

UNIVERSALIS

Universalis is:

- The game where every player is the Game Master
- The game where players can create and populate the world as they desire-as they play
- The game where everything that happens, happens because a player wanted it to happen
- The game where suspense comes from the actions of other players, not from a random roll
- The game whose plot evolves as you play with no random tables, rail-roading, or scenario books
- The game which requires absolutely no set up or preparation time
- The game where it doesn't matter if all of the players show up on time or at all
- Begin play with only sheets of blank paper, pencils, ten-sided dice, tokens, and plenty of imagination

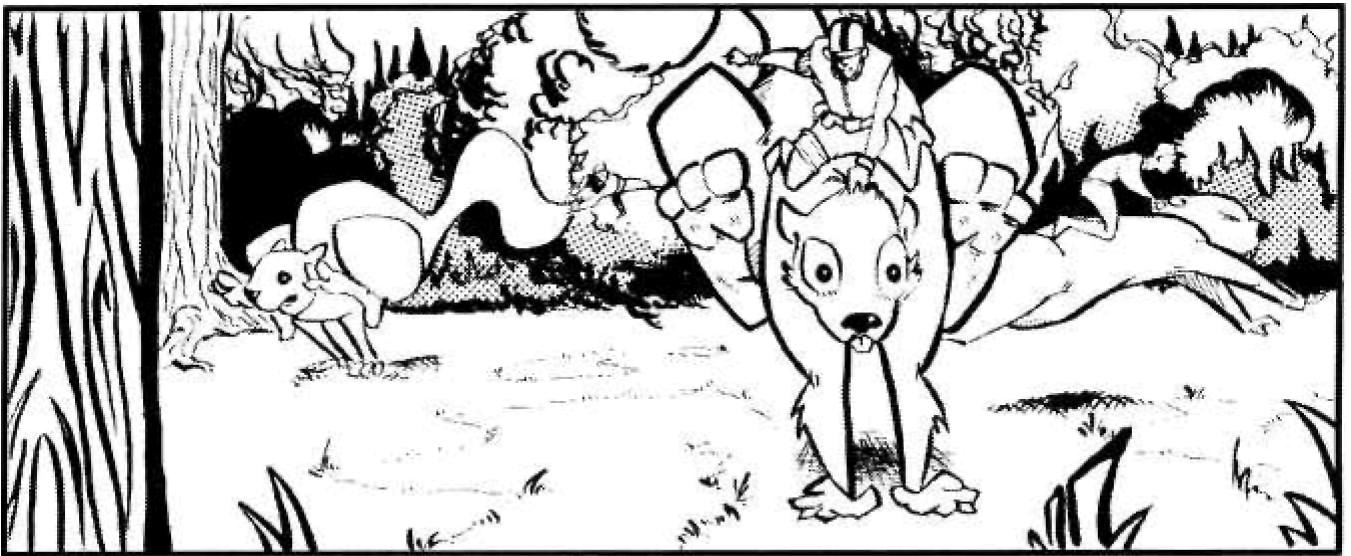
All the rules you need can be found within these pages

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Thinking fast, the team of meadow heroes escapes the raging forest fire by clinging to the backs of fleeing squirrels.

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Universalis has also been inspired by games like Story Engine, Once Upon a Time, and Aria Worlds,

You can find The Forge at: www.indie-rpgs.com

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All of the fantastic art in this book is by David Hedgecock and is used by permission. You can contact David at: therabbithole@cox.net. Or visit his home page at: <http://members.cox.net/therabbithole>.

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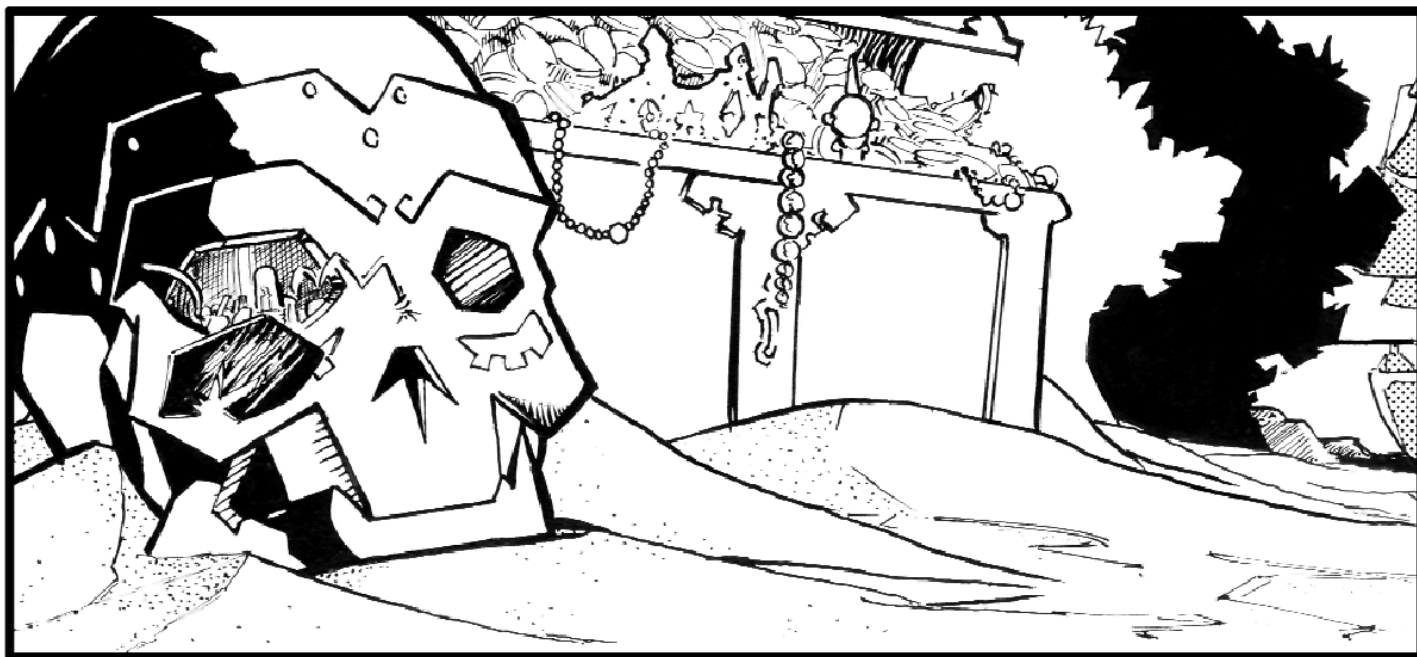
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And finally I dedicate this to Ruth, my life partner, whose tolerance and encouragement for my obsession with this weird bobby of gaming is more than I could ask for.

Mike would also like to say that he is very grateful to have been part of this project, and that he'd like to thank his family and especially his wife Marjorie for her patience during the process.

Universalis has come a long way from an initial discussion Mike and I had with Seth about giving players explicit control over setting in Alyria. While he didn't use that idea for Alyria, it got Mike and I started on a year long journey. The initial game of Universalis was nothing more than the framework of an old traditional RPG project I had set aside years ago with an early version of the Coin mechanics added on to give players tremendous ability to manipulate aspects of the game world usually reserved for the Game Master. Gradually over 7 complete rewrites the game morphed (largely on its own) into something that barely resembles what we started with and doesn't even really address our initial design goals. That's ok, because while I think Universalis has become something very different, I also believe it is a much better game than it was. Besides, that original windmill is still there for the tilting should we decide to make another run at it.

Universalis Web Site: <http://universalis.actionroll.com>



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CHAPTER ONE THE BASIC CONCEPT

Conceptually, Universalis is a collaborative story telling endeavor in the form of a game. Players begin by selecting what kind of story will be told during that session. No time needs to be spent preparing this ahead of time. It is decided at the table in round robin fashion, using Coins to purchase aspects of the game world as desired. When all players are satisfied that they understand the nature of the game to be played, actual play begins. Players will create all aspects of the setting, including all characters (main and supporting), all locations (and all setting details), and all props (basically anything else, animal, vegetable or mineral). They will then use these elements (collectively called Components) to develop the plot; telling the story through events and dialog and through the use of dice during plot complications.

All players have equal authority over the direction the game will go. There is no designated "Game Master" as there is in most Role Playing Games. Technically one could say that all players serve as joint Game Masters with their respective authority being measured and regulated in the game through the use of Coins.

A finished game may be left as a complete project on its own, or players may revisit that same setting with new tales to tell. Future games may gradually build up an entire world or cycle of stories, which reuse existing Components from previous games.

Coins Measure Story Power

Coins are the resource that quantifies and regulates how much control each player will have to 1) define the setting by Creating Components and 2) to move the story in the direction they prefer through Events. If you spend Coins, you gain power over the story. Its that simple.

Chapter 4 discusses how these Coins are used to Create Components. Chapter 5 discusses using these Coins to establish scenes and Events.

Stones, tokens, or actual pocket change can be used to represent these Coins. The supply of Coins a player has available to him is called his Wealth. Players will spend these Coins and earn additional ones throughout the game, so a central reserve of Coins (the Bank) is required. Players will receive a certain number of Coins at the beginning of each game. How many is up to the individual playgroup to decide.

- There are two ways to get additional Coins:
 1. at the end of each scene, Coins will be awarded through Refreshment.
 2. by Originating Plot Complications, players will have the opportunity to win additional Coins

The Coin mechanic sets up a miniature economy in the game which functions regardless of the number of Coins involved. However, different amounts of Coins will result in a different

feel to play (a Coin rich vs. a Coin poor environment), and players are encouraged to experiment until finding the level they find most enjoyable. In general, a game with high initial Coins will allow players to spend many Coins building the environment in the first scene before getting to the action. A game with fewer initial Coins will require getting to the action earlier because only by starting new scenes and Originating Complications can more Coins be acquired. A game with a low Refreshment rate will encourage players to have more frequent Complications as a way of earning more Coins. A game with a high Refreshment rate provides less encouragement for using Complications in this manner.

It is suggested that initially players start with 25 Coins each and Refreshment be set at 5 Coins per scene, until players become familiar with the rules. After a few sessions, groups can adjust this amount to find a level that suits their style of play. The number of Coins to be used must be chosen before the Game Preparation Phase begins.

Control, Authority, and Settling Disputes

There are four mechanisms in the game for maintaining organization and settling disputes between players. The first is the Social Contract which is discussed in Chapter 2. This is basically a pre-game agreement between players about how the game is to be played. Chapter 3 introduces rules for play order and regulations for who gets to say what and when. Chapter 3 also discusses the Challenge mechanic which is how disputes between players are resolved if they cannot be settled by other means. Finally and most importantly authority resides with the Coins themselves. A player's Wealth is a reserve of potential, but as yet unused, authority. As Coins are spent to gain immediate control over an aspect of the world, the player is simultaneously giving up some potential for control in the future. This dynamic, and the need to replace spent Coins is what drives the game forward.

Facts:As Traits, Events, and Tenets

Facts are a crucial core concept to Universalis. Each type will be described in detail in later chapters, but each has several things in common. Each defines some aspect of the game or story, each costs 1 Coin, each provides added weight to Challenges, and each can provide 1 die to appropriate Complications.

- Traits: Facts purchased for Components (described in Chapter 4)
- Events: Facts purchased for scenes (described in Chapter 5)
- Tenets: Facts purchased for the game itself (described in Chapter 2)

CHAPTER TWO GAME PREPARATION

Before any game of Universalis can begin, players must have some idea of what kind of story they desire to tell. Universalis has no established setting and is not designed with any specific genre in mind. It is a toolbox, which the players use to craft a story of their own liking through play. But before you begin using any tool, you have to know what sort of project you're using it for. Game preparation occurs at the table with all players participating. A series of Tenets will be defined which establish the parameters for the upcoming game.

TENETS

Tenets are Facts which define the game, what type of world it will be set in, what type of story is about to be told in it, how players prefer to play, and what special rules may be used.

At the beginning of the game, the starting player is determined by any means desired (age, seat position, seniority, volunteer, etc.). That player must either pay 1 Coin to propose a game Tenet or he must pass. Play proceeds clockwise around the table with each player paying 1 Coin to propose a Tenet or passing. Once all of the players are satisfied with the Tenets that have been drafted (i.e. all players have passed), actual play (as described in Chapter 3) begins. This should only occur after enough Tenets have been accepted to give all players a pretty solid idea about what type of game is about to be played and how they (as a group) have consented to play it.

Sometimes it is enjoyable to plunge into a game with only a minimum of prepared Tenets. This usually leads to a very chaotic and often silly, but sometimes extremely liberating and enjoyable experience. For a more "serious" and hopefully deeper game, players are encouraged to spend as much time as necessary establishing Tenets thoroughly.

- There are 3 types of Tenets that can be proposed: Story Elements, Social Contract issues, and Rule Gimmicks
- Each player may propose one and only one Tenet on any single rum and doing so costs 1 Coin.

This rule remains true for the entire game, so that at any time during the game a player can spend 1 Coin to propose 1 Tenet (and no more than one) on his turn.

This process is called "proposing" a Tenet because the player's choice is not carved in stone. Anything a player says or does during the game is subject to being Challenged by another player who disagrees with him or thinks he has a better idea. The Challenge mechanic is explained in Chapter 3. Unless there is a Challenge, however, the player's proposal is presumed accepted and becomes part of the structure of the game. In game terms each accepted Tenet is considered to be a Fact attached to the game itself. It is possible to propose a change to a previously accepted Tenet, but with the original Tenet serving as a Fact, it becomes easier to Challenge the proposed change and prevent it from being accepted (see Chapter 3 for details).

Story Elements

Story Elements are any aspects about the upcoming story that a player wants to define in advance. They provide direction to all of the players as to what type of story all players should be

attempting to tell. Story Elements include specifications about genre, theme, premise, settings, situations, mood (including atmosphere and tone), and degree of realism. They may include using the rules in Chapter 4 to define specific characters or locations that a player wishes to make central to the upcoming Story, Defining these items in advance leads to a more coherent story. Having all players participate in their creation and accept them (any Tenet, including Story Elements, can be challenged) helps ensure that everyone is clear about the nature of the upcoming story.

Lets introduce five players who will be part of our ongoing game play examples: Albert, Bob, Christine, Dave, and Ed who are sitting around the game table in that order. Albert starts off.

Albert: *Lets play a science fiction game tonight. [Albert proposes a genre for 1 Coin]*

Bob: *Ok, but no space ships...I'm sick of space ships. [Bob proposes a limit to the setting for 1 Coin]*

Christine: *Hmmm, I was actually looking forward to something more fantasy tonight..how about if we do sci-fi, but with a real fantasy flair? [Christine is informally polling the other players about how likely they are to Challenge her upcoming proposal]*

Albert: *Like what? [Albert's not sure he likes where this is going]*

Christine: *Well, like that famous quote "Any technology sufficiently advanced is indistinguishable from magic". So we do all of the trappings of sci-fi, but don't worry about all of the actual science making sense, the technology can be more fantastic, more magical, like the people who use it don't really understand how it works, [this exchange is technically referred to as Negotiation in the Challenge mechanic]*

Bob: *So, just like Star Trek then [everybody laughs]*

Christine: *Well...*

Ed: *Yeah, we get it, lets go with that, and see what happens [everybody nods in assent so Christine pays 1 Coin, Negotiation was successful, so there was no need for a full Challenge]*

Dave: *My turn. Lets see, how about we include a lot of animals mixed in with the technology, like how in Star Wars they still ride dewbacks and tauntauns and such, [nobody Challenges, so Dave pays 1 Coin]*

Ed: *Ok, interesting. But here's a twist, the people are all really small, like just a couple inches tall, so the animals they use are just regular size small animals iike mice and lizards and such.*

Bob: *What, small like Smurfs?!*

Ed: *Yeah, only really high tech...and not blue with silly hats, of course.*

Christine: *Ok, but not lizards, I hate reptiles. [Its not Christine's turn, so she isn't establishing this as one of the Tenets of the game world. At this point she's signaling the other player's that she's likely to Challenge things involving lizards. She could propose the "no lizards" rule as a Tenet for 1 Coin on her turn]*

Ed: *Fine, lizards can be the enemy then or something [Ed pays 1 Coin for the little people. He can only propose 1 Tenet*

per turn, so he cannot add the "lizards as the enemy" Tenet on this turn, although he likely will in a later turn]

And so it continues, until the groundwork for the game is completely laid.

Social Contract Issues

The Social Contract can be one of the most important aspects of the game. It is not always necessary to define each aspect of the Social Contract as a formal Tenet although this may be especially desirable if playing with a new group. Many established groups have played with each other so long that the major Social Contract issues are automatically assumed, even if they've never been explicitly stated. Other times, for quick pick up games that aren't meant to be serious, potential areas of friction can be largely ignored and basic rules of etiquette relied upon. However, even for the most established groups spending some time talking about the game and how players expect each other to play it, can be a valuable exercise.

Basically, the Social Contract is an agreement between the players as to how they want to play the game. Every play group has its own style of play and every player his own desires for how he enjoys experiencing his games and what he hopes to get out of them. By discussing these in advance and reaching some consensus about what is and isn't acceptable before play starts, groups can avoid many of the conflicts that lead to group dysfunction. By treating these as explicit game Tenets that are proposed and accepted, the players are formally agreeing to certain boundaries in their play. Such Tenets may include questions of pacing, outside distractions, table talk, and how closely players are expected to adhere to the tropes of a particular genre

The group dynamic issues found in the Social Contract are hardly unique to Universalis. In fact, not only do we encourage using this concept in every role playing game, it is one we borrowed ourselves. However, in the absence of a GM to run interference, settle differences and "rule from on-high by GM fiat" it is not just useful but crucial to establish these parameters in advance.

Returning to our example

Christine: *You know how in that other game we were playing with Steve as the GM he used to raise his hand as a signal for everyone else to get quiet and stop kibitzing. I think that worked pretty well. The person whose turn it is should raise his hand to get everyone's attention, and everyone else has to stop gabbing when he does, [1 Coin for a Tenet addressing Table Talk]*

Dave: *And no cell phones. Bob, last week was totally ridiculous, you got like 1000 calls. Really distracting. I say turn all the phones and pagers and stuff off, and we can check our messages 3t the next break. [1 Coin for a Tenet addressing outside distractions]*

Ed: *And no Monty Python jokes,..3t all,..by anyone. [1 Coin for a Tenet that should be in every game ever played]*

Rules Gimmicks

Rules Gimmick is the term Universalis gives to what are essentially optional rules created on the fly to address a specific game issue or player concern. Should a player wish to develop a situation where no current rule reflects the effects or environment he is after, he has only to introduce a Rules Gimmick to cover it.

A player may wish to create special effects pertaining to the use or effects of die rolls that aren't covered in the basic rules. He may desire adding more simulative detail than the usual Complication rules include. Rules Gimmicks can be used to accomplish this. Any situation where a player wishes to say "if this roll results in X, than Y will happen" is possible within Universalis using Rules Gimmicks. Other special rules may not involve dice at all, but no matter what it is, if the rule isn't already written, players can write it on the fly as a Rules Gimmick.

Gimmicks are introduced like any other Tenet, Pay 1 Coin to define the Gimmick and if no one Challenges successfully, it's the rule. Players may make suggestions to the rule as part of the Challenge Negotiation process. This can include modifying the way the rule works, asking that it take more than 1 Coin to use, or limiting its use to just this one scene. The proposing player is free to refuse or adopt these as desired, depending on how confident he feels about winning a Challenge.

In our ongoing example of play, several diminutive characters were confronted with a dangerous spider. The pint size heroes manage to escape from the clutches of the dreaded spider, but not without injury. Albert Creates a famous hermit doctor who makes his home in an abandoned squirrel nest high in an old oak tree. Both the doctor and the nest home are Created using the normal rules for Creating Components found in Chapter 4. As the scene nears the end, Albert has the doctor present the group with a medical kit to take with them.

Albert Creates the Medical Kit with the following Traits: Med-Kit, Easily Portable, Requires no skill to use. Heals Burns, Heals Cuts and Scrapes, Heals Broken Bones, (See Chapter 4 for clarification of Traits). Ordinarily this Component would cost 6 Coins (1 for each Trait), but Albert wants the kit to only be able to be used a few times before it is gone. Universalis has no rules for limiting usage (as for doses, ammo, charges, or fuel, etc) so Albert decides a Rules Gimmick is in order. For 1 Coin he proposes that each time one of the Healing abilities is used it will remove 1 wound Trait caused by the appropriate source but is itself crossed off (wounds are simply Traits like any other that serve to hinder the injured party). Albert feels this limitation should make the Med-Kit cost only 1/3 as much as it ordinarily would, or in this case 2 Coins. No one Challenges his logic, and so Albert adds 2 more Heal Traits of each type for 2 more Coins (6 total Traits at 1/3 Coin) for a total of 4 Coins.

In another example, Christine has just finished narrating an exciting scene where the heroes are clinging to the backs of squirrels, racing to escape a forest fire. There are a couple more things she wants to do before closing the scene but she's found she's run out of Coins.

