



Simple World

A streamlined, generic hack of Apocalypse World. Use at your own risk.

*Created by Joe Mcdaldno as part of his series of little games.
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buriedwithoutceremony.com/little-games/*

Dedicated to Vx.

MC Prep

What do you want the game to be about? Answer that question.

Create a stat that reflects each of these tendencies:

- Reflexive/Graceful
- Persuasive/Assertive
- Aggressive/Forceful
- Calculating/Methodical
- Inquisitive/Exploratory

If one of those tendencies doesn't matter to the story you want to create, either remove it altogether (thus creating 4 stats) or make up a stat that reflects something totally different.

Vx wants to use Simple World to play a post-apocalyptic game. He names his stats Cool (reflexive/graceful), Hot (persuasive/assertive), Hard (aggressive/forceful), Sharp (calculating/methodical), and Weird (inquisitive/exploratory).

Courtney wants to use Simple World to play a "unicorn-riding ladies on a quest" game. She names her stats Grace (reflexive/graceful), Charm (persuasive/assertive), Daring (aggressive/forceful), Cunning (calculating/methodical), and Whim (inquisitive/exploratory).

Write the Stats onto each player's character sheet.

Take a set of index cards. Write an evocative title on each – a type of interesting person you'd want to tell stories about. These are the game's character seeds. Beneath the title, list three specialities they might excel at.

Vx writes Brainer (mind control, echoing the psychic maelstrom, voyeurism) and Hardholder (controlling lackeys, protecting the village, bartering up) and Driver (driving cars, acting disinterested, siege) and Savvyhead (fixing things, breaking things, unlocking the secrets of the universe).

Courtney writes Princess (leading comrades, courage spells, archery) and Hand-Maiden (supporting comrades, healing spells, subterfuge) and Witch (vanquishing evil, curses, speaking to ghosts) and Hawk-Caller (siege tactics, recon, merciless choices).

Next, take a look at your Agenda / Principles / MC Moves.

The Agendas are the reasons you play the game.

The first two are filled in for you. Fill in the third:

- Make the players' characters' lives not boring.
- Play to find out what happens.
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The Principles are things you should seek to do whenever you speak, in the game. A list is filled in for you, just waiting to be customized. Use this customization opportunity to establish the way you plan to pace and run the game.

Cross off up to two of these Principles, and write in up to two of your own:

- Sprinkle evocative details everywhere.
- Make the world seem real.
- Build a bigger world through play.
- Create interesting dilemmas, not interesting plots.
- Address yourself to the characters, not the players.
- Make your move, but misdirect.
- Make your move, but never speak its name.
- Look at your NPCs and ideas through crosshairs.
- Name everyone, make everyone human.
- Ask provocative questions and build on the answers.
- Respond with challenging circumstances and occasional rewards.
- Be a fan of the players' characters.
- Think offscreen, too.
- Sometimes, reflect a question back upon the players.
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The MC moves are the specific things you say in any moment. There are two different cases where you use the MC Moves, and you use them differently in each of those cases. When the players look at you expectantly, you make a regular MC Move. When a player fails a die roll (getting 6 or lower), you make a hard MC Move. John Harper best described how to handle those two cases, so I'll quote him:

When you make a regular MC move, all three:

1. It follows logically from the fiction.
2. It gives the player an opportunity to react.
3. It sets you up for a future harder move.

Say what happens but stop before the effect, then ask "What do you do?"

When you make a hard MC move, both:

1. It follows logically from the fiction.
2. It's irrevocable.

Say what happens, including the effect, then ask "What do you do?"

A list of MC Moves is already written for you, waiting to be customized.

Cross off up to three moves, and add up to three of your own to the list:

- Separate them.
- Put them together.
- Put someone in a high-stakes situation.
- Trade harm for harm (as established).
- Deal harm (as established).
- Announce off-screen badness.
- Announce future badness.
- Take away one of their Things.
- Demonstrate one of their Things' bad sides.
- Give them a difficult decision to make.
- Tell them the possible consequences and ask.
- Turn their move back on them.
- Make a move from one of your Dangers or Bigger Pictures.
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Vx adds “Erode all status quos” as his final Agenda. For Principles, he crosses off “Build a bigger world through play,” as his vision involves small communities and very little over-arching social structure. He also crosses off “Sprinkle evocative details everywhere” in order to replace it with the more specific and thematic “Barf forth apocalyptica.” For the MC Moves, he crosses off “Put them together” and adds “Capture someone” and “Reveal a fundamental scarcity.”

