a particularly relevant second quality of a type already applied, you might apply half of the second modifier (rounded down).

Situational modifiers should be relatively small in magnitude, ranging from -5 to +5 in total for any given check. Anything beyond that likely should be addressed in setting the target. (*See 6.4*)

As with setting targets, the application and magnitude of modifiers should be discussed openly. Kibitzing over modifiers, if approached in a congenial spirit, can be an enjoyable part of the game. As a general rule you should permit obscure or even fanciful applications of qualities—but not absurd ones. In negotiating modifiers with the players, consider other ways you amicably negotiate, e.g., deciding what toppings to get on the pizza. Modifiers should be handled in the same spirit.



6.4 Game Moderation MODIFIERS VS. TARGETS

Mathematically speaking, there is no difference between increasing a target by 1 and applying a -1 penalty to the check. Accordingly, you should not get hung up in trying to decide how to translate a particular situation. However, there are a few considerations in dealing with this issue.

As a general rule, modifiers should be used to represent circumstances unique to a single PC; targets should be set based upon circumstances that apply to all PCs. For example, if a PC wants to shoot a bow while climbing a ladder, you should reflect the additional difficulty by increasing the target. Even if only one PC is presently attempting the feat, the other PCs might try it later under similar circumstances. Conversely, a PC using a recently recovered magic bow should get a bonus to the check since there is only one such bow.

Using modifiers does require more handling time than setting targets. When in doubt, alter the target number over using a modifier. Most importantly, be sure not to duplicate the effects of a particular circumstance by reflecting it both in the target *and* as a modifier to the check.

6.5

Game Moderation

NARRATING RESULTS



As with many aspects of the Bullseye system, the ability to interpret the results of a given check improves over time. Most importantly, you should use the spread to guide the narration. In all instances, you should strive to highlight the exciting results of the check no matter what the spread is. If the spread is large, you can describe great successes and devastating (or hapless) failures. If the spread is small, you can describe bare victories or narrow defeats.

The GM has the right to narrate the results of any failed check. However, do not be afraid to yield the right to narrate to the player who failed the check. Here is the trick: Look at the player when they make the check. If they have an obviously emotional reaction to the result, you should yield your narration rights. Some of the best developments are generated by a player telling the story of their own failure.



6.6 Game Moderation SCALING OPPOSITION

In establishing opposition over the course of a series of scenes, you must give consideration to the difficulty. If all of the conflicts are trivially easy to overcome, the players will get bored, and the game will devolve into mere storytelling. If all of the conflicts are nigh-impossible, the players will feel frustrated and impotent. Moreover, shifting the strength of the opposition keeps things fresh and surprising. Accordingly, it is important to provide a range of strength in opposition.

In seeking to achieve this goal, you might simply adjust difficulty levels on the fly: If players have been having a lot of success, provide them with a more difficult challenge; if they have been having a rough go of it, give them a cakewalk. The advantage of this method is its simplicity and its ability to adjust to actual results in play.

Alternatively, you can draft a list of varying opposition strengths, measured in relation to the highest relevant total bonus among the PCs, e.g., two scenes at -10, three scenes at -5, four scenes at -1, four scenes at +1, etc. Over the course of play, check off the levels you use. This method ensures that, at the end of the story arc, you have presented the players with an appropriate range of opposition.

6.7

Game Moderation

SCENES



It is helpful to think of a game in units of scenes. As with a good novel, each scene should have a purpose. In the context of the game, it should either (a) directly result in a conflict and consequently a check or (b) directly lead to a scene that will directly result in a conflict. In short, you should always be pushing the PCs toward conflict. Conflicts demand checks, and checks drive the story. On the rare occasion that mere transition is required, e.g., travel to a new location, summarize the scene in a sentence or two and move on.