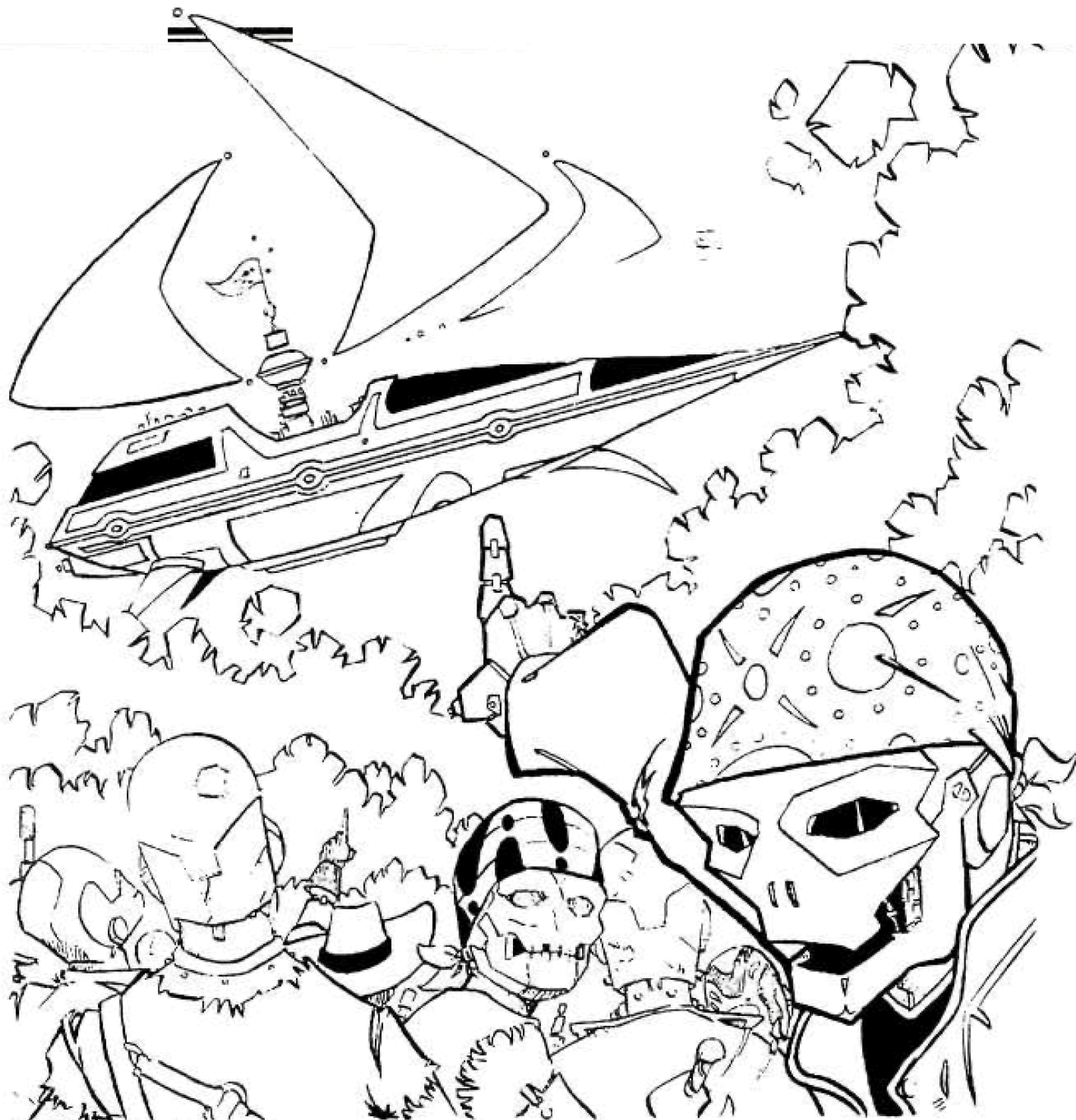
Albert: *No problem, how many do you need Christine*

Christine: *Oh, about 4 should do it I think.*

Albert: *Here you go.*

Dave: *Wait a minute, you C3n't give Coins away like that, its not in the rules*

Albert: *Ok, here's 1 Coin for a Rules Gimmick that says you can loan Coins to another player if that player agrees to pay back double next time they receive Coins...any Challenges? Christine you agree to that? Great, here are your 4 Coins, pay me back 8 when you get them.*



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CHAPTER THREE TURN ORDER & GAME FLOW

Several of the items mentioned here will be described in greater detail in later chapters. They are introduced here to give players a feel for how game play progresses so that the techniques and activities described in those chapters can be put into better context. All play occurs within scenes. One player will frame the scene which all players will have the opportunity to participate in. Players will narrate the Events and actions of the scene both during their own turns and by interrupting the turns of other players.

FRAMING SCENES

Bid for Next Scene

When one scene has ended, the player's first receive a small Refreshment of Coins (see below). They then bid for the privilege of framing the next one. Each player (including the player whose turn just ended) makes a secret bid (Coins from Wealth concealed in the hand) which is then revealed simultaneously. Losing bids are withdrawn, the winning bid remains on the table. It is possible for the same player to frame consecutive scenes if they win the bid. In the Event of a tie, the player sitting closest to the left of the player who framed the last scene wins.

If no one bids, the first player to the left of the last framing player (i.e. clockwise) is declared the winner and must then bid at least 1 Coin. If this player has no Coins, proceed to the first clockwise player who does.

Christine ends her scene with the squirrel riding heroes leaping from branch to branch across a river to safety. Each player receives a small Refreshment of Coins. They then bid to see which of them will frame the next scene. Each player secretly selects a number of Coins for their bid and holds them in their hand out over the table. Albert's hand was empty, he bid zero because he didn't have a good idea for a new scene. Bob bid 4 Coins, he has a pretty good idea he wants to try. Christine bid zero because she doesn't have many Coins, just the few she received from Refreshment (and, in fact, owes Albert 8).

Dave also bid 4. Ed bids 3.

Bob and Dave are tied with a bid of 4 Coins each. Dave is sitting immediately clockwise from Christine, so he wins the tie. Bob and Ed both return their bids to their Wealth. Dave leave his out on the table to be spent during the upcoming scene.

Winning the Bid:

The player who wins the bid gets to Frame the next scene, he is called the Framing Player. His winning bid remains in front of him on the table and can be used throughout the scene. Any Coins from this bid that are not used before the scene ends are lost to the bank.

The Framing Player must frame a scene as described in Chapter 5. He must Establish a location for the scene, Set the time, and Introduce any desired characters or props into it. He may, if he wishes, simply extend and continue the previous scene. The Framing Player cannot be Interrupted until the location and time are set and at least 1 character is Introduced.

Dave, having won the bid for turn, now sets about framing the new scene.

Dave: Ok, the scene cuts and we are now in the central throne room of the Slytheran Queen, sworn enemy of the Meadow People [This Establishes Location and costs 1 Coin. The Slytheran are a race of diminutive reptilian people who serve as the principle villain of the story. Both the Slytheran people and the Queen were Created during earlier play.]

Its shortly after the heroes escaped from the fire [Setting the time consecutive to the previous scene costs nothing].

The Queen, and 3 of her Generals are discussing plans to invade the Meadow [Introducing characters into the scene costs 1 Coin each. The Queen is an existing character and so brings with her all of her existing Traits. The 3 Generals are new. They cost 1 Coin each to Create them into the scene which gives them nothing but a basic Role Trait (currently just Generals #1, #2, and #3). The discussion of plans is actually an Event which itself costs a Coin. The defining of the first Event ends the framing part of the scene, and begins regular play. Dave continues with his turn but can now be Interrupted.]

Ending the Scene

Only the Framing Player can formally end the scene (although he can be Challenged to get him to do so). He can do this any time on his turn (except while being Interrupted) by simply declaring the scene to be over. The next scene is then bid for as above. Ending a scene costs nothing.

- The player may choose to pay 1 Coin when ending a scene to "Fade to Black"

Fading to Black prevents the next Framing Player from extending the scene or returning to it at any point in the future. This may be desirable if the player feels he has ended the scene in a suitably dramatic fashion and doesn't want another player dragging it out. Like anything else in the game, "Fade to Black" can be Challenged by any player who feels it inappropriate.

Refreshment

Refreshment occurs immediately following the end of each scene. This is true even if the new scene is a continuation of the previous one. All players receive a set number of Coins from the Bank. It is suggested that starting groups use 5 Coins as the Refreshment amount, but each group is encouraged to experiment and find an amount they find most appealing (Rules Gimmicks are a great way to handle this).

Returning to Christine's earlier scene involving the forest fire and the squirrels, we can see that after using her last 4 Coins to narrate the harrowing escape across the river, she declared the scene over. She, and all of the other players receive 5 Coins from the Bank.

PLAYER TURNS

All scenes have a formal beginning and a formal ending. In between there will be many player turns as players take their actions and Interrupt each other to narrate some element of the story. The Framing Player essentially has the first turn which begins as soon as the scene is framed. When a player is

done with their turn (because they do not want or can not afford to do anything further) they end their turn and play proceeds to the next player in clockwise order. Note: ending ones turn is not the same thing as ending the scene.

INTERRUPT PRIORITY

In the Event that multiple Interruptions happen at the same time, precedence is given to the player sitting closest to the Interrupted player's left.

This precedence even trumps players who clearly declared Interruption first. The purpose of this rule is to prevent Interruptions from becoming a speed contest to see who can Interrupt first. Regardless of who's first, the player closest to the current player's left always gets priority.

Interruption

A player can Interrupt another player's turn by spending 1 Coin to do so. Play passes to the Interrupting player and proceeds clockwise from there when he is done, unless he is also Interrupted.

- Interrupting a turn costs 1 Coin

These rules provide a good deal of structure as to whose turn it is and what they get to do on their turn. However, in practice players will find turns evolve in very free form fashion. A player may spend some time narrating a scene until a second player Interrupts. That player just adds a single Event and then ends his turn. The next player begins his turn until Interrupted by the fourth who begins narrating his own ideas, until the first player Interrupts him to start a Complication. In other words, a player's turn is not sacrosanct. While a player has the power to author and direct the story in any way he sees fit during his turn, his turn is always subject to Interruptions by other players seeking to do the same thing. In this way suspense is maintained because no player can ever really be sure what's about to happen or why.

The player being Interrupted can complete whatever immediate narration he was doing (i.e. he can't be stopped in mid sentence) but cannot continue with his rum beyond that immediate action. He is, of course, free to spend a Coin to Interrupt and take the turn right back.

The only time a player cannot be Interrupted is when they have won the bid for turn and are engaged in framing the scene. Until the location, time, and principal Components present have been announced, the Framing Player is immune to Interruption, Once those three items have been established, he is no longer immune.

Dave has continued to narrate his scene in the Queen's throne room when he is Interrupted by Ed.

Ed: *I'm Interrupting you [for iCoirt. Dave finishes his last thought, but can spend no further Coins].*

As the planning continues, a scout rushes into the throne room and dismounts to give his report [This costs 1 Coin to Create the scout as a new character with the Role Trait of "Scout". Note: the cost would have been the same if Ed were Introducing an existing scout character into the scene.

*"My Queen" he says "the fire was set as per your orders, however, I regret to inform you that we believe the Meadow spies managed to escape across the Rivet*1 [This costs 1 Coin for the Event of having the scout deliver his report to*

the Queen and 1 Coin for the Fact about the fire having been set by the Slytheran.]

There are a couple things of note here. First, during Christine's forest fire scene, she had never established the origins of the fire. Ed has interrupted this scene to establish that the fire was intentionally set by the evil Slytheran who will stop at nothing to kill the Meadow People. Second, since Ed now Controls the Scout and Dave still Controls the Queen (see the section on Control below), Ed and Dave can speak to each other in the voice of those characters using the Dialog rules (also found below).

Mini Scenes

When a player takes his turn during a scene, he may temporarily change the scene in order to describe events happening elsewhere. Ordinarily, especially if this other scene is to be an elaborate one, the player would wait for the current scene to end, and then bid enough to win the next scene and describe the events then. However, sometimes the desired scene is too small to be worth bidding many Coins on to ensure winning the bid; and sometimes the information the player desires to convey would lose its impact if not conveyed right then. When this is the case, the player may make use of a Mini Scene.

A Mini Scene must be Framed exactly as described above for any other scene, this includes immunity from Interruption during the actual Framing. The player must Establish Location, Set the Time (most often either concurrently with the main scene, or in the past as a flash back), and Introduce characters.

The Mini Scene must be ended when the player's turn ends (either by ending it himself, or through Interruption) and there is no Refreshment received for it. Unless the player paid a Coin to Fade to Black, however, the mini scene can be picked up again and continued either as another mini scene, or as a regular full scene after bidding.

Ed has ended his turn, so play continues with Albert.

Albert: *Ok, I'm declaring a Mini Scene, flashing back to the origin of the forest fire [this costs 1 Coin for the Location where the fire began, and 1 Coin for setting the scene in the past (see Chapter 5 for more details on framing into the past)]*

Present are a team of Slytheran [1 Coin for Creating the entire team as a character [see Chapter 4 for more details on creating groups as single Components]]

...and Jerek the Sparrow Rider [1 Coin for Introducing Jerek into the scene. Jerek is an existing character who has as a Trait the fact that he was "Exiled by the Meadow People" years ago. He also has as a Trait, "possession of the sparrow 'Fright'" which he rides. This allows the sparrow (which has been defined as a separate Component) to be Introduced into the Scene automatically for free (see Chapter 4 for more details on using Traits to express possession)]

Jerek observes the Slytheran start the fire and trails them as their scouts follow the Meadow People heroes as they flee. [1 Coin for the Event of Jerek observing the activity, 1 Coin for Introducing the Scouts into the scene. 1 Coin to follow them. The flight of the heroes has already been described in Christine's earlier scene]

That's the end of my turn [Albert ends his turn. He's managed to tie the roguish character Jerek to the events of the story

with this scene. Perhaps in another scene one of the players will describe Jerek flying in to give aid to the heroes, potentially earning redemption for his past, as yet unspecified, crimes]

HAVING CHARACTERS AND OTHER COMPONENTS INTERACT

Control

A player Controls any Component that he Introduces into a scene (either existing or newly Created). This Control does not last beyond the end of the scene. When a new scene is framed, the Framing Player gains Control of whichever Components he Introduces. If the new scene extends or returns to an existing previous scene, the new Framing Player gains control of any Components that are already there regardless of who Controlled them previously.

A player can narrate Events (see Chapter 5) which affect, manipulate, alter, or even destroy any Component which is under his Control. He may add Traits or remove them from a Component he Controls. He may not directly do these things to any Component which is not under his Control (including adding Traits).

There are four things a player can do with a Component that is not under his Control: Take it Over, engage it in Dialog (if its capable of such), involve it in a Complication, or (if already involved in a Complication) Draw upon one or more of its Traits to add dice to one of the Dice Pools in the Complication.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT CONTROL

When thinking about Control, it is important to distinguish between player turns and framing scenes, and between Controlling and Creating Components.

When a player frames a new scene that is a continuation of a previous scene, he automatically gains Control (at no cost) of any Components that are already present. When a player takes a new turn in an existing scene, he does not. Taking a turn is not the same thing as framing a scene. Taking a turn is merely participating in the current scene.

There are two ways of gaining Control over a Component during a scene. Either you Introduced that Component, or you took it over from another player.

Also, Creating a Component does not confer any special advantage regarding Control, If you Introduced the Component into a scene by Creating it from scratch, then you have Control over it by way of the Introduction. However, Control of subsequent scenes is determined irrespective of who initially Created the Component. Who Created the Component has no impact on the game.

Take Overs

- Control of a Component can be taken from another player by paying 1 Coin.

Control can change hands multiple times in a scene in this manner. It is possible for Control to be immediately taken back (also for a Coin); and two players intent on Controlling the same Component may spend Coins back and forth until

one player yields. Note that this is very similar to the Challenge mechanic explained below. Players are essentially Challenging one another for Control.

It does not have to be your rum to in order to Take Over a Component, nor does taking over a Component make it your turn. In fact, a common use is to Take Over a Component during another player's turn for the express purpose of setting up a Complication. In this use, a Take Over can occur after a player has declared an Event or activity but before it has been functionally carried out. By Taking Over a Component involved at that time, the player has turned the Event or activity into a Complication (see below and Chapter 6).

In our example, it is now Bob's turn (following Albert's mini scene). He decides to Take Over the character General #2 for 1 Coin. Control of this character now passes from Dave, who'd originally Introduced him, to Bob.

Dialog

Because Universalis does not involve traditional player characters, opportunities to speak in the voice of your character may not be as common. Much of the action in Universalis is described in the third person, including conversations like "Joe asks the bartender where he might find Tom Slick". This is common practice in novels where not every word a character speaks is actually said inside of quotation marks. However, there may be times when an actual dialog between characters in first person is dramatically important or just entertaining ("Yes Luke, I am your father"). This rule allows for that.

Normally, when a player attempts to interact or manipulate a character he doesn't control, the result would be a Complication. However, if the interaction involves a character he does control attempting to speak with a character he doesn't, Dialog can be the result instead. Note that if one of the players doesn't desire dialog he can force the Event into Complication and the winner can narrate the conversation third person as desired. However, if both players are willing, Dialog can be a powerful story tool. Players are free to Take Over characters and enter into Dialog in the same way as they'd Take Over Components to cause a Complication. A Player may even ask for volunteers to Take Over a Component that he's currently in Control of in order to engage in Dialog.

The rules of Dialog are simple. A player initiates a Dialog as an Event for 1 Coin and can end it at any time and continue with his ordinary turn. If the other character still has more to say, that player can, of course, Interrupt and use his turn to start up the Dialog again. Other activity (such as describing Events going on around the conversation) can be narrated by the player who's currently speaking without breaking the Dialog. Essentially, in game terms, each back and exchange of dialog is treated as a free Interruption.

After that, each player is free to speak in the voice of the character he is Controlling, in first person, responding to the conversations as he believes the character would. Much of what is said will not have to be paid for and the players are free to converse. However, significant items that are said should be purchased as Facts. Note that if a character says "the treasure can be found on Castaway Island" that the relevant Fact is not that the treasure can be found on Castaway Island, but that the character said it could be found there. The character could be mistaken or lying. See the "Other Details" section of Chapter 5 for more ideas about what might be worth paying for from a Dialog.

Note: because of the potential for powerful story development, it is suggested {although not required} that other players avoid Interrupting in the middle of a first person Dialog, unless it is particularly dramatic to do so.

Having taken over General #2, Bob decides to enter into Dialog with the Queen who is still Controlled by Dave. The scout character, also present in the scene is still Controlled by Ed.

Bob: *General Frederich von Stuben addresses the Queen [The General Trait has already been bought as a Role for this character by Dave, here Bob is assigning a proper name to him to replace the generic placeholder " #2". This costs 1 Coin.]*

Oh, by the way, we should all use Prussian sounding names for the Slytheran [This can be considered to be a Fact attached to the game world itself that "Slytheran have Prussian names". Alternatively, Bob could describe it as a Rules Gimmick, requiring the special attention of the players. Either way it costs 1 Coin and can be Challenged.]

General Frederich, being quite Prudent and a Master Planner says [These two Traits cost 1 Coin each]

"My Queen, I strongly urge you to reconsider this plan. If those Meadow Spies manage to report back, the enemy will be waiting for us. Their defenses are strong, we need more time to prepare" [The plan the General refers to was part of Dave's narrative earlier in the scene. The Meadow Spies are, of course, the heroes who've managed to escape across the river, and the strong defenses were established earlier in the story. Since nothing new is being introduced there is no additional cost. Dave, however, can reply]

Dave: *"Rubbish, the Meadow People are weakling cowards, we will overwhelm them and drive them from the forest" [again, nothing new in the dialog, but Dave decides to buy the Traits "Proud" and "Reckless Arrogance" for the Queen to describe her attitude]*

Bob: *"My Queen, if we but wait, the Meadow People will become complacent and we can strike will full surprise"*

Dave: *"If we strike now we will have full surprise! What side of the river did the spies end up on?" [Dave looks expectantly at Ed playing the Scout]*

Ed: *"The north side my Queen" [Since the exact compass direction had not been explicitly stated in the earlier scene being referred to, Ed is free to add the information as he desires. Thinking fast he remembers that the nest of the Slytheran is to the north of the Meadow, so by placing the heroes on the north side of the river, he has cleverly given them another obstacle to cross before they can get back home. He pays 1 Coin for this new Fact.]*

Dave: *"Excellent" addressing General #1, the queen says "make sure those spies don't make it back to the Meadow in time to raise the alarm" the General (being unquestioningly loyal) says "at your command my Queen" clicks his heels together smartly and leaves to carry out the order) [Here Dave has engaged in Dialog with General #1 who is also under his Control, so he is free to fill in both sides of the conversation. Dave pays 1 Coin to make the order official and 1 Coin to exit General #1 from the scene. He also pays 1 Coin to add the Trait "Unquestioningly Loyal" and another for the Trait "Dressed Smartly" to General #1]*

"General von Stuben, I'll hear no more of delays, make ready the Dread Cannons" [here Dave addresses Ed and pays 1

Coin for the Dread Cannons...an intimidating sounding weapon that as yet no one knows anything about because Dave just made them up]

Ed: *"as you command, my Queen" [Ed says clueing in to how Dave wants the queen addressed based on Dave's earlier dialog with himself]*

Complications

Players are free to define any Event that is caused by any Component under their control, and they can apply any effect (including adding, removing, or restoring TTraits) to any Component that they Control. However, if they attempt to involve a Component that they do not Control in any of these things, they've Originated a Complication. Complications are described in Chapter 6.

Complications can also be the result of another player placing an Obstacle into the scene. This can happen any time a player defines an Event (even one involving his own Components) that another player wishes to turn into a difficulty test. The interfering player can Buy Dice representing the difficulty involved which the current player must roll against in order to narrate the outcome as he chooses. Note that Buying Dice for an Obstacle, is conceptually identical to Creating a new Component to represent the Obstacle, buying Traits for it, and then having that Component (which you control) interact with a Target Component which you do not Control.

At this point Christine pays a Coin to Interrupt Bob's turn and Introduce Princess Altia into the scene for 1 Coin. The Princess is an existing character who has been shown to be a friend of the Meadow People and is secretly in love with one of the main characters. Christine wishes to have her desperately try to convince her mother to call off the aggression, so she decides to Originate a Complication between the Princess (Controlled by Christine) and the Queen (Controlled by Dave). Both players will form a die pool using applicable Traits present in the scene or buying them outright with Coins. Other players Controlling other characters can participate as desired. The dice are rolled and the winner of the roll will get to narrate the outcome as they see fit (by receiving a significant number of bonus Coins from the Bank). This is explained in detail in Chapter 6

CHALLENGES AND FINES

A Challenge is the way that players can police other players in the game. Challenges can occur for any reason. Anything a player says or does in the game can be Challenged. This can include player behaviors that are not directly game rule related but are deemed inappropriate. There are two phases to a Challenge, Negotiation and Bidding. In the Negotiation phase, if players can reach an agreeable accord, play can continue virtually uninterrupted. Only if an accord cannot be reached does the Challenge proceed to a Bidding contest.

A player normally uses challenges on another player's turn to oppose 01 suggest changes to what the other player is doing.

Negotiation

To initiate a Challenge a player merely breaks into the action and raises a dissenting voice. This can be done with a formal declaration of Challenge or be as simple as "Hey wait, that doesn't make much sense". Challenges can also be used to offer suggestions for a different approach that the Challenger

would like better, Such as "Hey that's great, but I think he'd be more inclined to punch the guy then sit there and take it like that".

If the acting player alters his play in a manner acceptable to the Challenger, then the Challenge ends and the acting player continues his turn. In this way, all players can take interest and collaborate in a scene, or can Teign in players who are straying from the Social Contract or a desired game mood, etc, in a non-disruptive manner.

In an earlier scene, the party of Meadow Heroes had been crossing a pond in a makeshift canoe made out of a dry curled leaf 3nd a couple of twigs, when Bob Originated a Complication involving a snapping turtle. Bob won the dice roll and used his bonus Coins to narrate the turtle overturning the boat and then snapping one of the characters, Turk Reigns, in half and devouring him (by spending Coins equal to Turk's Importance as explained in Chapter 6).