Courtney adds “Make doing the right thing difficult for the players’ characters” as her final Agenda. For Principles, she crosses off “Look at your NPCs and ideas through crosshairs” and writes “Allow your NPCs to change and develop in expected directions”. For MC Moves, she crosses off “Trade harm for harm (as established)” and “Deal harm (as established)”. She adds “Introduce a new barrier to carrying on” and “Destroy something precious (as established)”.

Finally, every PC in the game has a relationship stat with every other character. You can name this relationship stat something special, or just call it “Relationships.” When you help someone or hinder them, that has its own basic move, and you roll your relationship stat.

Helping and Hindering PCs

When you help someone or hinder them, roll your relationship stat with that person. On a 10+, add or subtract 2 from their roll. On a 7-9, the MC will name a cost; if you accept the cost, add or subtract 2 from their roll.

Helping and Hindering NPCs

When you help someone or hinder them, roll your relationship stat with that person. On a 10+, they either succeed or fail - your choice. On a 7-9, the MC will name a cost; if you accept the cost, they either succeed or fail - your choice.

At the start of the game, each player will assign the following relationship stat scores that their character has toward the other PCs: +2 for the one they know best, -1 for the one they know least, and +1 for all others. They will also list “NPCs: 0,” as the default is that they have a relationship score with all NPCs that starts at 0.

Relationship scores will go up and down over play. Choose how:

- At the end of each session, each player gets to adjust one PC score up or down by 1.
- Whenever two characters have a special scene together, their scores go up by 1. Whenever two characters work against one another publicly, their scores go down by 1.
- Characters can betray one another for a +2 bonus to a roll, but their relationship score goes down by 1. Characters can make meaningful sacrifices for someone, and their relationship score toward that person will go up by one.
- Some other system that you invent:

Write the relationship score triggers on each character sheet.

Vx names his relationship stat Hx. He decides that at the end of each session, each player gets to adjust one PC score up or down by 1.

Courtney names her relationship stat Friendship. She decides to create her own system for how relationships go up. Each PC lists a virtue on their character sheet (Hope, Justice, Bravery, etc). When another PC exemplifies that virtue, the relationship held toward that PC goes up by 1. Whenever another PC contradicts that virtue, the relationship held toward that PC goes down by 1.

Joe is writing a Simple World game about teenage monster drama. He decides that the relationship stat goes down every time you roll it, and it goes up every time you gain emotional leverage over a character (NPCs included!).

That’s it! You’ve got stats, character seeds, Agendas/Principles/Moves, and a relationship stat. You’re ready to get a group together and play.

Creating Characters

Hand each player a character sheet. It should have the stat names listed, including the relationship stat. It should have a description of how the relationship stat goes up and down over the course of the game.

Place the character concepts in the middle of the table. Talk about what they might mean and why they might be cool. Have everyone pick one and fasten it to their character sheet (in the concept box) using a paper clip.

Tell them to assign the following numbers to their 5 basic stats: +2, +1, +1, 0, -1. If you only have 4 stats, instead assign: +2, +1, 0, -1.

The maximum that a stat can ever reach in the game is +3, and the minimum is -1. This includes relationship stats. Player moves cannot advance a stat beyond +3 (though player moves can temporarily or circumstantially increase it beyond +3).

Each PC has a relationship stat with each other PC. Tell the players to do this: whichever PC they know the best, write +2 next to that character's name. Whichever PC they know the least, write -1 next to that character's name. For each other PC, write +1. Tell them to write "NPCs" and assign that relationship a 0.

Every character has a harm clock, with six sections. When characters take harm in the game, they mark a number of sections equal to whatever amount of harm the MC tells them they take. Point out the harm clock, and explain that when it's filled all the way up, the characters are taken out of the action (in a genre-appropriate way).

The next stage of creating characters is to pick 3 moves. When a player picks a move, they pick an option from the list below, give the move a title, and fill in the blanks. Each move gets recorded on their character sheet.