6.8 Game Moderation SETTING-SPECIFIC QUALITIES

After the participants have decided what kind of game to play, you should strive to reinforce the genre and theme resulting from that decision. One of the best ways to do that is to encourage the players to build their PCs using setting-specific qualities. Invariably, this will involve further discussion to flesh out and delineate the applications of those qualities. For example, in a fantasy setting, a good quality might be “dwarf of Clan Gingendam”. The descriptive part of the quality reinforces the setting. However, it is important to discuss what being a dwarf of Clan Gingendam means in the context of the game, i.e., the mechanical relevance. The participants might decide that the dwarves of Clan Gingendam are determined, skilled with the warhammer, and excellent smiths. This process helps give further dimension to the game world.

Similarly, much deliberation should be given to the depletable quality selected for the game. In the end, since it defines a character’s exit from the game, the depletable quality is what the game is ultimately about.

70 Variants



Variants

ALTERNATE DICE



Bullseye uses a single 20-sided die to deliver a broad set of results on any given check. However, you can use alternate dice without making any mechanical changes. You can use two 10-sided dice to yield a range of results from 2 to 20 with results weighted more towards the center of the range. Alternatively, you can use three six-sided dice for an even more pronounced bell curve. You can even use four 6-sided dice and subtract 4 from each roll (though this method does add an additional level of complexity with the routine subtraction).

This variant makes results more predictable and eliminates the vagaries inherent to the 20-sided die.



7.2 Variants BULLSEYES

With this variant, each player gets a “bullseye”, an additional resource. Each player gets one bullseye every 10 conflicts they participate in. A bullseye may be expended after a check is made to ignore the result of the roll and use a result of “20” instead.

This variant gives players a safety net to avoid particularly disastrous roles and also ensures at least one opportunity to narrate the results of a check over the course of a particular arc.

7.3 Variants

DEFINING QUALITIES DURING PLAY



In lieu of fully creating characters before play begins, players can establish their PC's qualities during the course of play. Players should otherwise have a good idea of what kind of character they want to be, but they can assign their character creation points during play. Once a particular quality is established, the player writes it in their character sheet, and it cannot be later changed.

This variant gives players more information about the nature of the setting and the kind of story arcs they will experience before they have to decide on all of their character's qualities.



74 Variants

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Improvement of PC qualities is not necessary for long-term play. However, some groups might enjoy the feeling of growth that advancement provides. In this variant, players gain 1 additional character creation point for each 10 conflicts in which they participate. (Of course, you can increase or decrease the rate of advancement as suits you.) Players may spend these additional points at any time between conflicts.

This variant allows players to slightly modify their characters over time if they want to emphasize different aspects from when they created the character.

7.5

Variants

GROUP DEPLETABLE QUALITIES



In this variant, the PCs share a single depletable quality score. The players should agree on an amount of character creation points each will spend to generate the initial score. Any reduction a PC would suffer to their depletable score affects the group score. Any impairment penalty affects all of the PCs.

This variant allows you to use more exotic depletable qualities. For example, the PCs could be special agents tasked with stopping a nuclear detonation, using time as a group quality. Or they could be a team of hackers, relying on a single pool of virtual health or anonymity.



7.6 Variants

MULTIPLE DEPLETABLE QUALITIES

In this variant, each PC possesses two depletable qualities. A check might affect one or both of the qualities as determined prior to resolving the conflict. If a check affects both qualities, the resulting reduction is applied in full to both qualities. A character with impairment from multiple depletable qualities suffers only the penalty associated with the greatest impairment—not the total of both. In other words, the penalties from multiple depletable qualities are redundant, not cumulative.

This variant allows you to highlight two themes to the game. For example, a fantasy game concerning human missionaries in a dangerous land might use both faith and health as depletable qualities.



NAME

SUMMARY

CORE

INTRINSIC

EXPERIENTIAL

MATERIAL

FULL

-2

-5

INC

0

RET

QUALITIES

DEPLETABLE QUALITY

DEPLETION MODIFIER