Ed: *Wait a minute, I like Turk, he's a pretty cool character, Besides he's a special forces operative and the team needs him to get through to the Slytheran nest*

Bob: *Its ok to have character's die, besides he has a silly name and deserves to get eaten. That's what happens when the Complication dice roll big, you should have built a bigger Dice Pool if you didn't want to lose.*

Ed: *How about this. The turtle snaps at Turk, but given his Trait of "Split Second Reflexes" he manages to jam his XR-27 Hyperblast Rifle (another Trait) in the turtle's jaws, barely escaping.*

Bob: *Ok, but the turtle snaps the rifle in half and Turk has to cross that Trait off his sheet [its removed per the rules in Chapter 6].*

Since Bob and Ed have come to an accord, the cost for the Complication Resolution is recalculated to the new outcome and game play continues normally.

Bidding

If the acting player refuses to make changes and the Challenger wishes to insist, then the Negotiation has failed and the Bidding begins. The Bidding is a process by which all players in the game get to rule on the outcome of the Challenge by spending Coins to support whichever player they desire.

Bidding begins with the Challenger who must bid at least 1 Coin. If he is not willing to do so then the Challenge immediately ends and the acting player continues his turn. The Bidding then progresses clockwise with the exception that the acting player who is being Challenged goes last. Each player in turn bids 1 or more Coins in favor of either the Challenger or the acting player, or he can pass. Alternatively, a player could bid at least 1 Coin to start an optional solution of his own, giving the other players a new option to bid for.

The bidding continues in this manner until no player wishes to add any further Coins. The Coins are counted and the side with the most support wins. Ties go to the player being Challenged.

- If the Challenger wins, the Challenged item is adjusted accordingly. The acting player continues with his turn.
- If the Challenged player wins, he does not have to change the Challenged item. That item is immune to further Challenge, and he continues his turn.

- All Coins bid from any side go to the Bank

Suppose Bob was not willing to accept Ed's suggestion.

Bob: *No way, Turk's buying it*

Ed: *Ok, then, I guess I'll have to Challenge that [1 Coin. From here it goes around the table]*

Albert: *Doesn't matter to me either way, I'm not spending anything [Bob as the Challenged party gets to go last]*

Christine: *I don't like the idea of a main character dying so early, Ed's solution is just as harrowing so I Bid 1 Coin for Ed.*

Dave: *Silly name, eh? I named Turk, I don't think its such a silly name, 1 Coin for Ed.*

Bob now sees 3 Coins arrayed against him. If he had a lot of extra Coins, he'd Sid 4 and see how far the others are wilting to go, he really wants Turk dead. But he doesn't have that many Coins and its hard to overcome 3 other players in a Challenge by himself, so he resigns...planning to try to kill Turk off again later. Ed's version of events wins out and the resolution cost is recalculated and play continues. The 3 Bid Coins are paid to the Bank.

Using Facts in Challenges

Every Trait and every Event in the game also serves as a Fact. A Fact is defined as any piece of information that a player has established in the game and has paid a Coin for. That last is important. If a Coin wasn't spent on it, its not considered to be a Fact. The term Fact can be used interchangeably with Trait or Event or Tenet in many cases as all three involve a player making a statement and paying 1 Coin for it.

In game terms the effect of a Fact is to give additional leverage during Challenges. If an established Fact is being contradicted, any Coins spent in defense of that Fact (i.e. opposing the contradiction) are doubled for purposes of determining the winner of the Challenge, thereby making the violation more expensive. This is intentionally not the same thing as saying a Fact can never be violated. Reality and stories are rife with examples of things that were believed to be true until discovered otherwise, or two different groups fanatically believing contradictory truths.

Therefore a Fact is only absolutely true until: 1) someone pays for a different Fact that contradicts it, AND 2) no one successfully Challenges that contradiction. For example: Naomi may have been established as Sebastian's daughter; but sometime later a player decides to frame a scene "revealing" that she is actually Drake's daughter. If someone Challenges this statement, the Challenge is made with the weight of the original Fact behind it, but if no one does then the new "Fact" takes effect.

Note, that the new Fact does not always replace the old Fact, although it likely does in the above example. Instead, the incident of violation can be described as an exception to the Fact which otherwise remains in place rather than being repealed entirely. For instance: take the Fact "Nothing can travel faster than the speed of light". If someone then narrates a discovery that permits faster than light travel, it doesn't necessarily eliminate the original Fact. Instead the Fact could be modified to become "Nothing can travel faster than the speed of light, except the PanGalactic Hyperform Transducer

Drive". This still leaves the original Fact largely in place to Challenge other contenders.

Determining whether a Fact is replaced or modified occurs during a Challenge as part of the conditions of the Challenge. Often, a player who is willing to accept a modification rather than insist on total replacement may find he can avoid a full Challenge all together.

Any player can attempt to bring a Fact into play during a Challenge, but if there is any doubt as to its applicability a majority vote of players can determine it. If a player doesn't agree with the decision, the outcome of the vote can itself be Challenged.

- If the Challenge involves a Fact which is being contradicted, Coins spent in defense of that Fact count double.
- A Fact that is being Challenged can not be used to defend itself.

Back during the forest fire scene, before the heroes managed to escape on the backs of squirrels, Dave took a turn where he narrated several things; one of which was Marissa Tournou (one of the characters] being caught by the flames and severely burned. Christine Challenged that narrative by pointing out that one of Marissa's Traits was "Flame Ret3rdant Jump Suit". If Dave had pressed the issue and tried to burn Marissa anyway, any Coins spent opposing him would have had their value doubled because the majority of players ruled that that suit constituted a fact protecting Marissa from fire. Ed entered into the negotiations and suggested that a fair compromise would be for Dave to pay double Coins for whatever effects he wanted the burns to have since the suit was only Flame Retardant and did give complete protection. Ultimately Dave avoided going to bidding, by instead narrating Marissa being surrounded by flames, but thanks to the suit emerged singed but unharmed.

Fines

Instead of, or following, a Challenge, a player can ask that a Fine be levied. Fines should be reserved for egregious behaviors or abuses, which are chronic, have not been solved through Negotiation, and are detracting from the enjoyment of others. The amount of the Fine will generally be fairly trivial. The point of a Fine is not to punish but to serve as a gauge of the sentiment of fellow players. A player who finds the other players united in levying a Fine has been formally requested to alter his behavior.

If a Fine is requested, both sides state their case and then all players vote thumbs up (yes a Fine should be levied) or thumbs down (no Fine is necessary),

- If the number of thumbs up is higher, the accused pays Coins equal to the thumbs up to the Bank for his undesirable behavior
- If the number of thumbs down is higher then the accuser pays Coins equal to the thumbs down to the Bank for unnecessarily asking for a Fine.
- If the thumbs are tied, there is no Fine levied against either party.

In an earlier scene Albert had described an aviary where the Meadow People keep swallows as mounts.

Dave: What is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?

Ed: Monty Python violation! I call for a fine.

4 thumbs immediately went up from the players. Dave sheepishly pays 4 Coins to the Bank.

ACTIONS YOU CAN DO ANY TIME

- Spend a Coin to Interrupt and begin your own turn
- Spend a Coin to Interrupt and Originate a Complication
- Take Over a Component in the scene for 1 Coin
- Initiate 3 Challenge. Bid Coins if necessary
- Engage in dialog for a character you Control.

ACTIONS YOU CAN DO ONLY ON YOUR TURN

1) Scene Narration Activity (Chapter 4)

- Establish or change the scene's location to a new or existing location for 1 Coin
- Introduce an existing Component into the scene for 1 Coin.
- Exit a Component from a scene for 1 Coin.
- Describe an Event for 1 Coin.

2) World Building Activity (Chapter 5)

- Create a new Component and Introduce it into the scene or not for 1 Coin.
- Add, Remove, or Restore a Trait for 1 Coin per Trait.
- Reduce or Restore Importance for 1 Coin per Level.

3) Game Tenet Activity (Chapter 2)

- Propose a new or modify an existing Social Contract issue for 1 Coin
- Propose a new or modify an existing Story Element for 1 Coin
- Propose a new or modify an existing Rules Gimmick for 1 Coin.

4) Complication Activity (Chapter 6)

- Originate a Complication with one or more Components you do not Control
- Draw on a Trait to add dice to a Complication Dice Pool
- Buy Dice (and justify the purchase) for a Complication Dice Pool for 1 Coin apiece
- Roll the dice, determine the winner, and spend or keep Bonus Coins



CHAPTER FOUR CREATING COMPONENTS

There are three broad types of Components: characters, locations, and props (people places and things). Characters are the most important Components of any story and range from great heroes and villains, to antiheroes, to supporting cast, down to extras. Locations can be thought of as stage sets. They are the backdrops for the action. Props are everything else. They can be physical objects, like a caT or sword or valuable oil painting. They can also be intangibles like religions, ideologies, organizations, etc. Basically, if it is a noun it can be Created as a Component in the game.

TRAITS

Each Component is defined by a set of Traits. A Component does not exist in the game until a Trait has been purchased for it. Traits are Facts purchased for Components, and as such are the basic building blocks of the game world. Anything that is notable or significant about a Component can be defined as a Trait. "Strong", "Likes the Ladies", "Devout Buddhist" can all be Traits for a character. Likewise a river can be "Deep" and "Cold", a sword "Perfectly Balanced", a baT could be "the place where everybody knows your name". Traits can be virtually any word or phrase that describe a feature or characteristic of the Component, or which provides information about the Component that would be useful in the game.

Traits serve 3 purposes in Universalis.

- 1) First they provide all players with a gauge of what the Component is like and how it should be used in the story.
- 2) Second they provide the Component with Importance. Importance is explained below but basically the more Coins that have been spent to buy Traits for a Component, the more Important the Component is to the story.
- 3) Third they can be Drawn upon to provide dice to roll in Complications.
 - The first Trait that is purchased for any Component should be its role.
 - Adding 1 Trait to a Component costs 1 Coin
 - A Component's Importance equals its number of Traits

Later in the game, while the heroes are attempting to make their way back to the Meadow, Albert stages a Mini Scene where he cuts to a scene of the Slytheran army advancing slowly but inexorably towards the Meadow. As part of the Mini Scene, Albert decides to flesh out the dreaded Doom Cannons. Dave had Created the Doom Cannons for 1 Coin, which in game terms bought a Role for the Component of "Doom Cannons".

BUYING THE SAME TRAIT MULTIPLE TIMES

A player can buy the same trait multiple times for a Component. This can be done to indicate a particular advantage in that trait. This can be recorded with a simple x2, or x3 after the Trait name.

A multiple Trait allows multiple dice to be drawn during Complications. During narration, additional consideration should be given to the magnitude of the added advantage.

Also, the additional copies of the Trait provide additional Importance. If a player deemed it important enough to designate a character as being "very strong" by way of having a Trait of "Strong x2", as opposed to simply defining the character as "Strong" it is presumed that this additional strength will carry some impact for the story.

If a player's primary goal is to get additional dice for use in a certain type of Complication, often times using Traits creatively can be more effective. Instead of buying "Sword Master x3", consider buying "Sword Master", "Incredible Reflexes" and "Combat Awareness" as three distinct Traits. All three are likely to be legitimate Traits to Draw upon in a sword fight, but each has additional uses as well.

If, however, the characters concept truly demands an extraordinary caliber of sword mastery, the first option is perfectly acceptable.

Albert: Doom Cannons are armored "Chameleon Lizards", They have "Thick Scaled Hides", which have been enhanced with "Armor Plating". Being Chameleons their "Eyes can Swivel" in any direction. Since their normal means of feeding is to strike at range with their tongue with pin point accuracy, I'm giving them the Trait of "Pin Point Accuracy". But here's the thing. They've been surgically altered. Instead of tongues they have a large barreled assault laser cannon housed in their mouths ("Assault Laser Cannon for a Tongue" which he buys at x3 representing the power of the cannon). The Chameleons are controlled with a "Chip Embedded in their Brain". When they go to strike a target with their tongues, it fires the laser instead.

[Albert pays 9 Coins for the above indicated Traits. Combined with the already purchased Role of Doom Cannon, the Component has an Importance of 10]

Drawing upon Traits

Complications are described in Chapter 6, but essentially, the more dice a player rolls in a Complication the better. His dice can come from 1 of 2 sources, he can either pay for them out of his own Wealth, or he can Draw upon the Traits of Components that are participating in the Complication and which would be useful in that situation. Each applicable Trait allows 1 die to be added, or subtracted from an appropriate Dice Pool.

It is likely, that when the battle is engaged against these Doom Cannons that some player will narrate Meadow Troopers attempting to destroy them. Since it is likely that the Doom Cannon will be controlled by a different player than the player controlling the Troopers, a Complication will result. In any Complication where the Targeted Doom Cannons are attempting to avoid being destroyed they have 2 relevant Traits "Thick Hides", and "Armor Plating" which can be Drawn upon to provide 2 dice to their Dice Pool in their defense. Unless of course, the player Controlling the crafty troopers can come up with a means of damaging the lizards in which armor plating wouldn't help them (like drowning perhaps).

Role

A Role is a standard Trait that every Component must have. It is the most basic form of defining "what the Component is

and how it should be used". A Role is sufficient to bring the Component into existence.

Role's can be just about anything. For a character they could be a profession like "accountant", or "sheriff", or "knight", or "scientist". They could have a more story related purpose like "bully", or "cynic", or "troublemaker". They could have a role based on their relationship to another Component like "Jeb's son", or "Dirk's sidekick". For a location, the role is usually an actual place name or something descriptive about the place "Dry Gulch", "Abandoned Warehouse", "Joe's House", "Red's Bar & Grill", or "Spooky old Mansion". For a prop the role typically defines what the prop is: a "sword" or "car" or "gun" or "religion".

Often times the Role involves multiple related Traits which need to be purchased separately. For instance, the "Spooky old Mansion" is "Spooky", "old" and a "Mansion" costing 3 Coins. The "Accountant" might be an "Accountant", "at Myrex Corp" costing 2 Coins. The "car" might be a "Souped-up", "Cherry Red", "Dodge Charger" costing 3 Coins.

A Role conveys a basic set of characteristics that make the Component identifiable. For instance, a horse Created by paying 1 Coin for the Trait "Horse" will have four legs, hooves, eat hay and someone looking at it would say "hey, that's a horse". However, this horse has no particular ability, strength or speed. What this means is that while the horse exists in the world and can be included in the story and described as doing whatever horses do, it is little more than scenery at this point.

How Roles are used in the game and how broadly they can be interpreted is often something best specified with a Tenet. For example, the above "horse" is a horse. But, if a player tried to narrate a character riding it would another player be justified in pointing out "hey no one said that horse has been broken."? Is it a riding horse, a war horse, a wild horse, a work horse, a race horse? Play groups should decide for themselves how detailed they want to require Roles to be, or even if they would consider "War Horse" to be two separate Traits altogether ("Horse", and "Trained for Battle"). Since it is beyond the scope of any set of rules to account for a nearly infinite array of possible permutations, Universalis specifically leaves these decisions up to individual play group preference, best defined as a game Tenet, either at the beginning of the game, or when such an issue first arises.

A Component with nothing but a Role defined is of limited Importance. A Role can be Drawn upon to provide 1 die during Complications in which that Role would be useful for 1 die per Trait that applies if the Role consists of multiple Traits). In this example if the Complication involved the need to pull a wagon, 1 die can be drawn From the Role Trait "Work Horse" as this is something that work horses are certainly useful for (of course, some groups may want to specify the difference between a pack horse, a cart horse, or a plow horse and may not be satisfied with "Work Horse" as being specific enough. Other Groups might decide that "Work" "Horse" is actually 2 Traits. If they're paid for separately they can each be Drawn on for dice.)

Proper Name

The actual name of a Component is bought like any other Trait. Buying a proper name for a Component serves 3 purposes. First, it helps identify that Component as something special to be paid attention to. It is a staple of movies and

literature that "named characters" are more important than "unnamed extras". Second, because it is an additional Trait it does, in fact, increase the Component's Importance in game terms as well (see below for more about Importance). Third, for a character only, a proper name Trait can be Drawn upon to provide 1 die for any Complication of any type involving that character. Essentially, if the character is important enough to name, he should be guaranteed impact in a scene. This does not apply to locations and props, simply because the relationship between in game name and meta-game importance doesn't have a parallel in movies and literature. The heirloom gold watch so important to a character is simply "Grandfather's watch" it isn't itself given a proper name. For props that would legitimately have a proper name, such as "Excalibur", the name exists as a Trait that gives additional Importance, but is not normally something that can be drawn upon. Of course, for a prop (like Excalibur) that is itself an item of extraordinary stature, a Rules Gimmick can certainly be used to give the item proper name status.

Thus, in a barroom brawl, the character identified as simply the "accountant" does not provide any dice because that role does not convey any particular fighting ability. However, "John Oswald", the "accountant" does provide 1 die by virtue of being a named character, John's pocket calculator which he's named Doris, on the other hand, does not, because Doris is a prop and not a character, and the proper name rule doesn't apply.

In the scene in the throne room, Bob took Control over General #2 and gave him the proper name of Frederick von Stuben. As a named character in the game, Frederick is now able to contribute 1 die to any Complication he's involved with (Drawn from his name) just for being important enough to have been given a proper name in the story.

Traits Defining Numbers or Groups:

It is entirely possible for a Component to represent more than one item or person. This can be accomplished simply by adding a Group Trait to the Component indicating a specific or general number of members, as in "Three" "Gangsters", or "Squad" of "Riflemen". The most common format, as in these examples, is to simply append The Group Trait to the Component Role.

It is entirely possible (and common) to purchase the Group Trait multiple times to represent increasingly larger groups. This may be a one to one ratio of additional members to additional Traits but it doesn't need to be. The additional Group Traits serve three functions:

- 1) To define a relative size of the group for purposes of aiding in player narration.
- 2) To draw additional dice from during a Complication in any situation where added numbers would be an advantage
- 3) To provide additional Importance to the Component making it more difficult to eliminate because of numbers.

If the Component is a fairly significant one, and each member is of sufficient stature then each Group Trait could well represent a single member (if the Components are of very high significance, of course, each member could simply be entirely bought and paid for as a separate Component altogether). If, however, the Component is meant to be simply a throwaway opponent for the characters (like a squad of enemy

troopers) or represents very large numbers (like an army battalion, or a wing of fighter planes) than the Group Trait can be left as an abstraction of the actual numbers involved. Players can use the Challenge mechanic if they feel a given Group Trait doesn't reflect the numbers sufficiently.

This section speaks to using Traits to define a specific group. The section on Master and Sub Components below speaks to defining entire classes and categories with a single Component.

For example, after defining the Doom Cannons, Albert decides that he doesn't know how many such war machines are in the Slytheran Army, but he decides that his cut away Mini Scene shows more than one for added dread. So he adds the Trait "Lance" to represent the unit size and then adds x2 to represent that a Lance of Cannon consists of 3 members (the original plus 2 more from the Lance x2 trait). This costs an additional 2 Coins and brings the Importance of the Component to 12. Obviously, by spending so many Coins, Albert is saying that destroying these cannon should be a cornerstone of the scene (or scenes) depicting the battle between the Meadow People and the Slytheran.

Traits Defining Relationships:

Traits can define relationships between Components. For instance: Super Villain Archon can have a Trait "Hates the Vindicator". Princess Ridela can have a Trait "Thinks Sir Ulaf is a crude boor". Lancelot can have the Traits "Loves Guenevere", and "Loyal to Arthur". These Traits not only provide additional Importance to the character (if the character is worth defining relationships for, he must have some importance to the story), but also can be used to Draw on for dice in a Complication connected to that relationship. For instance, if Ulaf attempts to seduce Princess Ridela, the above Trait would likely be drawn upon by the player Controlling the princess to resist the attempt. If Guenevere was in danger, Lancelot might Draw upon his love Trait to gain an additional die to try and save her.

Note that it is possible for a single Trait, which involves defining a relationship between two or more Components, to apply to all related Components for that same single Coin. For example: a player buys a Trait for Jill of "Jack's sister". This leads to the corollary Trait for Jack of "Jill's brother" which does not cost extra to record,

In the throne room dialog scene, General von Stuben mentioned the strong defenses of the Meadow People. He knew of them because of the treacherous spy, Lady Alasandre; a self styled Meadow aristocrat who has betrayed her people's secrets for promises of a position of power in the occupation government. As an added complication, Bob gave the lady a Trait of "Obsessive Lust for Turk Reigns" (all part of his apparent quest to see Turk suffer). This Trait does not automatically spawn a corollary Trait in Turk, but can be used to provide dice in all sorts of interesting ways.

Traits Defining Possession

The simplest way to define a possession is to simply list it as a Trait of the owning Component. This is especially true of minor utilitarian items. For example one of the Traits of a cowboy might be "Pair of Pearl Handled Revolvers" which could be drawn upon to provide dice in a Complication any time guns are used, or even in a social scene where the pearl handles might have some influence. Another character might

have his "Pet Dog Fido" as a Trait, or "Sharp Pressed Suits", or "Carries lots of Cash", etc.

Sometimes, however, the item is important enough to the story to be worth Creating as a separate Component of its own (like say King Arthur's sword, Excalibur). In such a case, the two Components can be Created separately and a Trait added which defines 1 of them as being in the possession of the another. This ownership relationship applies to both Components; the first owns the second, the second is owned by the first. There are no limits as to how many Components may be owned by a single owner. There are several game mechanic effects that come as a result of this Trait.

- 1) If the owning Component is Introduced into a scene, the owned Component is automatically Introduced as well.
- 2) In most cases a Coin can be spent by a player to separate the owned Component from its owner (if it is something which can be dropped or forgotten, etc). This is akin to paying to remove Traits described below. It does, like all uses of Coins, have to be justified. It is not enough to simply spend the Coin and declare them separated. Depending on Control this may require a Complication to accomplish. Otherwise the owned item can be eliminated from play by overcoming its own Importance (see below).
- 3) The player who is Controlling the first Component also Controls the second Component. If a player Takes Over the first Component he also automatically gains control of the second. If the second component is separated from its owner than a player can pay 1 Coin to Take Over that Component individually.
- 4) The first Component's Importance is increased by the Importance of the second Component for as long as the second Component is in his Possession. If the Components are separated, they lose this advantage. In other words if a 5 Importance character owns a 3 Importance item, the character is treated as if he has an Importance of 8 unless he is separated from the item.

The Possession rule was specifically designed for "signature" possessions, like a mad scientist's gizmo, a Jedi's light saber, Trior's hammer, Arthur and Excalibur and other similar relationships. However, with a little judicious application, the Possession Trait can become a real story driver. A wealthy tycoon's assets can be defined as possession. Bringing the tycoon down can involve one by one separating him from those assets. Similarly a major villain's body guards can be possessions. Their abilities add to their master's Importance, protecting him from defeat, until one by one, they themselves are defeated.