Player Moves:

- When you do something relating to [specialty], add +1.
- You have the ability to [do some sort of active special power]. It counts as a basic move using [stat].
- You have [some passive special power that has a constant effect].
- You have a [thing]. When applicable, it adds +1 to [stat] and [stat].
- When you do [specialty], mark XP.
- Add +1 to [stat].

Mark is playing in Vx's apocalyptic game. He chooses Brainer, and names them Wendigo. He gives Wendigo the stats: Cool -1, Hot 0, Hard +1, Sharp +1, Weird +2. Their relationship stat is called Hx, and the other PCs are named Brink and Rolfball. He decides he has Hx 2 with Blink, and Hx -1 with Rolfball. He creates the following three moves:

Dirty Secrets: You have the ability to detect someone's secret shame. It counts as a basic move using Weird.

Mind Strings: When you do something relating to mind control, add +1.

Open Your Brain: When you echo the psychic maelstrom, mark XP.

Lane is playing in Courtney's unicorn knights game. He chooses Princess, and names his character Lucinda. He gives Lucinda the stats: Grace +1, Charm +2, Daring 0, Cunning +1, and Whim -1. Their relationship stat is tied to a virtue, and Lane chooses Courage. He decides Lucinda knows Mercury the best, and writes "Mercury +2." He decides he knows Helena the least, and so has a Relationship of -1 with Helena. That leaves Ophelia, who Lucinda has a +1 relationship with by default. Lucinda is given the following three player moves:

Fearless: When you do something related to leading comrades, add +1.

Sharpshooter: When you do something related to archery, add +1.

Horn of Ancestral Power: You have a Horn of Ancestral Power. When applicable, it adds +1 to Charm.

Finally, each PC is going to have two stats highlighted. Have each player (except the MC) choose and highlight a stat for the PC to their left. Then have the MC highlight a second stat.

When you highlight a stat, you fill in the bubble next to the stat. When a PC rolls a highlighted stat, they gain a point of XP (experience).

Playing the Game

MCing the Game

Early in the first session, the MC should juggle two responsibilities:

- Follow the PCs around, and learn what they're all about.
- Give the players a sense of what the world is like, and how it operates.

Astute players will realize that these two things can sometimes be at odds with one another. MC, the way you navigate this combination of responsibilities is by honouring your Agendas and your Principles.

Talking and Moves

The game is like a conversation. People describe what their characters do, ask questions about what's going on, and talk in character. If someone says something that seems untrue or unreasonable, the MC is allowed to say, "I don't think that's possible, but you could instead [make some other interesting choice], if you'd like."

At some point, the MC will determine that something requires a roll. Actions require a roll when they are opposed by other characters or run the risk of interesting failure. When one of these conditions is met, the player needs to roll for a basic move. The MC will name which stat applies to the situation. The player rolls two six-sided dice and adds their stat to the sum. The effects depend on the basic move in question.

Basic Moves

There are three basic moves.

Taking Action

When you take an action that risks failure or opposition, roll with one of the basic stats. On a 10+, you succeed at your goal. As appropriate, the MC might award you: resource points, harm dealt, or a bonus to carry forward. On a 7-9, the MC will offer you a hard bargain or a cost. If you agree to that hard bargain or cost, you succeed at your goal (and as appropriate, the MC might award you resource points, harm dealt, or a bonus to carry forward).

Helping and Hindering PCs

When you help someone or hinder them, roll your relationship stat with that person. On a 10+, add or subtract 2 from their roll. On a 7-9, the MC will name a cost; if you accept the cost, add or subtract 2 from their roll.

Helping and Hindering NPCs

When you help someone or hinder them, roll your relationship stat with that person. On a 10+, they either succeed or fail – your choice. On a 7-9, the MC will name a cost; if you accept the cost, they either succeed or fail – your choice.

When you roll 6 or lower on a Basic Move, the MC gets to make a hard MC Move.

Moves (both the Basic Moves and the MC Moves) should continually propel the game forward in interesting ways. When a player succeeds on a Basic Move, their success should be interesting and introduce new opportunities for them. When a player gets a 7-9 on a Basic Move, the dilemma and hard bargain should create compelling drama, and either choice should be interesting and take the story in new directions. When a player fails on a Basic Move, the MC should respond with a hard MC Move that fundamentally changes the situation and demands new kinds of action.