Important Note: It is not necessary for all of a character's belongings to be defined as Possessions using these rules. In fact, most often they won't be. Treat most ordinary props and items as simple Traits as described in the first paragraph. Only if the item is some how extraordinary should it be Created as a separate Component and treated in this manner.

During the scene with the snapping turtle described in the Challenges section, it was mentioned that the character Turk Reigns possesses an XR-27 Hyperblast Rifle as a Trait. This Trait was crossed off Turk's record sheet when the weapon was snapped in half by the hungry turtle allowing Turk to escape death. This is an example of the simple type of possession.

As another example, Kevin McCrae has been created as a member of the group. He is the team technician and engineer. He also has as a pet skylar named Fritz. Ed, who Created Kevin as a character, also Created skylars as small winged lizard like creatures about the size of a dragonfly which eat fruit. As a bit of color (which didn't cost him anything except the 1 Coin for the name) Ed described how Kevin gave his pet a Slytheran name (remember Slytherans have been defined as having Prussian names] as a joke since it's a reptile, Ed could have defined Fritz simply as a Trait for Kevin, but he became so enamored of the little guy that he Created him as a separate Component complete with Traits like "Skyiar Pet" (Role), "Devoted to Kevin", and "Highly Trained", with an "Embedded Control Chip" and of course the name "Fritz" Throughout play, the players agree that Fritz is enough of a character to benefit from the proper name rules. Kevin was then given the Possession Trait "Owns Fritz" for 1 Coin which automatically adds "Owned by Kevin" to Fritz for that same Coin.

Assigning Facts to a Scene or to the Game World itself

It is often convenient to think of the game world itself and each individual scene as actual Components, Players can purchase Facts explicitly for a scene or the World itself just as purchasing Traits for a Component. As mentioned in the opening chapter, the Events that take place within a scene as described in Chapter 5, are Facts bought for that scene, and the Tenets described in Chapter 2, are Facts bought for the game itself. These can be thought of just like the purchasing of Traits for Components described above.

For example: Facts related to the weather or time of day might be bought for a scene. The laws of how magic works or what level of technology is available in the game might be bought as a Tenet for the world itself (or at least the part of it where play takes place).

Staying with the Tenet Albert proposed about playing in a Science Fiction game and the Tenet Dave proposed about the use of animals, Ed introduces a Fact for the Game World.

Ed: Both the Meadow People and the Slytheran use computer chips embedded in the brain to control their animals and make them do their bidding. [This costs 1 Coin for the Fact, Some play groups may prefer to treat this as two separate Facts, one for the Meadow People and one for the Slytheran and charge 2 Coins]

MASTER AND SUB COMPONENTS

Master and Sub Components are an advanced way to leverage Component Creation in order to populate an entire world without breaking the bank.

One Component is defined the Master Component which defines the features held in common by an entire class or category. It costs 1 Coin for a Trait which designates a Component as a Master Component. A Master Component cannot have a proper name and should only possess Traits that can be considered typical of that entire class. It essentially serves as a template for the Sub Components that are based on it. Master Components cannot be introduced into scenes or manipulated as distinct individuals.

A Sub Component is Created merely by buying a Trait for 1 Coin which defines the Component as being a member of the

class defined by the Master Component. There is no limit to the number of Sub Components that can be tied to a Master, or the number of Master Components that a single Component can be the Sub of (save plausibility). Note that throughout these rules all rules for Components apply to Sub Components, except as noted here. There are several game mechanics effects that accompany this relationship.

- 1) The Sub Component is assumed to have all of the Traits of the Master Component without them having to be paid for individually, for purposes of narrating the story appropriately. These Traits can be Drawn upon during Complications. Multiple Sub Components can Draw on the same Master Component Trait during the same Complication, just as if each had that Trait themselves separately.
- 2) The Importance of the Sub Component is not increased by the Traits of the Master Component. Even though the Sub Components can use these Traits, they are not counted towards the Sub Component's own Importance. Thus, even though the Master Component "Super Ninja Warrior" itself has many Traits, allowing its individual Sub Components to Draw on many dice during Complications, a Sub Component whose only Trait is "Super Ninja Warrior #12" still has an Importance of only 1 and can be eliminated with a single Coin.
- 3) Sub Components can have their own individual Traits in addition to being members of the Master Component Class. These Traits are not shared by other Sub Components or the Master, and do count towards that Sub Component's Importance normally.
- 4) It is possible for the Sub Component to have a Trait that effectively negates a Trait provided by the Master Component. Such a Trait prevents the Sub Component from Drawing on that Trait of the Master Component, but does add to the Sub Components Importance. It is, after all, increasing that Sub Component's individuality and thus Importance to the story. For instance: one of many Traits ascribed to the Master Component "Elf is "At home in the woods". A particular character who has the Trait "Elf (and is hence a Sub Component of the Elf Class), also has the Trait "Not at Home in the Woods". This Trait increases the Importance of the character while at the same time preventing a player from using the "at home" Trait.
- 5) A Component may be a Sub Component of more than one class. For instance, a character may have the Trait "Keltonese" as a Sub Component and have all of the racial and ethnic characteristics of someone from Kelton. In addition they may have "Imperial Guardsman", and "Worships Ammon" as Sub Components and have all of the Traits granted by training as a member of the Imperial Guard and all of the Traits common to practicing Ammonites.
- 6) The Master Component's own Importance is increased by the Importance of all of its Sub Component members. Thus, the only way to wipe out all of the elves from the world, would be to wipe out all of the individual elf characters in the story, and then Eliminate the Master Component itself.

In our sample game, Bob Created Slytheran Shock Troopers as a Master Component. He gave them the following Traits: "Slytheran Shock Troopers" (3s a Role), "Acute viper-like

sensing pits", "Venomous Fangs", "Fierce Fighters", "Single Mindedly Aggressive" and "Blindly Loyal". He equipped them with a "High Power Assault Rifle", and "Body Armor". This cost 9 Coins including the one designating this as a "Master Component".

From now on individual Shock Troopers can be Introduced into the scene for a single Coin (to purchase the Sub Component Trait "Slytheran Shock Trooper". Each trooper will have access to all of the above Traits of the Master Component, but itself will have only an Importance of 1 (allowing our heroes to kill them by dozens as required). Additionally, using the group rules a Component can be Created called "Slytheran Shock Troops", "Shock Squad x3". This would cost 4 Coins and have and Importance of 4, It would be a Sub Component of the Slytheran Shock Troops and represent an entire squad of such troops in a single Component.

INJURING, DAMAGING, AND ELIMINATING COMPONENTS

Importance

Importance is a measure of how valuable a particular Component is to the story. It is assumed that the more time and effort (and Coins) that have been spent describing a Component, the more valuable it is, and thus the more difficult it should be to remove from the story. A Component that has been Created with few Traits beyond a role (like "Thug #3) is assumed to not be very important to the story and thus can be removed easily. Or to put it another way, while the army of thugs may, in fact, be an important element in the story, no one thug has any value on his own...unless that thug is individualized further by the addition of additional traits.

Importance is a number that is simply equal to the number of Traits the Component has (by extension the number of Coins that have been spent on it). If the Component has a Possession, its Importance is increased by the Importance of the Possession. If the Component is a Master Component, its Importance is increased by the Importance of all of its Sub Components (assuming those Possessions and Sub Components have not themselves been Eliminated).

- Importance equals 1 for every Trait the Component has, plus the Importance of any Possessions, plus the Importance of any Sub Components.

Marissa Tournou is one of the main characters in this game. She was Created by Christine and throughout the game has accumulated the following Traits: "Marissa Tournou" (proper name), "Trained Killer x2" (Role, which she's particularly good at), "Physically Rugged", "Fiercely Determined", "Command Ability", "Impatient", "Hard Cold-Demeanor" and equipped with "Flame Retardant Jump Suit", "IR Goggles", and "Type VII Laser, Pistol". All told this is a total of 11 Traits which cost 11 Coins and provides Marissa with an Importance of 11. Later in the story its also revealed that she had a "Torrid affair with Jerek" and "feels betrayed by Jerek" which ups her Importance to 13.

Eliminating a Component

A Component can be Eliminated for many reasons: a character may be killed, a location or prop can be destroyed, etc. In order to do this a player must spend a number of Coins equal to the Component's Importance. For instance: "Jack", the

"Alcoholic", "Bartender" has 3 Traits and thus an Importance of 3. In a gangland attack on the bar, a player wants poor Jack to get whacked. 3 Coins will do the job. Kang the Merciless, Imperial overlord of the Dark Empire has a couple of dozen Traits and many Possessions. It will take far more Coins to Eliminate Kang.

The game mechanic effect of Eliminating a Component is to render the Component unavailable to be Introduced into scenes chronologically set in the future. The Component could still be introduced into scenes set in the past (before it was Eliminated). However, while additional Traits may be bought for the Component in those prior scenes, they will not (simply by increasing the Component's Importance) over ride the fact that the Component has been Eliminated. In other words, if, in a subsequent scene, a player flashes back to Jack the Bartender and adds the Traits of "College Graduate", and "has a young son", Jack's Importance has been increased to 5. That does not change the fact that Jack was killed during the hit even though the player spent only 3 Coins instead of 5 to do it. In stories, it is often the case that a character becomes more important after he is dead.

What Elimination actually represents is left to the player to decide. Like any expenditure of Coins, Coins spent to overcome Importance must be justified. Elimination often represents the death of a character or destruction of a location or prop. However, it does not have to mean this. It could mean anything that renders the Component out of play for the rest of the story. In the case of particularly minor Components, the cause of their Impairment might be left unstated. The faceless mook is simply put down. No one really cares if he lives or dies. The empty gun is merely cast aside never to be seen again in the story. The stolen car is abandoned, the key witness disappears overseas, a character takes an extended vacation. Whatever the reason is, he is now effectively out of the rest of the story.

Unless ... (of course, there is an "unless"). Certain genres practically require the return of a villain long thought defeated, or the return of a loved one who wasn't dead after all - they just had amnesia for 10 years. The broken sword can be forged anew, and the One Ring lost for generations can be rediscovered. To "resurrect" a Component in this way, a player must merely spend a number of Coins equal to its current Importance (which may have been increased since it was first Eliminated). If this is done in a plausible enough manner to avoid (or overcome) Challenge from other players, than that Component can be welcomed back to the land of the living. In fact, Eliminating a Component in this manner may be used as a way of preventing a character's death. If a player pays Coins equal to the Importance of the Arch Villain, he could narrate how the villain manages to escape into another dimension, thereby preventing another player from paying that many Coins to narrate his capture and execution. Either way the villain is out of the story and no longer plaguing mankind...for now.

While attempting to make it back to the Meadow, the heroes have several run-ins with the Slytheran forces the Queen had dispatched to stop them. One of those confrontations is handled as a Complication Originated by Dave using the 4 point Slytheran Shock Trooper Squad described above.

Following the resolution of the encounter, the players Controlling the heroes use the Bonus Coins earned in the Complication to narrate the defeat of the enemy squad. They can describe blasts of laser fire, fierce hand to hand combat, and

feats of derring-do as desired. The Troopers can be killed, driven off, taken prisoner, or any other outcome the players desire that essentially equates to their defeat as a "Shock Trooper Squad". Since the squad has an Importance of 4, it requires 4 Bonus Coins to accomplish this. Using 4 Coins in this manner also entitles the Target players, up to 4 Facts related to the Elimination of the Squad, and as much colorful description as desired (within reason, as defined by the other players willingness to Challenge).

Damaging Traits

Components can be damaged or injured without having to first overcome their Importance, but this does require Coins. First, the Event causing the injury must be paid for, then the effects of the injury or damage can be purchased. Damage and Injury can be handled in one of three ways.

- 1) Existing Traits can be Removed for 1 Coin each. If the character has ".44 magnum" as a Trait, it is a simple matter to cross that Trait off for 1 Coin. Instant disarmament. If the character has "excellent physical condition" as a Trait, it is a simple matter to cross that Trait off as a result of suffering a debilitating illness.
- 2) Second, new Traits can be purchased which reflect the nature of the damage. These Traits can then be Drawn on just like any other, albeit usually in a way detrimental to the Component suffering from them. A character may suffer from a "Broken Leg", a car from a "Blown Tire", a location from "Broken Windows", and "Smashed Furniture".
- 3) Note that adding Traits in this manner actually increases a Component's Importance even though they represent injury. There are two principles at work here. First, the author of a story usually only takes the time to describe the injuries of characters who are important, thus a character's Importance in the game is increased when players do this. Second, in many stories the hero takes beating after beating but actually becomes more and more difficult to kill. In Universalis this is no surprise, as his Importance is going up every time he gets a black eye.
- 4) If the player is actually Eliminating a Component, and is merely using the expenditure of the required Coins to graphically describe how this is accomplished, then the Coins are not buying additional injury Traits as in #2 above, they are just flavorful narration. For instance, a villain's henchman has an Importance of 5. A player is having the hero defeat and kill this henchman and has spent 5 Coins to do so. He describes a hard kick to the leg blowing out the knee, a twist to the arm dislocating the shoulder, and Finally a chop to the throat crushing the larynx. These three injuries are not added as Traits to the henchman, they are just part of how the henchman was killed. If the henchman was not killed, than they would be, and the henchman would now have an Importance of 8.

In the snapping turtle scene we saw how Turk Reigns' "X-27 Hyperblast Rifle" trait was Removed from the character record as a consequence of escaping with his life.

In the above scene with the Shock Squad, lets go back and assume the heroes only earned (or desired to spend) 3 Coins from the Complication. 3 Coins would not be enough to Eliminate the squad as a Component. Instead, the players could use the 3 Coins to Eliminate the "Shock Squad x3" Trait. This

is the Group Trait that defines the squad as consisting of more than one member. By reducing this Trait the players can narrate how its numbers are dwindling. By Eliminating all 3 occurrences of the Trait, the players Controlling the Targeted heroes have essentially killed all but 1 member of the squad. With the Complication over, it would be back to the pl3yer whose turn it is to narrate what happens to that final member using his own Coins.

During Complications, both the winning and losing side will receive Bonus Coins. Assuming that the heroes were the winning side in the Complication with the Shock Squad, the player Controlling the Squad [Dave, the Originator of the Complication] would also have Bonus Coins to spend. In our example we'll assume he has 2 Bonus Coins he wishes to spend to give Marissa an injury from the battle. He describes how in the fire fight her leg was hit by blaster fire and now she has a "Severe Blaster Injury to Leg x2" Trait (he essentially bought the same wound twice to demonstrate its severity). This injury serves to increase Marissa's Importance by 2 from 13 to 15 (until the wound is healed), but clearly her ability to walk has been compromised. Will the injury delay the heroes return to the Meadow?

The effect of this injury in games terms is three fold: First, players should take the injury into account when narrating Marissa's activities, possibly paying extra Coins to describe how she overcomes the handicap. Second, the injuries serve as a Fact in any Challenge against a player who's not taking the injury into account to another player's satisfaction. Third, in any Complication involving physical activity those injury Traits may be Drawn upon to reduce Marissa's dice or add dice to 3n opponent to represent their impact on her ability.

Restoring Traits: Healing, Repair, or Recovery

Healing or repair of such damage and injury is simply handled by either paying to remove a damage or injury Trait which has been purchased (the "Broken Leg" heals), or paying to restore a Trait that had previously been removed (the character recovers from the illness and gets his "excellent physical condition" back). in the case of a lost item, a Coin can be spent to have the item found, returning the Trait to the Character sheet.

When Turk gets back to the Meadow, he almost certainly will requisition a new firearm from supply. The player Controlling Turk at the time can pay 1 Coin for the action and Restore the X-27 Hyperblast Rifle to the character record. Alternatively, the player may decide that Turk takes the opportunity to upgrade to the new X-30 model with the under barrel grenade launcher, paying 2 Coins, one for the rifle and one for the launcher. Essentially, buying 2 new Traits instead of Restoring the old one.

Remembering the Med Kit the party had picked up (see the example in the Rules Gimmicks section), Christine sets to work tending Marissa's injury. She is unable to cross off both wound Traits (could Dave have been aware of that when he chose to give her two...). Unfortunately there is only 1 "Heals Burns" Trait left in the Med Kit. Using the Rules Gimmick proposed by Albert, she crosses off the last "Heals Burns" Trait and then crosses off one of the "Blaster Injury ..." and so Marissa is still suffering from a leg injury, although a less severe one. Her Importance drops down to 14 as a result.

Since the injury may still impact the groups' ability to warn the Meadow in time, Christine proposes a Rules Gimmick for 1 Coin. Justified by Marissa's Trait of "Fiercely Determined" Christine proposes that Marissa be able to completely ignore (as if she didn't have the Trait at all) the injury to her leg until she returns to the Meadow to get medical attention. In return (to make the Gimmick less likely to be Challenged, and because she thinks it would be cool) she proposes that due to

the added strain of pushing herself too hard and not caring for the injury properly, Marissa will acquire a "Slight Limp in Right Leg" Trait after the injury is healed. That is, instead of removing the temporary injury Trait entirely, it will be replaced with a permanent Trait, a war injury to be proud of. The rest of the player's agree to this unusual way of dealing with an injury Trait and so it becomes accepted as a rule.

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Kevin McCrae and his pet Skyiar "Fritz"

CHAPTER FIVE NARRATING THE SCENE

All of the action that takes place in the game occurs within scenes. Chapter 3 described how players frame these scenes and this chapter serves to elaborate on the concepts raised there. Except as noted in Chapter 3, all of the following applies to both scenes and mini scenes.

FRAMING THE SCENE

The Framing Player has the responsibility of framing the next scene of the story or extending the previous scene. A scene may be of any duration, from a brief cut to action happening elsewhere; to an epic climax that is extended over multiple bids for scene. All scene framing includes the following 3 items: Establish the Location, Set the Time, and Introduce the Components.

All scenes start as collections of Components that are active in the scene (i.e. a location, characters at that location, and any props that are present). The act of adding a Component to a Scene is called "Introducing" that Component. This costs 1 Coin. If the Component already exists (i.e. has been Created previously) then the 1 Coin pays for its presence in the scene. If the Component has not yet been Created, then it is Created now with that Coin (which buys its Role as described in Chapter 4). Only Components that have been Introduced in this way are present in the scene. Components that have been eliminated through the Importance rules cannot be Introduced in a scene chronologically after the one in which they were eliminated.

The player who Introduced the Component, Controls it initially. This Control can change during the scene through Take Overs. The Controlling player (and only the Controlling player) can add, remove, or restore Traits to the Component, unless this is done as the result of a Complication. Control of a Component in one scene has no bearing on who controls that component in a subsequent scene.

The Framing Player cannot be Interrupted while he is framing the scene. Framing refers to the 3 required activities of: Establishing Location, Setting Time, and Introducing Components.

When the first Event is narrated, the framing portion of the scene is considered over. Components can be Introduced throughout a scene, not just during framing. The Framing Player may spend any of the Coins he bid to win the scene during any point in the scene not just during framing. Any of the bid Coins that are not spent before the scene ends are lost to the Bank.

Establish Location

- Establishing a location costs 1 Coin to establish or change

All scenes require a location to occur in. All locations are a type of Component which are Created by the players as described in the last chapter.

Locations can be changed during a scene by a player merely establishing a new location as above on their turn. Changing locations is not the same thing as starting a new scene. It is appropriate only when a single scene spans across multiple locations (such as with a chase scene). Characters and Components should remain fairly constant across locations. It is assumed that all Components travel to the new location at no

additional cost. Any that do not should be paid to exit [see below). Only Traits from the current location are available to be Drawn upon. If the change of location also involves a substantial change in cast, then this is best handled by ending the current scene and beginning a new one.

CUTTING BACK TO THE SAME SCENE

If a Framing Player wishes to return to a previous scene to continue the action of that scene he needs only pay the 1 Coin necessary to Establish the location. Another Coin may be necessary to Set the Time if the scene is in the past or future (as opposed to running concurrently with more recent scenes).

Components that have already been established as being in that location at that time do not have to be reintroduced, in fact, in this situation, it would require Coins to Exit a Component from a scene where it otherwise should be.

It is important to mention that in this way scenes can be paused while a new scene cuts to action elsewhere. Then a subsequent scene can simply pay to cut back and pick the action of the first scene back up from where it was left off with all prior components included. Note that if this technique is used often, players would be well served to keep careful record of scenes and the Components that were present.

Set the Time

- Setting the time costs 1 Coin to set in the past, 1 Coin per player to set in the future

Unless otherwise stated, each scene occurs either immediately subsequent to the previous one or simultaneously with it (possible if framed at a different location). This is the default and costs nothing. Establishing a time other than these must be paid for.

There are two ways to frame into the past. First is to frame into the distant past to deal with Events that occurred before the current game began. These are the easiest past frames to accomplish as the player must only ensure he does not establish any Facts which violate what is already known to be Fact (unless he desires to do so and is risking Challenge). The second is to frame the scene back to an earlier point in the game itself. This is a much more advanced technique. If players intend to use it with any frequency they should create a timeline of scenes and maintain a record of which Components were present in order to preserve continuity.

Framing a scene into the future, however, will limit the Events of other scenes that occur before it chronologically but have yet to be framed. In order to frame a scene into the future the player must pay 1 Coin to each other player in the game as compensation for limiting their future control in this way,

During most scenes, time progresses at a normal rate into the future. The time of the scene is not normally changed in mid scene the way a location can be changed. Usually if game time is to be moved substantially forward or is to flash back to the past, a whole new scene or mini scene is framed and an appropriate time set. However, since it is not possible to write rules to cover every possible scene players could wish to

invent, this rule can be violated by proposing a Rule Gimmick allowing it to be lifted (such as a Component which creates rifts in the dreaded "space-time continuum").

Introduce Components

- Introducing components costs 1 Coin to Introduce or Exit one Component

The location provides the setting of the scene. Other Components provide the actors in it. The player must decide which characters and other major props he desires to be present in the scene. As noted above, it costs 1 Coin to Introduce an existing Component into or Create a new Component within the Scene. Characters and props can be Introduced at any time throughout the scene during player turns in this same way simply by paying a Coin. The Introducing player will have initial Control. Controlled Components can similarly be Exited from a scene by paying a Coin to have them depart. Any Component is assumed to be available to be brought into a scene unless it has been Eliminated.

Players can also spend a Coin to explicitly state a Component as not being in the scene. This may be desirable because another player is free to retroactively place any character not so limited into the scene at a later time. For example, if the Events of a scene included a murder, another player could later frame a scene at a local police precinct where a character (who wasn't explicitly present in the earlier scene) is claiming to be a witness to the crime. Explicitly paying to not have that character present at the scene is a Fact that could be used to assist in Challenging that attempt (or at least Challenge it being true, the character could still lie about having been a witness, but the players would all know that she actually wasn't).

If the location changes during a scene, all characters and props present in the scene can be moved to the new location (with proper explanation as to how they got there) for free. Otherwise a Coin can be paid to exit them from the scene. If the new location involves significantly different characters and props then it is probably an entirely new scene. The player should end the current scene and then bid to take the next turn so he can frame the new scene.

Early on in the game, the players set up the scene that would give direction to the story:

Dave: *Ok, lets get started, the place is the "Town" of "Meadow" [This costs 2 Coins and Creates a Component with "Town" as its Role and "Me3dow" as a proper name. The same Coin that defined the Role, 3lso establishes the Component as the location for the upcoming scene]*

We see the town from above, like from a bird flying overhead [This is pure color, Dave is just giving screen direction type information in order to better paint a picture for his fellow players. This costs nothing]

It is "quiet little community", of "small cottages" and "red tile roofs". Given that it is the home of a small diminutive people, everything is in miniature, "Set in the middle of a small meadow", the town is "surrounded by grasses the height of the buildings" and "bright witdflow-ers towering like trees". Throughout the town are signs of contrast: here are "streets paved with pebbles like cobblestones" and an "old style water tower". There, is a "satellite dish" and "antennae for cell phones". [As Dave is speaking, he has a handful of Coins from his Wealth. When he mentions something that sounds to

him like its worth paying for, he drops a Coin into the Bank. Albert, who has taken it upon himself to record all of the Components in the game on behalf of the other players, scribbles furiously each time. The players are using the simple expedient when defining Traits that if its something you want written down for future reference, it costs you a Coin. The above Traits (indicated with quotation marks for reference) cost Dave 10 Coins. Including the 2 spent above, Meadow now has an Importance of 12. Dave has spent a lot of his initial Coins, but has really put his stamp on the story by giving substance to the somewhat vague Tenets the group came up with.]

It is early summer and the flowers are in bloom. The "oak and beech trees surrounding the meadow" are just starting to take on a deeper shade of green and they dominate the horizon like mountains. [Here Dave has set the time for the scene. Since this is the first scene of the game, Dave has used an actual calendar reference. Most other scene's time will be set in relative terms (referring to how long before or after a previous scene it was). Any scene set immediately following the previous one costs nothing, but since there has been no previous scene, this costs 1 Coin (a fair price, since Dave has now established a season for the story to start in). Dave doesn't pay for the flowers being in bloom. He decides that that is just color and no other player feels differently enough to Challenge him on it. He does drop a Coin on "Oak and Beech Trees Surrounding the Meadow" to make that a Trait for the town. Given that the town is in 3 meadow, one could assume the trees as a given, but Dave feels like making it explicit and getting to decide what kind of trees in the bargain. Albert, keeping record, tacks on "...like mountains" for free, feeling that that is all part of same Trait and Dave has spent plenty of Coins so far anyway.]

Down in the "square" there are three figures standing about like they're waiting for something. That's the end of my turn. [Dave buys yet another Trait for the town, ensuring that it has a proper "Square" and bringing the total Importance of Meadow to 14 so far. He then pays 3 more Coins, 1 each for the three figures, and 1 Coin for the activity of them waiting for something. Ordinarily the Coins to Create those figures would entitle Dave to define a Role for each of them. However, Dave is instead doing something unusual (unusual enough that some groups may require a Rules Gimmick to allow it). He has paid for the figures, but left defining their Role up to someone else. This is Dave's way of getting another player to kick start the story. He set the stage, he Introduced 3 potential characters and now he's leaving defining those characters and having them do something to someone else. Dave's turn ends (having spent 19 Coins on Framing the Scene). Play passes to Ed.]

Ed has his own ideas about what he wants the story to be about. Dave's initial setting has changed them somewhat (he was planning on more of an urban industo-tech setting, than European rural quaint), but in a more important way, it dovetails nicely. Ed is planning on having the character's homes threatened by an enemy, and Dave has nicely created that home.

Ed: *Ok, the camera zooms in on one of the buildings "on the square". It is an "imposing stone edifice" with the words "Defense Command Headquarters" carved above the door. We watch as the three figures walk inside. [Ed has created a new location for 3 Coins, and spent 1 Coin on the actions of the as yet mysterious figures.]*

Ok, I'm changing the location we are now in the "Offices of General Jackson Trudeau". "at DefCom HQ". [This costs 2 Coins and Creates the offices as a Component with the indicated Trait as its Role. That same Coin also Establishes that Component as the location for the upcoming scene. The second Trait defines the offices as being a Possession of the HQ building itself, a creative way to connect locations together. The "On the Square" Trait above serves the same purpose with regards to the HG and the town of Meadow.]

The General is present as are the three unknown figures. [Since the location has been changed, existing Components from the old location are assumed to automatically change location without having to be paid for. Ed pays 2 Coins to Create the character of the General (his Role) and define his proper name.]

The General's Offices are "Spartan" and "Meticulous" [These are Traits added to the location for 1 Coin each as per Chapter 4]

At this point the scene continues. Ed establishes a potential threat from an old enemy which he Creates and names the Slytheran. Christine Takes Control of one of the figures and on her turn begins defining the character of Marissa. The other characters will eventually become Kevin and Turk, and the group becomes part of a team ordered to investigate Slytheran activity. The story has now been given a direction.

EVENTS

Describe the Events

- Costs 1 Coin per Event which includes any or all of the following elements:
 1. a single effect,
 2. a single Component performing the effect,
 3. a single Component receiving the effect.

Events include: actions performed, conversations held, emotions felt, ideas thought, environmental impacts, and anything else that can be thought of as an effect or an activity. If Components are nouns and Traits are adjectives, than effects can be thought of as the verbs and Events as the sentence which ties them all together. Events are considered to be Fact (i.e. it is a Fact that the Event occurred) attached to the scene in which the occurred.

Often the logical result of an Event will be to add Facts to Components by adding, reducing, or restoring Traits. These Traits are paid for separately as described in Chapter 4. The Event is essentially the justification behind it.

For example: the Event may be "Marissa shoots the buzzer with her laser pistol". The shot is the effect, Marissa is the Component causing the effect, and the buzzer is the Component receiving it. The pistol in this case is not strictly part of the Event ("guns don't kill people, people kill people"). Rather, its inclusion in the Event justifies the player now detailing the results of the shot by defining suitable wound Traits for the target. He uses 2 Coins to give buzzer a Trait "Hit in the Wing" and to pay for the Event "the buzzer goes down".

Note, some play groups may argue that the Event is really "Marissa pulls the trigger on the pistol" paid for with 1 Coin, and then "the pistol shoots the buzzer" for another Coin. In this example, we feel that this interpretation is probably far too nit-picky to make for an enjoyable game, but there will

certainly be situations in the game which arise that could be defined equally well in different ways like this. Often it will not be clear when one interpretation is "better" than another. It is up to the individual play groups to determine to what degree they wish to subdivide Events into smaller and smaller atomic units. After all, another group may argue that the Event is really 4 Events "Marissa moves her finger", "the finger pulls the trigger", "the trigger discharges the pistol", the "pistol shoots the buzzer".

Because of the near infinite number of potential events that can be narrated, there is no way to write rules to cover each possibility specifically. What is clear is that some definitions of an Event are far too narrow and clumsy to be fun, while other definitions of an Event are far too broad and would allow players to accomplish too much with a single Coin. Arriving at some general consensus before the game as to how your group plans on defining the scope of Events and Traits is a large part of the Social Contract, and can make for an effective Tenet.

Universalis is designed to also allow such parameters to be established during play. This works as follows: the narrating player states his Event and pays 1 Coin. If no other player Challenges then the scope of that Event is deemed as being acceptable. If some player believes it is not acceptable [too narrow or not narrow enough] they Challenge. The Negotiations phase of the Challenge allows players to talk about what they feel is or isn't an appropriate scope for that particular event and suggest how many Coins they think the Event should cost (i.e. how many individual Events are really embedded in what the narrator said). Either through Negotiation or Bidding (or no Challenge at all) the issue gets resolved, the Coins get paid, and all players have a new data point to help judge where those parameters are in the future. The bottom line is, no matter where your group sets the threshold for the scope of a single Event or Trait, if you're having fun, its set at the right level.

This is why in the first chapter we made a point of saying that each play group must determine its own level of Coins to start the game with and to recover via Refreshment A lot of this choice will depend on how many Coins it takes to establish the Event of "Marissa shoots the buzzer" in your group...1 or 4.

Events are the entire point of framing the scene to begin with. Players should have an idea of what they wish to accomplish within each scene and then pay for the Events necessary to make it happen.

Not every statement spoken by the player must be paid for as an Event. The player is free (and indeed encouraged) to embellish his narrative with color and detail. Note, however, that technically only those statements that are explicitly paid for carry the weight of Fact, The act of paying for a statement or colorful description gives special significance that it otherwise wouldn't have. In game terms, it has become a Fact.

A easy way we have found to help judge when something should be paid for is the "written record sheet test", if a player says something that should be written down so it gets remembered (like recording information on a character sheet) its worth paying a Coin for. If a Coin isn't paid, it doesn't get written down.

Other Details

- Other details cost 1 Coin as for any Fact

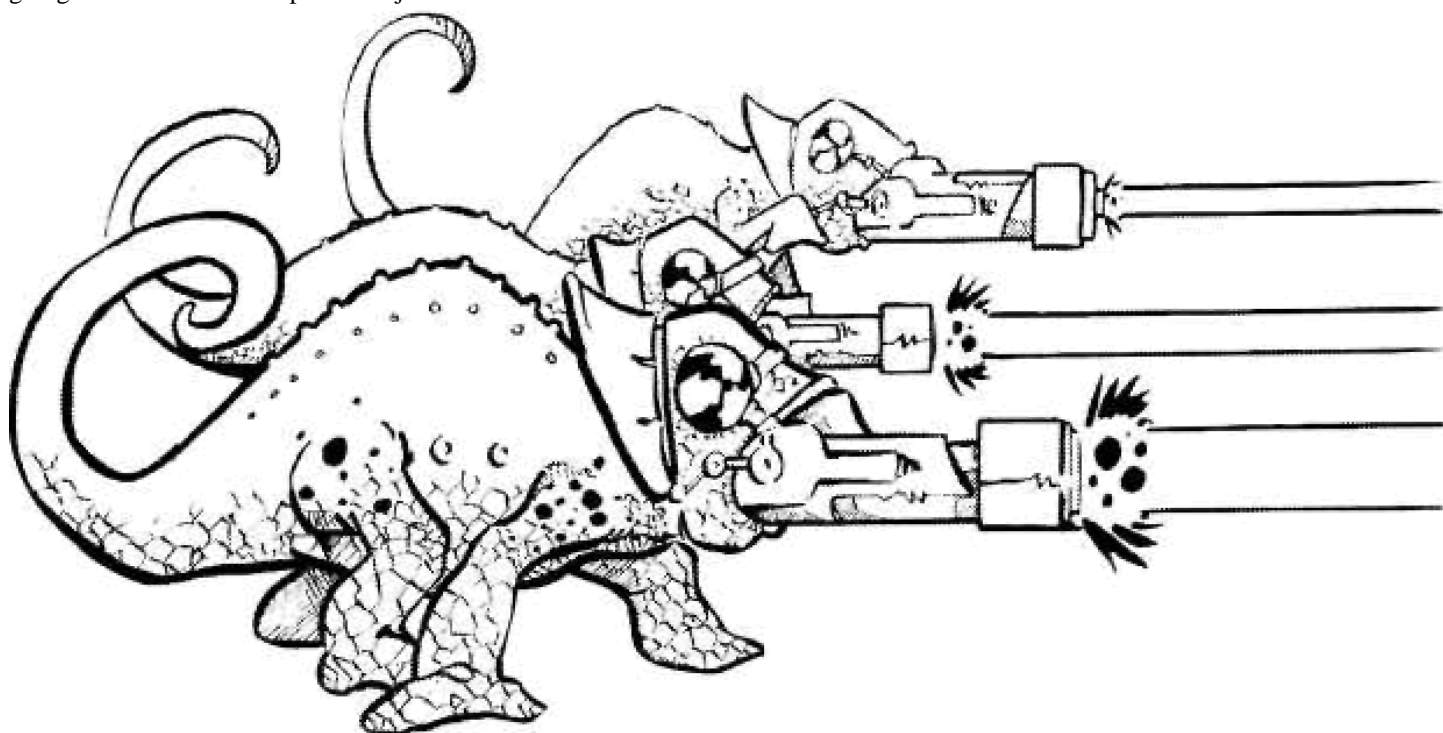
Other details like "why" and "how" can be added to a scene exactly like purchasing any Fact. In many cases the why is implicit and the how is demonstrated by the Events: the bad guys attacked because they are bad guys, the earthquake happened because it is a force of nature, etc. Other times a player may wish to explicitly state the why. The Event may have involved the betrayal of a trusted friend. The player may want to illuminate the reasons behind the betrayal and this can be done just as for any other Fact by spending Coins.

Often times, however, the player will not want to explicitly state the whys or hows. These may be left to be explained by another player in a future scene in a way completely unexpected by the initial player. In this way suspense can be preserved in a game where the players have total power to author the story. For example, a Mafia hit man just kicked in the door and attempted to off one of the game's principal characters. Why? We don't know. The player framing that scene never said. But at some point, unless the players want to leave a rather glaring loose end in their story, somebody is going to have to come up with a justification and frame a

scene accordingly. Until then all of the players are left wondering "why the heck is the Mafia trying to kill this guy".

Similarly, consider a scene framing a secret meeting between an agent and his underworld contact. Another player introduces a Complication (described in Chapter 6) where government counter espionage forces attempt to apprehend the characters. How did the government know about that meeting in order to crash it? We don't know. The player creating the Complication may not even know. But answering that question will provide some player with great grist for a future scene (could the agent's contact be a double agent?).

In the example of the opening scene earlier in this chapter, Dave did something similar when he left the identity of the "figures in the square" undefined. Nobody at that point (including Dave) had any idea who those individuals were or why they were there. In this way, even though there is no Game Master to keep secrets hidden from the players, there is still ample opportunity for secrets and suspense built into the game.



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Doom Cannons advancing on target, assault lasers blazing.

CHAPTER SIX: COMPLICATIONS

- Complications occur in one of two ways:
 1. Whenever a player attempts to do something to or with a Component that he is not in Control of; or
 2. When another player wishes to turn an Event into an Obstacle and purchases dice representing difficulty
- Resolving Complications involve players rolling dice against each other to see who gets the privilege of deciding the outcome.

COMPLICATION BASICS

- 1) Start a Dice Pool for the Complication, and for each player who Controls a Component Targeted by it.
- 2) Go around the table and add dice (dIOs) to any desired Pool by Drawing upon Traits or buying with Coins.
- 3) When no one wishes to add any further dice, roll.
- 4) Count the number of dice that came up 1-5 in each Pool (a Success), the Pool with more Successes wins.
- 5) The player rolling the winning Pool gets Coins equal to the total sum showing on the Success dice.
- 6) Players rolling non winning Pools get Coins equal to the number of dice rolled.
- 7) Winning player uses Coins received to narrate Events and add, remove, or restore Traits as desired.
- 8) Winning player may use Coins to cancel Coins received by the Losers.
- 9) Losing players, in order of most to least Coins received, do likewise, limited by what has already been narrated.
- 10) Players do not have to spend all Coins received. Coins not spent can be kept and added to Wealth.

NEW CONCEPTS

Originator

The player who started the Complication by interacting with a Component he does not Control, or placing an Obstacle.

Target

The Components that the Originator is attempting to manipulate, effect, or interact with, as a result of the Complication, are the Targets of the Complication. A player who Controls a Targeted Component is a Target Player and rolls the dice on the Component's behalf. Note: that if the player who controls the Target is the same player as the Originator, then there is no Complication. That player can simply manipulate, effect, or interact with those Components as he desires as part of a normal turn. If that player really desires to turn the situation into a Complication he can ask other players to voluntarily Take Control of the desired Target Components and oppose him in the Complication.

The Dice Pools

During the Complication there will be 2 or more Dice Pools. One is for the Originator and represents the Complication.

Each player who Controls a Target of the Complication will have a Pool of their own as well. The dice are dIOs with Os being ten.

During the Complication, players will add dice to the Pool of their choice (how is explained below). In general the Originator will be adding dice to the Complication Pool describing the nature of the threat / challenge / opponent / or obstacle. Controllers of the Target Pools will be adding dice to their own Pool describing how the Target is trying to defeat / overcome / circumvent / or otherwise prevent the Originator's intended action from coming to pass.

Players without Pools of their own may participate as they choose, adding dice to any Pool they have a desire to see prevail. They may also, on their turn (normally or by Interrupt) Introduce additional Components and involve them in the Complication. These Interruptions do not interfere with the progression of the Complication.

Alternatively, players may prefer that every participating player keep their own Pool and narrate its results regardless of whether they Control a Target Component or not. After the dice are accumulated but before they're rolled each player can declare his Pool for whichever side makes sense based on the dice that built it.

Committed Components and Take Overs

Take Overs work essentially the same as described in Chapter 3, with the following restriction. During a Complication, Components that have been committed to the Complication are not available to be Taken Over. This rule is there to avoid the bizarre effects that could result from Components changing hands in the middle of a Complication.

Committed Components include: Any Component that is an identified Target of the Complication, any Component that has been identified as the source of the Complication, and any Component that has already had at least 1 Trait Drawn from it to add dice to a Dice Pool.

BUILDING THE DICE POOLS

Once Originated, Complications proceed regardless of other Events that may be narrated around them. Players continue to Interrupt and take their turns normally. The Complication remains open so long as any player has an interest in it being open.

The primary (though not the only) activity that should be occurring on a player's turn once a Complication has been Originated is adding dice to the Dice Pools.

CREATIVE SOURCES OF DICE

By Interrupting and taking a turn yourself in the middle of a Complication you can increase your options.

- 1) Introduce a new Component into the scene and Draw on its Traits.
- 2) Purchase new Traits for an existing Component and then Draw upon them.
- 3) Create a new Component, and purchase new Traits to Draw upon.

- Adding dice to the Dice Pools can be done to ...
 1. Draw upon a Trait
 2. Buy Dice directly

During their turn any player can call for the Complication to be closed. If all other players agree {i.e. no player wishes to add any more dice} then dice are rolled to resolve it.

Draw Upon Traits

- Drawing upon traits is FREE, This adds 1 die to, or subtracts 1 die from, a Dice Pool if the Trait applies

Drawing upon Traits is the primary (and most cost effective) means of increasing the dice in a Dice Pool. Mechanically this involves simply identifying an appropriate Trait that is present in the scene and which would apply in some fashion to the Complication at hand. Usually this will result in adding 1 die to an appropriate Dice Pool, but it could also mean removing 1 die from a Dice Pool depending on how the Trait is interpreted.

A player can Draw on the Trait of any Component in the scene whether he Controls them or not However, the Trait must be used in a manner consistent with its nature and the Component that it is a part of. In many cases this consideration will dictate which Dice Pool the Trait effects.

For example: During the final battle with the forces of Slytheran, a building collapses and traps Kevin McCrae under some rubble. A Complication ensues to see if the other characters can rescue him before Slytheran Troopers arrive and take him prisoner. The Complication involves treating the heavy rubble as an obstacle that must be overcome. Bob doesn't Control Turk, but on his turn he Draws upon the Turk's "Strong" Trait. Since being strong would obviously help the character make the lift, the die from this Trait must go into the Target's Dice Pool. Even though Bob has shown that he "has it in" for Turk, he can't use this Trait against him since it is so clearly an advantage in the given situation (at least not without a lot of creative interpretation that would be subject to Challenge).

If, instead, a character with a "Weakling" Trait was trying to make the lift, that die would obviously hinder the character's efforts and either have to go into the Originator's Dice Pool (on behalf of the heavy object) or be used to reduce the Target's Dice Pool.

This is nothing more than the application of the standard rule that is true throughout Universalis: any action taken with Coins must be justified. To Draw upon the Trait, the player must explain how that Trait applies to the situation described by the Complication. The nature of this description might then be used as justification to Draw upon another Trait The Challenge mechanic is always available to oppose uses of other Traits that other players don't find justifiable.

A Trait can only be Drawn upon once and provides only one die for each Complication. If, however, the Component possesses the same Trait multiple times (i.e. if Turk had "Strong x2" as a Trait) then each occurrence of the Trait can be Drawn upon separately providing additional dice. If there is more than one Complication in a scene, a Trait can be used in each Complication where it would apply. Traits newly purchased during the Complication can be Drawn upon immediately.

Buying Dice

- Buying dice costs 1 Coin to add or subtract 1 die to/from a Dice Pool

Buying dice is the only other way of increasing (or decreasing) the number of dice in a Dice Pool. For 1 Coin, a die can be added to any Pool or an existing die removed from any Pool. Like everything else in the game, however, this purchase must be justified. Buying Dice allows players to purchase modifiers for features, advantages, or disadvantages that are temporary to the scene or Event at hand and unlike Traits do not last beyond the Complication. If the player wants the feature to last it can be bought as Trait. If the feature really isn't appropriate as a Trait (or is only appropriate as a Trait), other players may use the Challenge mechanic to see that it is accounted for properly.

Each time dice are bought, the player must provide a description of what the source of the modification is. This description may then provide justification for the Activation of other Traits.

For example: During one of several Complications that made up the final battle, Dave paid 2 Coins to remove 2 Dice from Marissa's Pool declaring "you are fighting at a disadvantage because the Slytheran forces have laid down smoke to cover their advance." Christine, then Draws upon Marissa's "IR Goggles" Trait to add a die back to her Pool. Ordinarily this Trait would have no applicability to a scene during the day, but the nature of the Dave's description provided the justification.

RESOLVING THE COMPLICATION

When none of the players desire to do anything further in relation to the Complication and all are satisfied with the Dice Pools as they stand (or at least are unwilling to spend more Coins to alter them further), resolution begins.

The Originator will roll all of the dice in the Complication Dice Pool and control any Coins generated from the roll. Each player who has a Component that he Controls Targeted by the Complication will have his own Dice Pool.

In the Core rules, there are only two sides in a Complication, The Complication itself, and the Targets collectively The rolls of all of the Target Pools are counted together (as one big Pool) to determine the winning side of the roll (either the Targets win or the Complication wins). They are counted separately for purposes of spending the Coins generated (with each rolling player spending the results of his own Pool).

The Universalis expansion will contain several optional rules, including different ways of handling multiple targets during Complications. Players are free to use Rules Gimmicks to address unique situations where they feel the Pools should be handled differently.