Whenever people look at the MC expectantly, the MC should make a regular MC Move. This should create new things for the players to react to. The MC should then go on to say, “So, what do you do?”

Resource Points

When someone succeeds (with a 10+ or a 7-9) on a Taking Action roll, it'll sometimes make sense to represent their success with a number of resource points. For example, if someone tries to read a person's facial expressions and determine their true intent in a conversation, they might make a roll. If they get a 10+, the MC might determine that they have 3 conversation points, and they can spend those points 1-for-1 to get answers about the character's motivations and goals during the conversation. Resource points are always given a name and function at the time they are awarded. In most cases, resource points should be temporary, lasting until the end of a scene or situation.

In Vx's game, Wendigo (the Brainer) decides to try to mind control a wandering merchant to just hand over his choice goods. The MC says, “Well, that sounds like Taking Action, because the merchant is obviously opposed to such an attempt. Weird applies here, right?” Wendigo's Weird stat is 2, and he's got that move Mind Strings (When you do something relating to mind control, add +1). He rolls a 2 and a 5, and adds it to the +3 from his stat & move. A 10! The MC says, “Alright, you've got two mind control points. You can spend them 1-for-1 to force him to either obey a psychic command or suffer 1 harm.”

In Courtney's game, Lucinda (the Princess) decides to lead her fellow

unicorn knights on a charge into the ogre's keep! She's unfortunately got a Daring of 0, but she has a move that applies: Fearless (When you do something related to [leading comrades], add +1). She rolls a total of 7. The MC says, “Alright, here's your hard bargain: as you're charging in, the ogre sentries ready their spiked clubs. You can press forward, but your unicorn will be wounded and require care.” Lucinda agrees, and the MC says, “Alright, I'm going to award you three tactics points. You can spend them to do stuff like: round up the sentries, ensure no ogres escape, ensure no one else gets wounded, avoid being smoked out or driven back, ask questions about the situation, and so on.”

Dealing Harm

When someone succeeds on a Taking Action roll, it'll sometimes make sense that they would deal harm to their opposition. Harm is typically physical harm that's brought about by violence, but it may vary from setting to setting. When someone does harm to someone else, the MC will rate that harm from 1-3. What qualifies as a certain score will vary from setting to setting. PC harm gets marked down on the harm clock on their character sheet. NPC harm gets noted by the MC, either in their head or on a notes page. NPCs can typically take 2 harm before they're taken out of the action, but tougher NPCs might have more.

Being Taken Out of Action

When a character has all of their harm sections filled in, they're taken out of the action. The specifics will vary based on genre and context. In a Hardy Boys game, being taken out of the action means disappearing under mysterious circumstances (to wake up tied to a chair later) or being put into a coma. In an apocalyptic gang fighting game, being taken out of the action means being killed. When a character is taken out of the action, they're no longer playable – either they're dead or they're the functional equivalent of being dead. If the character was a PC, the player should create a new character.

In Vx's game, Brink (the Driver) decides to run over a thug who's trying to guard the road. He rolls Hard, and gets a 10. The MC says, "Great. You definitely hit this guy and hear a thump underneath the car. A car going at this speed is definitely worth 2 harm, so he's either dead or near death. The road's clear. What do you do next?"

Bonus to Carry Forward

Sometimes, succeeding on a Taking Action roll means that the PC is set up for future successes. In these cases, the MC can award a +1 bonus that the PC can apply to their next roll. The player should mark that bonus on their character sheet.

In Courtney's game, Helena (the Hawk Caller) sends her hawks out to scout for the best place to try to sneak across the fortress walls. That's a Taking Action roll, and Helena gets a 7-9. The MC says, "Alright, your hawks sweep over the fortress, but they draw the suspicions of the guards. If you press forward, you'll be encountering guards who are armed and ready for you. But the hawks do identify the best place for you to try to scale the walls – down by the thicket, where the wall has begun to crumble. You'll carry a +1 bonus forward to scaling the wall there, if you choose to."

Marking XP

Whenever you roll a highlighted stat you earn a point of XP. Mark it on the XP section of your sheet. When you hit 5 XP, erase all of it and take a new Player Move. If you've already got at least one move that references each of your specialities, you may create a new specialty and reference it in the Player Move you purchase.