- The dice are d10s with "0" being read as ten.
- All dice that roll 1-5 (50% possibility) are Successes and are kept, and ail dice, which roll 6-0, are set aside.
- The side with the most Successes is the winner, the other side is the loser.

The side with the most Successes "wins" the contest and will have the advantage in describing the resulting action (usually from the perspective of being either advantageous or disadvantageous to the Target). A number of Coins are generated

from the die rolls and are used to narrate the outcome of the Complication.

If Successes are Tied

If both sides have the same number of Successes, add up the sum of the numbers on the Successful dice in each Pool. The side with the highest total has the Edge. Add one free die of a different color to that Pool and reroll both Pools. Continue (giving out additional Edge dice each time) until the tie is broken. If the totals are tied, both Pools get an Edge die and both roll again. In the case of multiple player Pools on the Target side, give the Edge die to the Pool which contributed the most successes to the Target side's cause. Ties in this go to the player sitting closest to the left of the Originator. In resolving the Complication, players should treat ties as indicating escalating drama or suspense and work this into the narrative accordingly.

COINS GENERATED

The Loser's Pool: generates 1 Bonus Coin per die rolled regardless of Success

The Winner's Pool: generates a number of Bonus Coins equal to the total sum on all Success Dice in the Pool. This will usually be more than the 1 Coin per die rolled of the Loser's Pool [averaging 1.5 Coins per die] which is part of the economic advantage of trying to win Complications. However, it may also be less, meaning it is possible to win the Complication but wind up with fewer Coins, which is the risk of Complications

Edge Dice: Both sides can add the number rolled on their Edge Dice (regardless of Success) to their total, if not already part of the Success Dice.

During the final battle there is a Complication involving a firefight between teams of Meadow Soldiers and Slytheran Shock Troopers. Both sides are evenly matched and both sides have 6 dice in their Pool. The dice are rolled and the results are: Complication (Slytheran) 1,3, 5, 6, 6, 9 and Targets (Meadow) 2,2,3, 7, 8,9, Both sides have 3 Successes so there is a tie. The Slytheran have a sum of $1+3+5 = 9$, however, while the Meadow has $2+2+3 = 7$. The Slytheran have the advantage and so gain an Edge Die.

Both sides reroll, the Slytheran now with 7 dice. The results are 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 7, with 10 on the Edge die for the Slytheran and 4, 5, 5, 8, 8, 9 for the Meadow. Again there is a tie at 3 Success each. This time the Meadow has the Edge with $4+5+5 = 14$ vs. $2+3+4 = 9$ for the Slytheran.

Both sides reroll and now have 7 dice each in their Pools. This time the results are: Slytheran: 1, 4, 5, 7, 7, 0 edge 9 and Meadow: 2, 4, 4, 8, 8, 9 edge 3. The Meadow has 4 successes to the Slytheran 3 and thus wins the Complication.

Continuing with the above example: The Meadow forces won with 4 successes: 2, 4, 4, and 3 on the Edge Die. This gives them 13 Bonus Coins to spend on narrating the result of the Complication.

The Slytheran rolled 7 dice, plus they rolled a 9 on their Edge Die. They get 1 Bonus Coin per die rolled, plus they get to add the 9 from the Edge Die (even though it wasn't successful), That gives them 16 Bonus Coins to spend.

The Meadow has the advantage of going first, and ensuring that they narrate the outcome of the Complication as they please, but the Originator of the Complication has plenty of Coins (even more than the Meadow) to narrate the winner's losses with. This encounter became something of a Pyrrhic Victory for the Meadow People.

In this way, ties make it possible for extraordinary results by the side gaining the Edge, whether they ultimately win or lose.

Using the Coins

It is important to keep in mind that the dice rolled are not a "to-hit" roll, or a "task resolution roll", or even a "scene resolution" roll. They are a roll off between players to determine which player gets to decide the outcome of the Complication. The advantage goes to the player who invested the most Coins and effort into the Complication and accumulated the largest Dice Pool.

RULES FOR USING COINS FROM COMPLICATIONS

- 1) The Winner of the Complication narrates his Coins first, although he may discuss options with the Loser if he desires.
- 2) The Winner may sacrifice his own Coins in order to negate a like number of Coins received by the loser.
- 3) The Loser may Narrate his Coins as desired, within the parameters of what the Winner has already narrated.
- 4) The Coins should be spent on items directly or indirectly tied to the Complication itself, not on items completely unrelated,
- 5) The overall outcome should be narrated with a bias favoring the Components of the Pool that won or to the detriment of the Components of the Pool that lost.
- 6) The Events and activities narrated should tie into or reference, at least tangential ly, the Traits that were Drawn upon and the justifications given for purchased dice.

The Coins can be used in any and all ways already described in these rules. This includes: Creating a Component, adding Traits to a Component, removing or restoring Traits to a Component, overcoming Importance, narrating Events, Introducing additional Components into the scene, Changing the location or even the time of the scene, and even proposing new game Tenets. The only restriction is that the use of the Coins must be appropriate to the Complication at hand and bear some relation to the Traits that were Drawn upon and the justifications used to purchase dice.

The generated Coins can also be kept by the player and added to his own Wealth. In fact, Originating Complications is one way for a player short of Coins to earn a few additional ones.

The big Complication Example: Following their escape from the forest fire, the heroes were in a quandary. They needed to get back across the river 3rd back to Meadow in time to warn the town of the impending attack. Yet confronting them were troops dispatched by the Slytheran Queen with orders to stop them.

Its Albert's turn and he has just narrated how the team has moved down stream away from the fire and will be crossing the river on a hastily built pontoon boat with a tent cloth for a sail. He Created the boat as a Component with the Traits of

"Pontoon Boat", "Sturdy", "Tent Cloth Sail", "Bark Chip Paddles", and "Big Enough for 3 plus Gear". He had narrated the boat being in the water and crossing the stream when he is Interrupted by Bob.

Bob: As the team tries to cross the river they are met by a hail of fire from the opposite bank. I'm Introducing 2 Squads of Slytheran Shock Troopers to oppose the Crossing, which will make a Complication out of it. [He pays 4 Coins for each squad using both the Sub Component and Group Trait rules from Chapter 4].

The squads both have Traits of "Shock Troopers", "Fierce Fighters", "Single Mindedly Aggressive", and "High Power Assault Rifle" [From the earlier example].

I think those all apply to the situation of trying to gun down the heroes on their little raft before they can cross. That's a total of 5 Dice apiece, or 10 Dice total for the Complication Pool. Also, numbers are certainly an advantage here, and each squad has "Shock Squad x3" which I'll Draw on for 6 more dice. [Bob decides that the Troopers "Acute viper-tike sensing pits" don't apply because the targets are easily visible. Nor do their "Venomous Fangs" help since they aren't fighting at close quarters. The Troopers are "Blindly Loyal", but so far neither their loyalty nor their morale has been called into question so he doesn't use that trait either. They are equipped with "Body Armor" but the Target's haven't declared they're shooting back, so that doesn't apply yet]

Christine, Dave Et Ed all take their turn in that order around the table, and all pass in order to wait and see how Albert decides to address this threat.

Albert: Wow, that's 3 hefty Complication Bob. One might think you really want the Slytheran to win. Ok, let's start with the obvious choices. First, all three of the Targeted characters are "named" and so provide a die each. They each have roles, but only Turk's "Special Forces" Trait seems applicable to the situation at hand, so that's a fourth die. [Having framed and narrated the entire scene so far, Albert is in Control of all of the characters at this point, so there is only one Target Pool for the Complication]

I guess we need to decide how they're going to respond to this danger. Going toe to toe in a firefight seems pretty futile (especially since Turk no longer has his weapon), so instead I think the team will decide to try and escape downstream; outrunning the troops on the shore and finding a safer place to land. So that gives us Turk's "Small Boat Handling" Trait, and the Traits "Sturdy" and "Tent Cloth Sail" from the boat to add 3 more dice. [Turk's Trait had been added earlier during the snapping turtle scene when the players needed a way to get across the pond. Bob considers Challenging the use of the sail, since he doubts a jury rigged piece of canvas will do much to speed up a raft heading down stream already, but decides it isn't worth making an issue of.]

Bob: I think the Complication is good where it is [he decides to hold off adding any more dice to the Pool]

Christine: Well, Martssa has "Fiercely Determined" that sounds useable, so a die for that. What about "Command Ability" could she add a die for that, or not? [Here Christine is soliciting opinions about the suitability of a particular Trait]

Bob: I don't think so, they're on a boat, and Marissa has no particular boating skill. Its more Turk's bailiwick at the mo-

ment. [The other players concur with this, and so no die is added]

Dave: I pass

Ed: What about Fritz? Kevin sends Fritz aloft to scout the far bank and signal when he's found a safe place to land. I'd say that counts for 4 dice "Highly Trained", "Embedded Control Chip", the proper name "Fritz" which we've been counting, and "Flys" from the Master Component of Skylars

Bob: Man you're really milking that pet thing aren't you. You should have named him Lassie.

Ed: We've used him to scout stuff out before.

Bob: I'll tell you what, I give you 2 dice for it, but not 4. Take one for being "Highly Trained", and one for the name () still say its silly to give a pet that name bonus, but I lost th3t Challenge). But the "Embedded Control Chip" and the "Fly" thing are what makes the justification even possible. Those Traits are what allow you to get any dice at all out of Fritz so I don't think its right to count them too. [Bob is Challenging Ed's use of Fritz here and is currently Negotiating with him on the appropriate number of dice, The other players think Bob's reasoning here is a little flimsy, because that logic could apply to a lot of different situations, but when Christine points out that regardless of the reasoning, she doesn't like the idea of the pet overshadowing the heroes, they decide not to fight him on it. 2 Dice only are added to the Target Pool.]

Albert: Well, that gives us 10 Dice total. Lets go ahead and roll and see what happens.

The Targets Roll 10 dice. They come up 1, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 9, 0, 0, 0

The Complication Rolls 10 dice. They come up 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 7, 7, 8, 8, 8, 9, 0

The Complication wins with 9 Successes to the Target's 4.

That gives the Complication $1+2+2+3+4+4+5+5+5 = 31$ Bonus Coins, and the Target gets 10

Bob: Ok, this is what happens.

Coin 1: Blazing fire from the shore strikes the small craft repeatedly. [1 Coin Event]

Coin 2: Turk attempts to get the boat turned down stream [1 Coin Event]

Coins 3-4: hut fire rips through the sail and cuts into the mast [2 Coins put into the boat, undefined as yet]

Coin 5: Meanwhile Slytheran Troopers spot the Skylar and recognize it is providing aerial recon. [1 Coin Event]

Coin 6: They open fire on it. [1 Coin into Fritz]

Coin 7: Fritz dodges and weaves, but its ultimately futile [1 Coin into Fritz]

Coins 8-11: 2 blasts hit the small lizard square in rapid succession and Fritz is incinerated [Fritz has a total Importance of 6, so with 2 Coins already applied towards this, 4 more Coins will eliminate Fritz altogether]

Coin 11: Kevin gets a "signal not found" error from his control chip interface [color, no Coins]

Coin 12: The boat has managed to make decent progress downstream and despite the Troopers running to keep up it is starting to outdistance them [1 Coin Event]

Coins 13-15: But the damage done to it is making it difficult to control and when a last few parting shots strike home the

boat breaks apart and capsizes [The boat has a total Importance of 5, so with 2 Coins already applied to it takes 3 more to eliminate the boat altogether]

Coins 16-18: The team is dumped into the water, and with no boat to help control their progress they are carried much farther downstream than they had intended and are now even farther from the Meadow than they were before they crossed. [Being swept downstream is an Event that applies separately to each effected Component so 3 Coins covers this.]

Coins 19-23 a 24-31: Lets see, that's 18 Bonus Coins spent total so far. I'll use 5 more to cancel 5 Bonus Coins from the losing Pool leaving you with 5, and save the remaining 8, recouping my cost for this Complication.

Dave: Oh my god, you killed Fritz, you bastard!

Ed: Poor Fritz, he was a good lizard.

Albert: Ok, with 5 Coins I can't do. much, which was obviously Bob's intention. So first things first.

Coins 1-3: All three te3m members manage to make it safely to the desired shore, so they're now on the right side of the river. [3 Coins for each character crossing the river. The safely part comes as a result of Bob not seeing fit to saddle the characters with any injury so Albert isn't about to either]

Coin 4: Turk recognizes where they are, so they aren't lost [1 Coin to establish that as Fact so they can at least avoid that difficulty going forward]

Coin 5: and finally, none of their gear appeared to be lost or damaged in the dunking [One could argue that this should require a separate Coin for each character whose gear made it safely through, but no one Challenges, so Albert gets it for a single Coin]

Albert ends the scene and after a round of bidding Dave wins the right to frame the next one. He decides to continue where the previous one left off and so begins his scene with the wet and bedraggled heroes having just crawled up on the river bank. He hasn't gotten very far when Bob again spends a Coin to Interrupt.

Bob: I'm Creating "Buzzers", they are the somewhat "larger", "more aggressive", "carnivorous", "cousins of Skylars". They also "Fly", but they eat meat instead of fruit They have a "paralytic venom", that they can "spray at their target" which allows them to leach on and "suck their prey dry" in safety. They also have "embedded control chips" and are used as "Aerial Weapons by the Slytheran" [Bob pays 11 Coins for the above traits, plus a 12th to make buzzers a Master Component. Ed wonders if this Complication doesn't derive from Bob wanting to introduce Fritz's evil twin.]

They'd been following the team's progress down the river, and seeing them make it to shore alive, they descend to finish the job. [2 Coins for the following and the descent as Events]

I'm saying there is 4 of them, so I'm Creating a Sub Component "Buzzer" with a "Numbers x3" Trait for 4 Coins.

Dave: Dang, that's 18 Coins you sunk into this Complication.

Christine: Yeah, but he's Created another weapon for the Slytheran army to attack Meadow with. Now they have an airforce too.

Bob: Ok, "large", "aggressive", "carnivorous", "Fly", "paralytic venom", "spray at their target", "suck their prey dry" "control chips" and Aerial Weapons". That's 9 dice, plus 3 for the size Trait is 12.

Christine: are we going to fight them?

Dave: Yeah, I guess we have no choice this time.

Christine: Ok, well then I think Marissa's "Command Ability", would apply, as would her "Laser Pistol". I'm not going to Draw on her "Trained Killer x2" because I don't think that covers flying lizards. But I do think "Hard Cold Demeanor" can work. I see this as being one of those grim moments where the camera focuses on her standing there all calm, cool, and collected barking orders and taking charge.

Sob: That works for me,

Dave: What about her "Determination"

Christine: Well, you can Draw on that if you want, but it seems to me that since there is no clear objective like crossing the river to this scene that I don't think it applies.

Dave: Hmmm, we'll see. Ok, so that's 3 dice so far, plus another 3 for the named characters, plus Turk's "Special Forces Training" makes 7. Now what.

Ed: Beats me

Albert: Time to call in the big guns. I'm paying 1 Coin to Introduce Jerek into the scene. That also brings in the sparrow he rides automatically as a possession. He's been shadowing us ever since he watched the snakes start that fire, and now he's seen our plight and decided to come in guns blazing. [Albert pays the 1 Coin for the Introduction, plus 2 more for the Events that Jerek has been following and that he leaps into the fray]

Lets see, he's got "Ace Flyer x3", and his sparrow is "Cybernetically enhanced" and has "mounted laser cannons across the neck x2". That's 6 more dice making it 13, plus I'm going to add 3 more for his surprise attack out of the sun [buying the 3 extra dice costs 3 more Coins] that's 16.

Bob: Sweet, I wondered if that rogue was ever going to show up. I figured he might if I threw a flying enemy at the heroes.

Christine: Hooray for Jerek!, I wonder if this will change Marissa's feelings for him.

Dave: Don't know, but I think that his showing up is enough of a justification to trigger Marissa's "Fiercely Determined" Trait, so I'm going to throw that in and push us up to 17 dice.

Ed: I say we roll, Sob you want to add anything else,

Bob: Lets roll.

The Target Roll on 17 dice comes up t, 2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8, 9, 0

The Complication Roll on 12 dice comes up 1, 3, 5, 5, 6, 6, 6, 8, 8, 8, 9, 0,

The Target wins with 11 Successes to the Complication's 4.

That gives the Target $1+2+2+3+3+4+4+4+5+5+5 = 38$ Bonus Coins and the Target 12

We'll end the example here in the interest of brevity. Suffice it to say, that after a brilliant dog fight and a saving shot from Marissa's pistol, all of the buzzers were shot down. Jerek, then agreed to take the heroes back to Meadow the short way if they agreed to help him get his commission reinstated in the air wing (you'll recall he'd been exiled for some, as yet still unspecified, crime). Ultimately the heroes agreed, and with Marissa riding behind him in the saddle, and Turk and Kevin dangling painfully from Flight's claws (although less painful than having been left to the Slytheran Troopers who

were still closing in), the team returns to Meadow in time to put the defenses on full alert.



Jerek and his War Sparrow "Fright" drive off the attacking Buzzers.

CONCLUSION

Now you have everything you need to create your own worlds and characters with Universalis. You're ready to see what kind of story comes out of the collective imaginations of you and your friends. You will find that the more you play Universalis, the more the system becomes second nature and fades into the background; and the more you will begin to use the system in new and unexpected ways. This is a natural part of the process of acclimating to these rules. In other words, the more you play, the better it gets. The more you play Universalis, the more it becomes the game that you need it to be. This effect should not be overlooked. Many games get old as you play them. People discover things that they don't like about the system, and they get tired of the same sort of action. Universalis, over time, actually becomes more the game it needs to be to fit your style of play. Try the system out "as is" for a bit, but don't be afraid to add in a Gimmick whenever you feel the need. Make the game what you need it to be for you. Get creative with its use, and you'll like the results.

What will happen to the heroes in our example? Will they be able to help in the defense of the Meadow? How will their story end? We don't know; it hasn't been played out. That's a

very fun part of Universalis, nobody ever really knows where the story is going until it gets there. You could play out the end of the Meadow gang if you wanted to. Better yet, make up your own world, heroes, and story. You'll find that it's more rewarding than you might have imagined.

Be sure to check out the Universalis Website at: <http://universalis.actionroll.com> where you'll find:

- Add-ons...pre-designed Rules Gimmicks that can be incorporated directly into your game
- Links to the Universalis Forum on The Forge where you can have your game questions answered
- Essays and game guides on how to get the most out of your Universalis sessions

We also want to see transcripts of your games, great scenes you've run, and characters, locations, and props you've created. If we like them, we'll put them up on the page where everyone can use them as a source of inspiration for their own games.

Happy Gaming, Ralph & Mike

GLOSSARY

Bank: A central reserve of Coins where all spent Coins are returned and new Coins are drawn from.

Bid for Turn: Players bid secretly for the right to frame the next scene. The winner is the Framing Player and can spend the Coins bid during the scene. The losers return their bid to their wealth. Ties are broken by the first player to the left of the last Framing Player.

Bidding in Challenges: If Negotiations fail to resolve a Challenge, players Bid. The Challenging player must bid first (openly) followed in order by the other players with the Challenged player bidding last. Each player can bid one or more Coins either in favor of the Challenger or the Challenged (or a new option). The side with the most Coins when no one wishes to bid further wins. If a Fact is being Contradicted the side defending the Fact counts double for the Challenge.

Buying Dice: 1 Coin allows 1 die to be added to or subtracted from any Dice Pool. The rationale for this must be fully justified by the player making the purchase.

Challenge: A means for players to regulate the actions of other players in the game. Any action or behavior can be Challenged, if possible the issue is resolved through Negotiation. If not, it is resolved by Bidding Coins.

Characters: A type of Component describing a person or group of people (where person is defined very loosely). Characters are the most important Component, and the story is told through them. Players can Control any character in the story, there are no specific Player Characters.

Coins: Coins regulate story power in the game. Players spend them to add Traits to Components, Tenets to the game, and narrate Events in scenes. Additional Coins can be earned from Complications and automatic Refreshment after every scene.

Complication: A Complication involves building a Dice Pool for the Complication rolled by the Originator and a Dice Pool for any Targets rolled by the Target Players. The most Successes wins and both sides receive Coins to narrate the outcome.

Component: All people, places, and things, and even intangibles can be defined as Components. All Components are collections of Traits which describe it. The more Traits, the more Important the Component is to the story. If it is a noun it can be defined as a Component.

Control: The player who Introduces a Component into a scene Controls that Component until it is Taken Over by another player. Only the Controlling player can add, Remove, or Restore Traits to a Component or involve a Component in an Event without causing a Complication.

Create Component: Players Create all Components in the game by purchasing 1 or more Traits for it costing 1 Coin each. The first Trait must be the Component's Rote.

Dialog: When a Character Controlled by 1 player wishes to have a conversation with a Character Controlled by another, the two (or more) players can enter into Dialog with the initiating player paying 1 Coin. During Dialog the players speak in the voice of their Characters and pay for any statements their Characters make that they wish to have treated as Fact.

Dice Pool: Both the Complication and the Targets will have a Dice Pool made up of 10s There may be more than one for

multiple Targets but they are treated collectively for purposes of determining the winner. Dice are added to the Pools either by Buying them or Drawing them from Traits.

Drawing on Traits: Any Component in a scene can have its Traits Drawn on during a Complication. If a particular Trait applies to the Complication 3t hand it can add or subtract 1 die to the relevant Dice Pool. Each Trait can provide only 1 die per Complication but can be used in multiple Complications in any one scene.

Edge Dice: If the number of Successes rolled in a Complication are tied, sum the values of each of the Success dice. The side with the highest sum gets a free die of a different color known as the Edge Die. In the event of multiple ties, continue handing out Edge Dice until the tie is broken. In the event of multiple target Pools, award the edge die to the Pool with the most Successes. If this is tied, award it to the tied Pool closest to the left of the Originator.

Eliminated: Components can be Eliminated from the game by paying Coins equal to their Importance. Each Coin paid also entitles the player to a Fact regarding the Components fate. Eliminated Components cannot be Introduced into any scene occurring chronologically after the time of its Elimination. They can be returned to play (with suitable justification) by paying additional Coins equal to their Importance.

Event: Events cost 1 Coin and deliver the action of the story. Each Event consists of a single effect, a single Component receiving the effect, and/or a single Component performing the effect. If Components are nouns and Traits are adjectives, then effects are verbs and Events are complete sentences.

Exit Component: Exiting a Component is the opposite of Introducing a Component. With a suitable justification, a Component currently present in a scene can be removed from the scene for 1 Coin.

Facts: Facts cost 1 Coin and give added leverage in Challenges. A Trait is a Fact assigned to a Component. A Tenet is a Fact assigned to the game itself. An Event is a Fact assigned to a scene.