Between Sessions

At the end of each session, players may be asked to adjust relationship stats (if that's how relationship stats fluctuate in your game). Between sessions, the MC might create Dangers, and might link those Dangers into Bigger Pictures. At the start of each session, highlighted stats are changed. Whoever has the highest relationship score with a character chooses a stat to highlight, and the MC highlights a second stat.

Dangers & the Bigger Picture

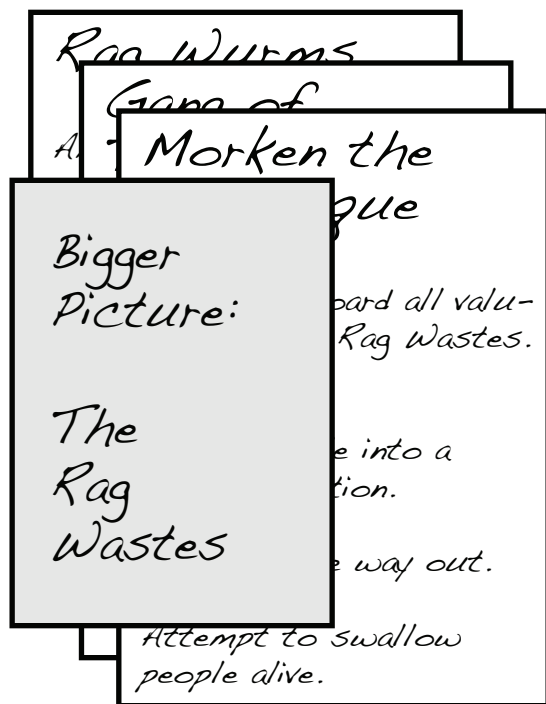
Between sessions, or even during them, the MC can create Dangers. Dangers are things that might cause problems for the PCs, or fight them for resources, or block the PCs on their path. When you create a Danger, take an index card. Write its name, and its Ambition, and 1-3 MC Moves. Its Ambition is whatever this thing wants and strives for. If the PCs don't do anything about the Danger, the Ambition will either happen or it'll be attempted and disastrous effects will result. The MC Moves are things that the MC can add to their list of MC Moves whenever the Danger is afoot.

In Vx's post-apocalyptic game, he creates a Danger called "Morken, the Grotesque." His Ambition is "Hoard all valuables in the rag wastes." His MC Moves are "Display the nature of the world it inhabits. Threaten someone, directly or by implication. Steal something from someone." Whenever Morken is in the scene, those three things are things that Vx can do as MC Moves.

In Courtney's unicorn knights game, she creates a Danger called "The Swamps of Symmetry." Its Ambition is "Eliminate all odd numbers and out-of-balance things." Its MC Moves are "Corral people into a remote location. Obscure the way out. Attempt to swallow people alive."

If you have a group of Dangers that work together or interlock, you can group them together into a Bigger Picture. Take an index card and fold it in half. Now it acts as a folder or hand that you can stick the related Dangers into. On the front of the folded index card, list the Bigger Picture's name. On the inside halves, list a new Principle and a Dark Future. The Principle is something that you should do whenever this Bigger Picture is involved in a scene. The Dark Future is a list of possibilities for what could happen if the PCs don't intervene and change this Bigger Picture.

Vx decides that Morken isn't the only threat in the Rag Wastes. So he creates a new Bigger Picture called "The Rag Wastes." In it, Vx sticks three interrelated Dangers: Morken the Grotesque; The Gang of Thunder; Rag Wurms. He lists a new Principle for whenever the PCs are interacting with the Rag Wastes: "Entice people with dangerous opportunities." As the Dark Future, Vx writes "The Rag Wastes will expand, becoming a dangerous and impassible realm of thieves and mutants."



Genre and MC Decisions

The MC will have to make a number of decisions before and during play. The MC Prep that comes before play (naming stats, modifying Agendas/Principles/MC Moves, clarifying the relationship stat) involves a lot of decisions about genre and tone. More decisions along these lines will be made in play.

The MC will have to make judgment calls about what requires a Taking Action roll, and what is outright impossible in the genre. The MC should use their veto right judiciously and sparingly. If someone wants to take an action that subverts the genre, that's good! It's only when they want to take an action that is impossible or nonsensical for a given genre that the MC should say that something isn't possible. When the MC says this, they should use the line, "I don't think that's possible, but you could instead [make some other interesting choice], if you'd like."

When someone has all of the sections on their harm clock filled in, they are taken out of the action. What this means is dependent on genre and context. In a fighting adventure game, this will typically mean that they are killed or captured by fierce antagonistic forces. The MC should not pull their punches when they take someone out of the action! It should be done in the most dramatic and severe and permanent manner that makes sense for the genre and context.



MC PREP SHEET

The Stats

Reflexive/Graceful _____

Persuasive/Assertive _____

Aggressive/Forceful _____

Calculating/Methodical _____

Inquisitive/Exploratory _____

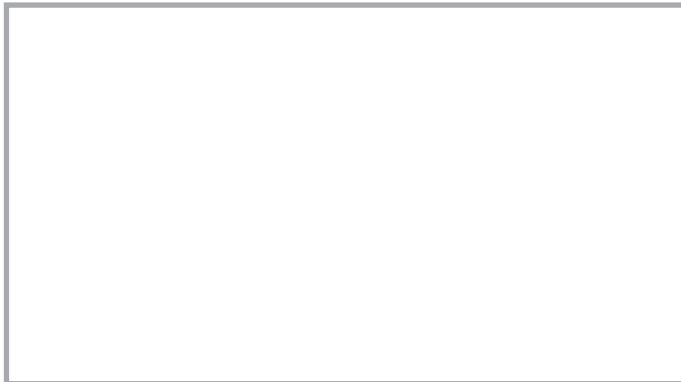
Agendas

The first two are filled in for you. Fill in the third:

- Make the players' characters' lives not boring.
- Play to find out what happens.
-

Relationship Stat _____

How Relationship Scores Change:



Principles

Cross off up to two of these Principles, and write in up to two of your own:

- Sprinkle evocative details everywhere.
- Make the world seem real.
- Build a bigger world through play.
- Create interesting dilemmas, not interesting plots.
- Address yourself to the characters, not the players.
- Make your move, but misdirect.
- Make your move, but never speak its name.
- Look at your NPCs and ideas through crosshairs.
- Name everyone, make everyone human.
- Ask provocative questions and build on the answers.
- Respond with challenging circumstances and occasional rewards.
- Be a fan of the players' characters.
- Think offscreen, too.
- Sometimes, reflect a question back upon the players.
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MC Moves

Cross off up to three moves, and add up to three of your own to the list:

- Separate them.
- Put them together.
- Put someone in a high-stakes situation.
- Trade harm for harm (as established).
- Deal harm (as established).
- Announce off-screen badness.
- Announce future badness.
- Take away one of their Things.
- Demonstrate one of their Things' bad sides.
- Give them a difficult decision to make.
- Tell them the possible consequences and ask.
- Turn their move back on them.
- Make a move from one of your Dangers or Bigger Pictures.
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Character Sheet

Resource Points

Name:

The Relationship stat is:

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Player Moves:

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Stats:

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Relationships:

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- When you do something relating to [specialty], add +1.
- You have the ability to [do some sort of active special power]. It counts as a basic move using [stat].
- You have [some passive special power that has a constant effect].
- You have a [thing]. When applicable, it adds +1 to [stat] and [stat].
- When you do [specialty], mark XP.
- Add +1 to [stat].

Taking Action

When you take an action that risks failure or opposition, roll with one of the basic stats. On a 10+, you succeed at your goal. As appropriate, the MC might award you: resource points, harm dealt, or a bonus to carry forward. On a 7-9, the MC will offer you a hard bargain or a cost. If you agree to that hard bargain or cost, you succeed at your goal (and as appropriate, the MC might award you resource points, harm dealt, or a bonus to carry forward).

Helping / Hindering PCs

When you help someone or hinder them, roll your relationship stat with that person. On a 10+, add or subtract 2 from their roll. On a 7-9, the MC will name a cost; if you accept the cost, add or subtract 2 from their roll.

Helping / Hindering NPCs

When you help someone or hinder them, roll your relationship stat with that person. On a 10+, they either succeed or fail – your choice. On a 7-9, the MC will name a cost; if you accept the cost, they either succeed or fail – your choice.