Fines: Fines are a way of indicating dissatisfaction with the pfay of another player. Any player can at any time call for a Fine against another player. All other players vote simultaneously "thumbs-up" to levy the Fine or "thumbs-down" no Fine is necessary. The losing party must pay a number of Coins equal to the total thumbs against him to the Bank.

Framing Player: The winner of the Bid for Turn is the Framing Player. He can use the Coins he bid (and additional ones from his Wealth) to frame the Scene. He cannot be Interrupted while doing this. The first Event he narrates ends framing and begins regular play. Only the Framing Player can declare a scene ended.

Framing a Scene: The Framing Player Frames a scene by Establishing Location, Setting the Time, and Introducing Components. He cannot be Interrupted while doing so. The Framing ends when the Framing Player narrates the first Event.

Group Trait: Any Component can be turned into a group of like Components simply by adding a Group Trait. The number of times the Group Trait is added indicates the relative numbers of the group (not necessarily at a 1 :t ratio). The

additional numbers are not treated separately in the game (it is still a single Component) but can be Drawn upon in any Complication where additional numbers would be useful.

Importance: All Components have an Importance which is simply equal to the number of non Removed Traits the Component has. A Component can only be Eliminated from the game if a number of Coins equal to this Importance are spent to do so (and can be justified). Likewise an Eliminated Component can be brought back into the game if a number of Coins equal to its Importance is spent to do so (and can be justified).

Interrupt: For 1 Coin any player can Interrupt the turn of another player (except during framing) and begin taking his own turn. The interrupted player can finish his immediate thought before handing over the turn.

Introduce Component: Any existing Component can be Introduced into a scene by paying 1 Coin. Only Components that have been Introduced can have Traits Drawn upon for Complications.

Locations: A type of Component describing a place. Locations are one of the first things that must be Established in any scene for 1 Coin.

Loser: The side rolling fewer Successes in a Complication is the Loser, The losing player (or players) receive 1 Coin per die rolled plus the value of any Edge dice to narrate the outcome of the Complication, after the Winner's narration is completed,

Master Component: A Component can be marked as a Master Component for 1 Coin. A Component so marked can never be given a Proper Name and serves as a template for every related Sub Component tied to it. The Traits bought for the Master Component should be suitable for a generic representative of that class or category of Components. A Master Component can not be eliminated unless all of its Sub Components have been eliminated.

Mini Scene: Instead of waiting for the current scene to end and then winning the next Bid for Turn, a player on his turn, can cut to a scene elsewhere to depict events going on in another time or place. The Mini Scene automatically ends at the end of the player's turn (voluntarily or by Interruption). There is no additional cost for the Mini Scene, but Establishing a Location, Setting a Time, and Introducing Components all cost as they do for framing a normal scene.

Negotiation: Before any Challenge goes to Bidding, players can discuss alternative solutions amongst themselves. If the Challenged player agrees to modify his action to the satisfaction of the Challenger, or successfully convinces the Challenger to drop the Challenge, then the Challenge ends without Bidding.

Originate a Complication: A Complication occurs in one of two ways:

- 1) when a player who Controls one Component is attempting to effect a Component Controlled by a different player, or
- 2) when a player wishes to turn an Event described by another player into an obstacle by Buying Dice for it.

Originator: The player who begins a Complication is the Originator. He represents the source of the Complication and rolls the dice related to it.

Pool: Shorthand for Dice Pool

Possession Trait: One Component can be marked as being a Possession of another Component with a Possession Trait. The owned Component is automatically Introduced whenever the owner is Introduced. The owner's Importance is increased by the Importance of the Possession. The owner can be separated from the Possession by paying to Remove the Possession Trait (if such can be justified in the narrative).

Proper Name: Any Component can be given a Proper Name as a Trait. Like any Trait it can be Drawn on for any Complication in which it applies. It is difficult to conceive of many situations where a mere name would apply to a Complication. However, there is a special rule for Characters (and rarely other Components). Because "named" Characters are always held to be more important than unnamed ones, a Character with a Proper Name can Draw upon that name in any Complication in which they participate.

Props: Any Component that is not a Location or a Character. Typically items, equipment, and gear, but also intangibles like religions or ideologies,

Refreshment: At the end of every scene and before the next one begins, all players receive a small number of additional Coins (typically 5) from the Bank added to their Wealth.

Relationship Trait: Traits can depict family or emotional ties between Characters or a Character and other Component). These Traits can be Drawn upon any time the relationship applies. It is possible for ? Coin to buy both a Relationship Trait for 1 Component, and the corollary matching Trait for the related Component.

Removing Traits: For 1 Coin any Component's Trait can be crossed off of its record sheet. The rationale for this must be fully justified by the player causing the Removal.

Restoring Traits: For 1 Coin any Trait that had been previously Removed can be Restored. The rationale for this must be fully justified by the player causing the restoration.

Role: The first Trait that must be bought for any Component, the Role defines what that Component is or does for the story. This is often a position, or occupation for Characters, but can also be a story based role. Roles can be Drawn on for any Complication in which they apply.

Rules Gimmick: A formal means of proposing optional house rules during the game for 1 Coin.

Scene: A game division in which the Framing Player Establishes a Location, Sets a Time, and Introduces Characters and Props. All players then take turns narrating events within the scene until the Framing Player ends it and a new scene is Framed.

Social Contract: The Social Contract is an agreement between players about how a particular group intends to play. It can include rules on outside distractions, table talk, how loose the players will be with the rules, forbidden topics, pacing, and much more. The Social Contract can be an informal understanding, a formal agreement, or elements can be proposed during play as a Tenet.

Story Element: A Story Element is a Tenet which defines the type of story about to be told. Items like genre, theme, setting, mood, and situations. These make up the "type" of story the players want to tell.

Sub Component: A Component can be made a Sub Component of a Master Component by buying a Trait indicating the connection. The Sub Component has access to all of the

Traits of the Master Component and each Sub Component is free to Draw on them during Complications. The Sub Component's Importance is determined only by its own Traits, not including those inherited from the Master.

Successes: When the Dice Pools in a Complication are rolled, each die that comes up a 1-5 is 3 Success, The side with the most Successes is the Winner, the other side is the Loser.

Take Over: For 1 Coin a player can take Control over any Component in a scene currently Controlled by another player. It does not have to be his turn to do this, nor does the Take Over make it his turn. Complications or Dialog are often the result of a Take Over. Alternatively, Take Overs can allow players to avoid Complications if they desire.

Target: Any Component that is going to be effected as the result of a Complication is a Target.

Target Player: The player who Controls a Target Component is the Target Player and will roll the dice on behalf of those Targets.

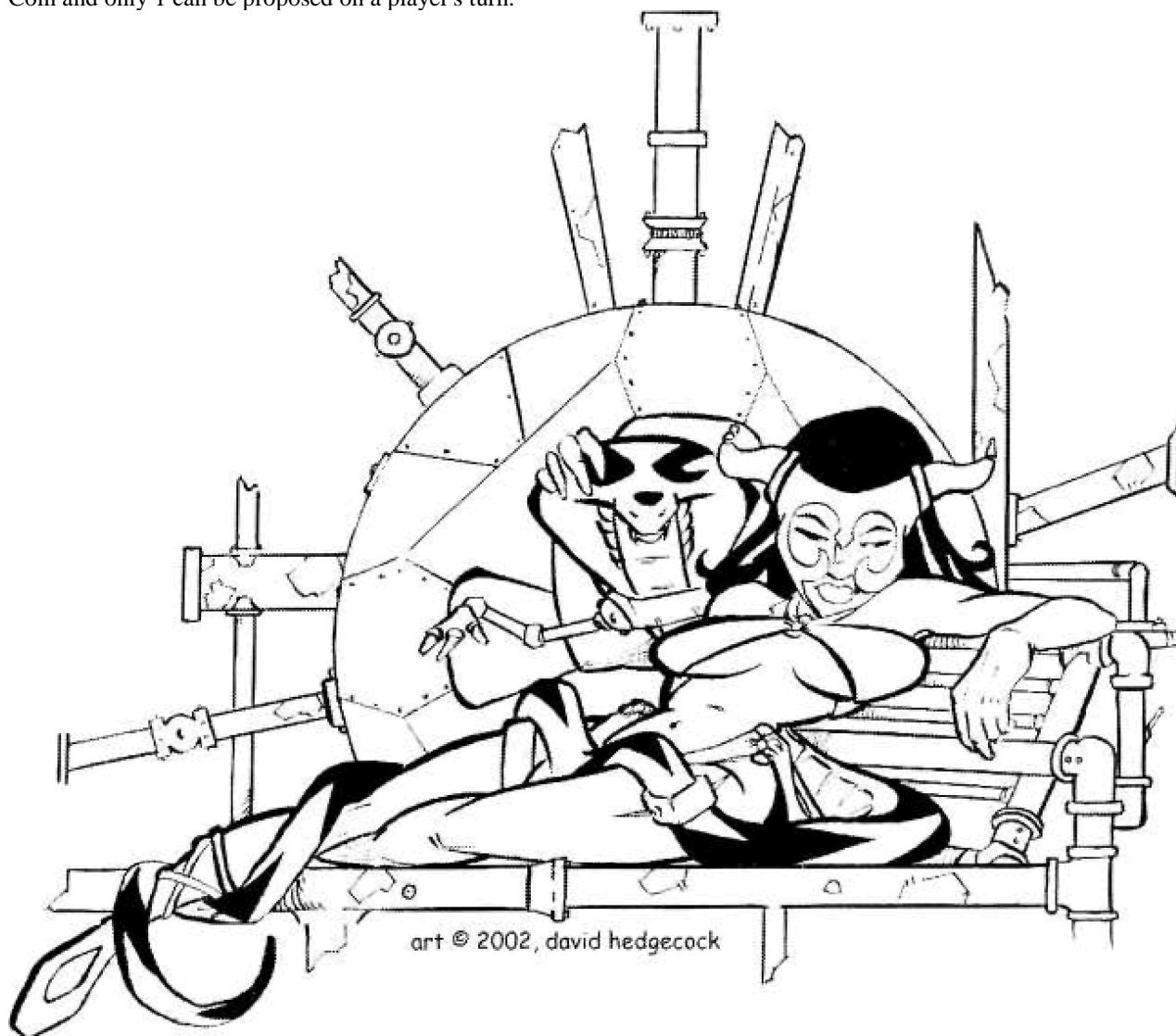
Tenets: Tenets are rules of the game. They can be Social Contract Issues, Story Elements, or Rules Gimmicks. They define how and what a group intends to play. Tenet's cost 1 Coin and only 1 can be proposed on a player's turn.

Traits: Traits are like adjectives which describe Components. The more Traits a Component has the more Important it is. Traits can also be Drawn on to provide dice during Complications. Traits cost 1 Coin

Wealth: A player's supply of Coins is called his Wealth. Players begin with a supply of Coins at the beginning of each game (typically 25), and this is replenished through Complications and Refreshment.

Wound Trait: A specific kind of Trait that is added to a Component to represent injury or damage of some kind. During the game Events involving the Component should be narrated to take the Wound Trait into account. During Complications the Wound Trait can be Drawn on to provide dice which hinder the Component if applicable. Wound Traits do increase Importance while present and can be healed / repaired by paying to Remove them (which reduces Importance).

Winner: The side in a Complication with the most Successes is the Winner. Sum the value of each of the Success Dice plus the value of any Edge Dice that weren't Successful. The total is the number of Coins the player draws from the Bank to narrate the outcome of the Complication.



The traitor. Lady Atasandre, with the snake she uses to deliver intelligence to the Slytheran High Command.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATIONS - ADDONS

Getting Started

Universalis is not a difficult game to play, but it can appear rather daunting at first. If you're a veteran role player you'll notice right away that most of the familiar places to begin (like character creation or how to make a skill roll) don't exist in Universalis. If you've never played a role playing game before you'll notice that the rules and game play aren't very similar to the traditional card and board games you may be most familiar with.

When it comes time to actually play the game for the first time and introduce a bunch of friends to it, it can be hard to know where to start. For this chapter I'll describe the method I've used over the last two years to introduce new players into the game. My method is to break the game up into stages, describe the basic core of each stage, but leave the more advanced or tangential parts for later. I'll structure this chapter kind of like a script. It's the sort of things I say at the table when teaching the game.

Where to begin? I start with what the game is about.

"Universalis is a game about creating stories. Every story needs a setting, characters, and plot. We'll be developing those as we play. Each of you count out 25 Coins from the Bank, there. Coins are the resource that gives you control over the story. Every character you create and everything you have those characters do will cost Coins. setting element or character you create, everything you have those characters do, and every place you have them go will cost Coins. The Coins are a way of regulating how much of the story any one person can tell at a time. Basically, every statement you make that establishes some fact about the story will cost 1 Coin.

"When you run low on Coins you're actually running low on the ability to influence the story, at least until you acquire more Coins. Everyone will get a few additional Coins periodically during the game but the best way to replenish a low supply is to introduce plot conflicts, obstacles, and complications into the story (usually on another player's turn). We'll get into that later."

Then I talk about the game preparation phase and facts.

"First we need to decide what kind of story we're going to be telling. Is it going to be an action adventure story, a romance, a mystery, a psychological thriller? Is the mood going to be dark and gritty, a light comedy, outrageously absurd humor? How strictly are we expecting the other players to abide by the conventions of the genre we're playing in? What's the setting? Is it going to be a science fiction story featuring space ships, or will it be set on an alien planet, or is it a future version of earth? Is it going to be fantasy, based in actual history, a western...?" I go on like this using examples of movies or TV shows until it's apparent everyone gets what we're talking about. Usually it just takes a couple.

"To do this we're going to go around the table and everyone is going to spend 1 Coin to add one element about the type of story we're going to tell. As I mentioned, anytime you make

a statement about something in the game it costs 1 Coin. Once you spend a Coin on something it becomes Fact. Facts are important when there is a disagreement among players about a statement someone made. Basically, anything anyone says about anything related to the story is subject to being challenged by one of the other players who doesn't like it or thinks they have a better idea. But once something is established as Fact it's more difficult to challenge it later.

"When a disagreement arises you discuss what you don't like and offer suggestions. If you can come to an agreement, great, play goes on. If you can't agree, then a full Challenge occurs where everybody spends Coins voting for the outcome they prefer. We'll talk more about that if it ever comes up, for now just be aware you can do that." Often this has been all I've ever said about Challenges for the whole game. Players just worked it out amongst themselves with Negotiation and never felt the need to call for the full bidding process.

"Ok, so, let's start collecting the elements of our story. I'll start and we'll go around clockwise however many times we need to. Once everyone feels they have a good idea what kind of story we'll be telling we'll move to the next part of the game. As we go along start thinking of a good opening scene, like the opening scene of a movie, something that will get our attention and give the story something to build on. Usually, once you get an idea for a good opening scene you have enough to work with and its time move on to actual play and get that scene started. Ok, here's my Coin, tonight we'll play a game that involves..."

Usually I try to keep my opening Tenets pretty basic for a first game so that there is a familiar genre or story style for players to latch on to. While Universalis can be used to do a story like Memento or Pulp Fiction, such play is best left for experienced players. For first time play I stick to convention and cliché (although depending on the group I may make a point to mention that this is for teaching purposes only).

If play has gone around a few times and after a little prompting no one seems like they're really getting an opening scene idea I'll grab one (again relying on cliché or scenes stolen right out of a movie) and bring this phase to a close. There are 3 keys to keep in mind during this phase.

- 1) If the other players are struggling with it you need to kill the prep quickly and get to the fun parts before they get discouraged and lose interest.
- 2) If the other players get into it full bore right away you want to try to avoid starting to actually play scenes in the middle of prep. If that's happening, they've obviously got it, so kill the prep and get right to the scene bidding.
- 3) I really prefer that one of the new players come up with the opening scene unless it just gets obvious that isn't going to happen. The reason is that, if I do the opening scene, it can get players thinking that I'm running the show and am in charge of how the story is supposed to go. Its best is when one of the players immediately grabs the opening scene and runs with it...shattering that expectation right from the start.

Setting up the Scene

"Ok, now we're going to get into scene by scene play. The whole game is played in scenes just like the scenes of a mov-

ie or TV show. All scenes in the game start by being framed, which just means establishing what's initially going on so the other players can visualize what's happening. All scenes have a beginning and end. Before each new scene begins three things happen: 1) everyone gets 5 new Coins. 2) We bid for the privilege of framing the new scene, and 3) the scene gets framed. Ok everyone take 5 Coins.

“Bidding for the scene works like this. Everyone, secretly take a number of Coins into your fist as your bid. If you have a really great idea for what to do with the next scene bid a lot of Coins. If you don't, bid few or none. Keep in mind that a big part of the overall direction of the story will come from what scenes are played so being the framer is a fairly influential thing. Since this is your first game I'd keep your bids to less than 8-10 Coins but I've seen players bid more than that once they got the hang of things.

“Bids will be revealed simultaneously and whoever wins will frame the first scene. Losers will get to take their Coins back. Winners will spend their Coins during the scene” I don't get into ties and all that stuff unless it happens. Usually this part goes pretty easy and if you're really lucky you have 2 players both bidding high, which means at least 2 people have some really good ideas for what to do and you can sit back and watch them go. I always bid 0 or 1 at this point unless I'm convinced I'm with a group that really requires additional hand holding before they'll try it themselves.

“Now that you've won the bid you have to frame the scene. You'll spend the Coins you just bid to do this (plus any others you want). Your job as scene framer is to set the stage for us. Tell us where the action is taking place, when it's taking place, and who's there. At this point, assuming the player doesn't require additional prompting, I generally will let them riff for about a paragraph or so. Then I'll stop them and say, “Ok, hold up a second and let me tell you how much all of that costs”

At that point I'll pick up the pencil and summarize what the player said, writing down statements he made that I can identify as Components and Traits. I indicate what specifically I'm writing down and the rough hierarchy I'm placing them in to give a sense of how the game stats are organized. “Congratulations, you just created your first game Components. The location you just named and the characters you just introduced are now officially part of the story. They exist and can be used and manipulated by any of the other players throughout the game. Those descriptive phrases you added about each of the characters are now Traits of those characters and cost 1 Coin apiece. .

“Anything can be a Trait. Even the character's name (if they're important enough to bother giving them one) is a Trait. Think of how you'd describe a person you know or a place you like to hang out to another friend. Just about any phrase you'd use can be treated like a Trait in the game. For a person this can include how smart they are, what they look like or even what their goals are, what they own, and who are their friends. If a Trait is supposed to be particularly important it can be purchased more than once.

“Any time one of these people, places, or things is brought into the story from now on, all of their Traits come with them and are considered Facts of the game. Note that you don't have to pay a Coin for every single detail. If it's just a minor descriptive feature that adds a bit of color but isn't really

important it's free. But if you didn't pay for it, it doesn't get written down and it isn't considered a Fact.

“Ok, now go ahead and begin to describe what happens. Give us a little bit about what's going on and what the characters are doing. When you think you've done enough, pass your turn and the next player will continue with the scene with those same characters.” After another paragraph or so I'll stop them and repeat the pricing routine, this time referring to Events instead of Components. Most players at this point are a little tentative and are fairly quick to pass. If the player seems like he's heading down the road of trying to tell the whole story in a single scene I'll point out how many Coins he's spending relative to how few Coins he got at the beginning of the scene; and suggest he let some of the other players help pay.

When it's the second player's turn to go, I introduce the concept of Control. “Great, before you get started let me tell you a little something about Control. Right now, everything in the scene belongs to <player 1>, not because he created them, but because he brought them into the scene. It never matters who created what, only who introduced it into the scene. You can't do anything with those Components, because you don't Control them. So here's what you can do: you can either introduce your own characters and other things into the scene and have them do their own thing, or attempt to have them do something to his characters...or you can pay 1 Coin and simply take Control of one of his characters so it becomes yours.”

At this point one can bring in the Dialog rules or Complication rules as needed. I will typically wait until it seems like people are grasping the nature of Control and the “paying Coins to do stuff” routine before bringing up the ability to start interrupting each other...especially if it looks like there are 1 or more shy or reserved players at the table. I definitely want them to get at least 1 turn in before other more vocal players start interrupting them. Also, unless someone specifically asks, I don't mention how to bring a scene to an end until it gets back to the first player and everyone's taken a stab at scene one.

For my own turn, the first time around I do one of two things. I either take the lead and create some interesting characters who have obvious sources of conflict (or create conflict for existing characters); or, if it seems like the players are getting the hang of it themselves, I try to hang back and let them go without much interference. As I'm taking my turn I'll take a handful of my own Coins and drop one in the bank every time there's something worth paying for. This gets the players into the habit of counting out the Coins as they're talking rather than stopping the narrative to do accounting, and also clues me in as recorder what they think is important enough to pay for. Once they get in the habit of that I'll interject just enough to keep everybody at about the same scale of what they're getting for 1 Coin.

Other Stuff

From there the game starts to take care of itself. All of the other subsystems of the game are brought up only when a player starts to do something for which those rules might apply, or if they express puzzlement about how to “do” certain things. The first one that usually arises is the Group Trait. Another early one tends to be Importance, depending on how eager the players are to start offing the characters. Using Traits to represent negative features like “He's been

shot” or giving the car a “Flat Tire” is often an epiphany moment for many players. I ll often make a point to do this one myself as an illustration if no one else has thought of it.

Once things get going and its clear that players are grasping the basics I ll start to introduce other elements, usually by doing them myself as an illustration or pointing out when they d be appropriate for someone else. These include things like Rules Gimmicks, Framing Scenes into the past or into the future, Mini Scenes, Fines, Fading to Black, cutting back to a previous scene. Any thing to highlight the flexibility the players have and to get them thinking of how to use the rules creatively.

More advanced techniques like Master and Sub Components or nesting complications I usually save until later unless the players seem in the mood to dive right into the deep end.

Universalis is actually pretty easy to play once the basics are grasped and we tried to draw on familiar concepts like scenes and spending Coins to make play pretty intuitive. This chapter provides a few tips I ve picked up over 2 years of running demo games for new players. If you use any of these successfully, or develop a few of your own, we d love to hear about it on our discussion forum at www.indie-rpgs.com.

Intent and Departure from Tradition

Universalis is not the first game to push the envelope of what role-playing games are. In fact, elements of the Universalis can be seen in games like Story Engine, Once Upon a Time and Baron Munchausen. Even so, it is quite different from any of those and vastly different from any traditional RPG. Many aspects of Universalis are so different that it has led some to question whether it is even a role-playing game at all. We think there is great opportunity for role-playing within Universalis, but it all depends on how you use it. More than anything, Universalis is a tool kit for the creation of stories. With it, you can create entire worlds and civilizations to whatever level of detail you desire. You can populate those worlds with a cast of characters limited only by your imagination and the needs of the story; and you can concentrate on defining only those aspects of the world that are important to that story.

The plot of the game is entirely created and motivated by the players. Other games in the past have used various mechanisms to give players a degree of control over the story. "Hero Points" as a way of cheating death, or "Drama Points" used to achieve some cinematic effect, are examples of granting limited power of this kind to players. Other games use "Plot Points" to give players a great deal of dramatic control over the course of a games events. Some even empower players to describe the entire resolution of a conflict in whatever manner they choose. Universalis goes further and puts the entire story in the hands of the players. Not only what the characters want to achieve and how they will achieve it, but also what their enemies are doing and what obstacles theyll have to overcome along the way as well. All of it (including everything normally reserved for the Game Master only) is player created, player developed, and player driven.

There is no pre-established setting. While many games are designed to be generic in that they can be used with a variety of different settings, Universalis can be played literally without defining any setting at all in advance. While it is possible to play Universalis using already published settings for inspiration, or predefining a few features; the game is at its most

revolutionary when players sit around a table for the first time with no characters and no clear idea of even what sort of game is about to be played. Everything in Universalis is under your control as a player: the setting, the genre, various genre conventions; even the theme, mood, situation, and plot are all decided upon and moved forward by player interaction, collaboration, and even competition. Every mountain range, every city, every NPC, every monster, every mission, every powerful evil empire is totally invented by you and your friends as you are playing. Even the characters in the story will be created "on the fly" as play progresses. Universalis rules are designed to promote the creation of a good story, and a good story can be told about any place and any situation.

There is also no Game Master. Almost all traditional RPGs, and even most non-traditional ones, rely on a Game Master. The Game Master is the one who does not play an individual character himself but rather controls the game world and everyone else in it. In Universalis the GMs powers arent just shared with the players, theyre totally ceded. Players have all of the control, all of the power, and do all of the decision making. As players, you will decide where the characters of the story are going and what manner of obstacles they will find when they get there. You will decide the nature of the adventure, who the enemies are, and what those enemies are plotting. You will decide the reward for success and the price of failure. You alone have absolute power. Essentially, every player is a Game Master and Coins are a measure of your authority.

But dont be fooled into thinking there is no game to be played, that with absolute power there will be no suspense and no challenge. Indeed the opposite is true. For while it is true that you have enormous power to influence the world and everything in it, so do each of the other players. Each of them will have their own ideas of what to do, and where to go, and what should be found there. Instead of several players trying to unravel the twists and turns of a single GMs story you have several players trying to unravel the twists and turns of several GMs stories. You cant do everything your way. You can try, but then youll quickly run out of Coins and hence out of power. The collaboration, competition, and even subterfuge of play provides its own very powerful form of suspense and challenge.

But dont take our word for it. Head on over to the [Play Examples](#) page and see for yourself the kind of stories that have been told using Universalis.

Coins and Currency

Every RPG has its system of rewards. What kind of activity in the game earns a player a reward? What form does that reward take? What can that reward be used for? In many traditional fantasy RPGs for example, characters are rewarded for defeating monsters. The reward takes the form of experience points and treasure. Experience points are used to make the character tougher by increasing his skills or level; and treasure is used to make the character tougher by giving him powerful items or the gold to buy powerful items. The effect is to render the character better able to defeat more monsters and thus earn more experience and treasure.

This circular system of rewards functions as the games currency, or money. In the real world people pursue different ways of earning money, and then spend that money on the

various products and services that are available. While playing the game, players will pursue various ways of earning game rewards, and then spend that reward in whatever manner the game makes available. The games flavor text may say that the game is "about" something. But it is the system of rewards provided that determines how it will really be played.

The core mechanic of *Universalis* is its system of rewards. Beginning with the thought that these rewards function like a games currency, *Universalis* uses Coins as its primary resource. They are spent to gain dramatic control over the story and all aspects of the game world itself. The entire game world is available for player creation and manipulation: geography, economics, politics, religion, and the people and creatures who populate it. Likewise the plot will be written, developed, and negotiated by the players through the mechanism of Coins.

The spending of Coins creates an entire Coin based economy to the game. As a player, you will notice that your play is different you are "wealthy" than when you are "strapped for cash". You will learn to keep a close eye on the "money supply" of the game and who is currently rich and who is currently poor. This economy is the driving factor behind the entire game. All game mechanics are essentially 1) a means of spending Coins, 2) a means of acquiring Coins, or 3) a means of settling disputes (in the absence of a Game Master) about how Coins are spent or acquired.

It is important to understand what Coins represent in *Universalis*, which may be most easily explained by what they are not. Coins are not a literal measure of in game character wealth, nor are they "Hero Points" which allow characters to achieve extraordinary feats. They are not a measure of Action Points, or who is more powerful. In fact, they are not associated with individual characters in any way.

What they are is very simply clout. Players as a group have ultimate authority over every single aspect of the game. Coins are a measure of how that authority is currently distributed among those players. You achieve control over the world and story by spending Coins. Your current Wealth is your store of potential authority for the future. This has great impact on play. If you spend a lot of Coins in a brief amount of time you'll have had tremendous impact over events and the scope of the world. However, your impact in the future will be more limited because you will now have fewer Coins relative to your fellows. Horde Coins in order to have decisive control in the future (enough to win Challenges or Complications with ease) and you'll find a large part of the story has already been told, and a large part of the world defined without you. Balancing this dynamic is a key to play.

Universalis can be compared to a team of scriptwriters working on a TV show episode. Everyone has ideas of what they'd like to see in the show or how a scene should play out and many ideas are tried and discarded and batted around for commentary. What *Universalis* does is superimpose a game structure on this collaborative process, using Coins to measure each player's ability to contribute.

The Importance of the Social Contract

Before the game begins, players are encouraged to establish a Social Contract, that is to get a consensus about individual play style preferences and expectations on the record in ad-

vance. Chapter Two mentions several features that can be included in a Social Contract. The Contract is an explicit acknowledgement that every group has its own dynamic. Everyone has their own preferences and their own expectations. They have their own ways of dealing with situations and with other players.

Preferences are a collection of things a player likes and dislikes. Often times if a game does not fit within a player's set of preferences there is not much to be done. Everyone is different, and everyone is entitled to like what they like. This means *Universalis* may not be for everyone. However, most of the time, preferences are flexible. There is usually a lot of gray area between features players insist on having and things they refuse to play with. This is where expectations come in.

Expectations are what a player believes he will be getting when he sits down to play. In any game, if a player's expectations aren't being fulfilled they are going to be dissatisfied with the experience. However, much of the disappointment can be avoided if players are clear about what they can expect from the game right at the start. *Universalis* offers a game that is unlike almost any other RPG out there. We think it is a damn good game: a lot of fun and a powerful story creating tool kit. However, if a player comes to the table expecting seafood and instead gets served a thick steak, he will likely be disappointed, regardless of how good a steak it was. The Social Contract is the way to make sure everyone knows what's on the menu. Items to discuss in a Social Contract include:

Outside Distractions:

Some groups have no problems playing a game amidst many distractions. Other groups have very strict bans on things like cell phones, televisions, Monty Python jokes; or discussing sports, a favorite movie, or a new computer game. Some groups forbid food and beverages at the gaming table, and establish set break periods where the game halts at a predetermined time for such activities. One of the first parameters that should be established by any playgroup is its policy on distractions. A rambunctious, talkative group with lots of out of game camaraderie will present a very different play experience than one where such things are banned and total focus on the game is demanded. Players expecting one will be very disappointed if presented with the other.

Table Talk:

Related to this is the idea of table talk. During a player's turn is it encouraged, permissible, discouraged, or even forbidden for other players to offer suggestions, reminders, or threaten retribution to the player taking his turn? Some groups will find that the story is more collaborative if collaboration is allowed at all times. Players can actually work together to help another player craft his turn in the best way possible. Other groups feel that such efforts stifle individual creativity and lead to bland predictable stories. Still others simply find that it's distracting, promotes too much chaos at the table, or allows powerful personalities to dominate play. Some will permit a suggestion or two if a player seems stumped but discourage it in general. Games will function much more smoothly if a group's attitude towards table talk is identified before hand.

Game Rule Priorities:

How fast and loose vs. meticulous and detailed does the group as a whole desire to be with regards to game rules? Some groups will fall into the fast and loose category. They may get so absorbed with slinging around cool descriptions and clever plot twists that they forget to keep track of exactly how many Coins they're supposed to have spent. Later, when they realize this, they might be satisfied to simply say "yeah, that would have been something like 6 Coins or thereabouts". Other groups will want to be far more meticulous in their accounting. They will explicitly cost out every detail and if the player is a Coin short, they'll expect him to cough up another one to make good. Either method can make for an entertaining game, but all players should be on the same page as to what to expect.

Pacing:

Universalis is a game focused on the creative process in which brainstormed ideas serve to shape the game world's reality. The ability to interrupt another player's turn to add details of your own, is a cornerstone of game play. Some individuals are not as quick as others at this and prefer a more deliberate pace where they have time to carefully think each item out and frame it "just so". Others are brainstorming dynamos spitting out ideas by the bushel. If your group includes a mix of these types, players should discuss in advance how to keep the "rapid fire" players from dominating play and leaving the "deliberate" players behind, and conversely how to keep the "rapid fire" players from getting bored with a more "deliberate" pace.

Adherence to Conventions:

An important item to establish up front is how rigidly you plan on adhering to Game Structure decisions about genre and theme and the like. If the genre is one of Dark Horror, how much "humor" or silliness will be tolerated before the Challenge mechanic is used to drag the story back on course. If the genre is a gritty realistic police drama, how much tolerance will there be for over the top kung fu escapades and open flaunting of authority. Some groups couldn't care less and are willing to follow the story wherever it takes them. Other groups will demand players adhere to the setting and genre conventions as they've been established. Spelling this out up front, will save a lot of headaches and Challenges later on.

Level of Simulation:

Universalis gives players a great deal of power to author and direct the story as they see fit. In this sense a player is much like a screen play writer bound only by his imagination and his budget. However, he is also bound by his ability to "sell" his ideas to the other players. When engaged in a scene, should players attempt to use their authority to ensure that the actions in the scene are "realistic" and reasonable? Is verisimilitude important to the game? Or are players free to be as outrageous and over the top as they desire? This is yet another issue that is almost sure to cause a great deal of conflict within a group if all of the players are not in accord. Many groups will expect the players to be self-limiting. That is to say, each player voluntarily limits his own power to alter the world to what makes sense or is reasonable given that world's reality.

It is not expected that players will go down this list item by item and sign a written contract. In fact, if you're part of a well established group that has been playing together for a long time, you were probably able to recognize where your group already fits as you read through each item. Most likely many of the issues above have been tacitly assumed within your group for some time simply as a result of being familiar with each other. You may, however, have noticed an area or two in which there is some friction because players have different priorities. Or if you're part of a new group, you may not have a clear idea of what your fellow players' preferences are.

Simply being aware that these differences (and many others) exist and that not everyone in your group will share the same view on them as you do can go a long way towards smoothing tensions. Often a simple discussion about an issue can resolve it before it becomes a major source of friction. These principles can be adopted to any game (or really any social activity at all).

Universalis, however, goes one step further. It allows (and encourages) social contract issues to be introduced as a rule in the game. Items like "no food at the table", or "no chit chat while a player is taking his turn", or "make sure we account for our Coin expenditures exactly" can be proposed as a Tenet of the game. If not Challenged by the other players it is now a rule of the game that the other players are expected to abide by and can be used as part of the Challenge or even Fine mechanic if necessary.

More Details on Story Elements

Genre:

A category of literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content. Genre is often one of the first choices that will be made in a game of Universalis. Universalis is truly a universal game, games can be about anything. Genre will help to define the style, form, and content of the game world. It will be the first indicator of what is or is not appropriate to create and do in the game. Genre conventions are those aspects of a genre that are recognizable characteristics of that particular genre. They may either be definable or too subtle for definition, but they are what make one genre feel different from another. As an example compare the detectives Sherlock Holmes and Poirot with Rick and AJ Simon and Thomas Magnum. Obviously there is a noticeable difference in feel between the adventures of Holmes and Poirot and those of Simon and Simon and Magnum PI. These differences are in the genre conventions.

At the macro level, genre encompasses major literary divisions of the type of categories you might find in a bookstore. Romance, is separate from fantasy which is separate from westerns which are separate from science fiction. When someone in a game of Universalis declares "tonight we are playing a Murder Mystery", he is setting the genre of the game. Other common genres might include: cyberpunk, horror, anime, spy thriller, kung fu action, Hollywood action, or something else more exotic.

At the sub level, genre can be broken down further. Fantasy, for instance might be more specifically defined as "Swords and Sorcery" (ala Howard and Liebler), "High Fantasy" (ala Tolkien and Jordan), Dark Fantasy (ala Moorcock), or even "Historical Fantasy". Science Fiction might be based on near

future hard science, or it might be a sweeping space opera. Westerns might be about cavalry and Indians, or cowboys, or pioneers, or prospectors or gunslingers.

We suggest that when a player first introduces a genre he specify only the macro level genre leaving the sub genre to be specified on a later turn or by another player.

Theme:

An implicit or recurrent idea. What a piece of writing or artistic work is about Themes are useful tools to ascribe to a game of Universalis. They don't so much determine plot as they suggest what the purpose of the overall plot should be. Themes can generally be summed in just a sentence or two. A game's theme might be about "the struggle against tyranny", "the search for redemption", "vengeance", "vindication", "survival", "the struggle to maintain tradition in the face of change", "the descent of greatness into decadence", "the corrupting influence of power", "the loss of innocence". These are just samples, but hopefully they've sparked some ideas of your own. Players are encouraged to frame scenes and Originate Complications (explained in Chapter 6) which serve to illustrate the story's theme. This will help give focus to the story and help keep it from being simply a collection of events happening to a group of characters.

Universalis is a game about telling stories. Theme can be thought of as the reason you are telling this particular story. Besides the entertainment value, what message might you try to convey, what avenues of the psyche might be explored. What hidden moral might be pursued. What commentary are you making about the nature of life. Plot is a tool through which you will explore theme. Theme is the reason you are taking the journey.

Premise:

A proposition antecedently supposed or proved; a basis of argument. A proposition stated or assumed as leading to a conclusion

In his seminal work, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, Lajos Egri introduced the world of theatre to the idea of premise. Premise is very similar to theme but to Egri it is much more powerful, decisive and less open to misinterpretation. The goal of any good play must be to prove its premise and all aspects of the play must be focused on leading the audience to that conclusion. Offered as examples are premises such as: "great love defies even death", "Blind trust leads to destruction, "Jealousy destroys itself and the object of its love".

To Egri, premise trumps both situation and emotion. "No idea, and no [unusual] situation was ever strong enough to carry you through to its logical conclusion without a clear-cut premise". "No emotion ever made, or ever will make, a good [story] if we do not know what kind of forces set emotion going". Both situation and emotion are necessary but a story only becomes great if these are both focused on proving a premise.

The idea of premise must go through some alterations if it is to be applied to role-playing. In the theatre, the playwright is separate from the audience. The playwright must be convinced of the truth of his premise and must do all in his power to prove that premise to the audience. Role playing games are far more interactive, and in games like Universalis the players are both playwright and audience.

The Forge has been the leading proponent of adapting and applying the concept of premise to Narrativist RPGs. The adaptation takes the form of altering the idea of premise as a truth to be proven to one of a truth to be uncovered and discovered through play. In other words, in a role playing game, the premise is not a statement of fact but rather a question or inquiry. The answer to the question is explored through the game and the results of game play.

For role playing purposes then, the above example premises might be restated in the following manner: "Can great love survive in the face of great opposition and even death?"; "Can anyone, even family, ever be trusted completely and without question?"; or "At what point does strong desire stop being a motivator and start being self destructive?" The answers, rather than being decided by the playwright (GM) and proved to the audience (players), are instead unknown until the players decide for themselves based on the results of their role-playing experience what lesson is to be learned.

Narrative Premise is an exceedingly sophisticated role-playing technique. It is not one that will be mastered easily. It is also certainly not required for a role-playing game to be enjoyable. But it is a technique that can turn an enjoyable experience into a truly powerful and moving one. Egri indicates that it is not necessary to establish the premise first, that it is possible to have the sketch of a story in mind, and from that derive a suitable premise. Likewise in Universalis, premise may be left until a suitable one shows itself in the story before being introduced as a Game Structure element. For maximum effectiveness, however, if it is to be used at all, it should be introduced early on and all players should endeavor to stay focused on it thereafter.

Situation:

The relative position or combination of circumstances at a certain moment in time.

A critical, problematic, or unusual state of affairs.

A particular or important complex of affairs at a given point in the action of a narrative

If theme or premise is the driving factor behind the meaning and importance of plot, then situations are the specific facts leading up to it. Situation is what gets the story going. It provides the starting place from which players can begin to narrate. Most episodes of *The Twilight Zone* began with an introduction something like: "Picture this, a small town. A town, like any other town in middle America; and a day like any other day. Until today" These opening remarks defined the situation that was going to be explored in that episode.

Traditionally, situation has been the focus (often the exclusive focus) of RPGs. Many a game campaign begins simply by the GM framing a situation and the players deciding how to react to it. Similarly, games of Universalis must have a situation. There must be some starting point to focus players attention and act as a catalyst for the rest of the action. Universalis can also be played exclusively as focused on situation created by one player and responded to by another. Hopefully some of this section will have offered ideas on how to incorporate other story elements into the game as well..

Situations may simply be a jumping off point from which the players begin before taking the story in any direction desired. This is often a fun and enjoyable means of playing. However, situation can also be used to provide an overreaching story

arc to the campaign. The direction of the entire game might be established by the resolution of a specific initial situation.

Setting:

the time, place, and circumstances in which something occurs or develops.

Setting is often closely tied to Genre and Situation. Setting does not refer to a specific location but more to the period, style, and color of the story that will pervade all of the locations. For example the setting might be that the story takes place on a stark, harsh prison planet, or in a fairy tale kingdom amidst the clouds, or in 17th century France, or in Texas right after the fall of the Alamo.

If a player has a specific location in mind that he wants to create during the Game Preparation Phase (see Chapter Two), he can do so, but only after a setting has been accepted.

Note that it is entirely possible for players to use an established and well known setting for their game of Universalis. They may model the setting after a favorite movie, a series of novels, or the setting of another RPG. If this is done, many of the genre convention and mood choices will already be made. There are three basic ways of using a pre existing setting in Universalis.

The first is the "Inspired by" method. This method most closely resembles a standard game of Universalis in that the game starts with no Components (see Chapter Four) being predefined. Rather the players play as they would any Universalis game but take their cues from the established setting. Locations and characters and organizations and such can be created when needed and loosely based on the inspirational setting.

The second method is "full conversion". In this case a selection of key locations, characters, and other important features of an existing world are taken and defined in terms of Universalis Traits and Facts before game play actually begins. Play begins with a substantial number of Components already in existence and already defined according to their actual capabilities in the converted setting.

The third way is actually highly encouraged, and that is to use a previous session of Universalis as the existing setting. In other words each game can continue to build on the world created and defined before. Players may wish to move to a slightly different geographical location, fast forward to different point in history, or even use the events of the previous game as part of the legends and mythology of the new one. In this way playgroups can write their own trilogies and decologies of stories.

Mood:

A conscious state of mind or predominant feeling. A distinctive atmosphere or context .

Mood very well may be the most pervasive story element in Universalis. Players who select and agree to a mood (especially if the Social Contract calls for it to be strictly enforced) are influencing virtually every scene and Complication that will take place during the game. This even includes creating the elements of the world itself, as visual imagery and the appearance of those elements goes a long way towards establishing mood.

Mood is often closely tied to genre. In fact, mood may well be part of the conventions of a particular genre. Mood is what

sets a police drama like Hill Street Blues apart from a show like CHiPs. Mood is what made Miami Vice a sensation. It is the dark and brooding angst ridden mood of neo-gothism that made Vampire: The Masquerade one of the most widely played RPGs of all time.

Games can be full of in your face attitude, wit, or even silly. Despite similarities in genre, clearly the mood of Rush Hour is much different from that of The Dead Pool. The mood of Star Wars is much different from that of Blade Runner. Mood often evokes a particular emotional response: despair, humor, hardness, grit, hyperactivity, and silliness are just some examples. Stories told with a consistent mood throughout will be much more memorable and less disjointed than those whose mood fluctuates widely. A player expecting a game of serious soul searching will be greatly disappointed by a rambling farce and vice versa.

Realism:

Fidelity to nature, fact, and reality and to accurate representation without abstraction

The level of realism is another facet that players should agree upon. Few factors are as likely to cause disharmony among players than differing priorities regarding realism. Some players get a great amount of enjoyment from establishing the precise differences and effects on game play between a 9mm Beretta and a .45 Automatic. Some desire an exact accounting of the money that characters spend and the items they have on them at the time. Some want to know the acceleration limits of a sports car, and precisely what handling penalty is incurred for a wet road. Some players desire to establish how a suit of plate mail protects differently from a suit a chain mail when faced with a heavy bludgeoning weapon. It may become important to them to see these differences reflected in the actual Events and dice mechanics of the game.

Other players care little for the real world statistics of what, to them, are merely story props. A gun shoots until its dramatically interesting to run out of bullets, nobody dies unless there is a good story reason for them to do so. Travel times are based on the need to arrive in the nick of time not on encumbrance and terrain features. MacGyver really can make a bomb out of bubble gum and a paperclip, but only when its dramatic to do so. So what if Arnold walks calmly out in front of a dozen trained soldiers who all have automatic weapons and doesnt suffer a scratch they hes the star right?

The game of Universalis plays most smoothly with the latter sort of attitude towards realism than the former. However, given the level of authority players have over the game direction, it is within their power to ensure the choices and decisions they make adhere to whatever standard of realism they choose. Deliberate use of advantageous and disadvantageous Traits can be made to illustrate the performance differences between a Ferrari and a Corvette, or a grenade and a stick of TNT, or a masonry wall and a steel reinforced concrete barrier. Rules Gimmicks, (which are basically player decided customized house rules) allow for the establishment of effects like fire vs. concussion, impaling vs. slashing, or anything else players can imagine. It should be noted here, that while the core rules of Universalis do permit this sort of realism, they do not offer any details or guidance on how to accomplish it. It is assumed that players who prefer a high level of realism normally play games that provide a high degree of realism and thus already have experience with how things should or shouldnt work in game terms. We leave it to those

players to manipulate the rules of Universalis to create the effects they desire.

Role:

A part played or a character assumed with a socially expected pattern of behavior determined by an individual's status in the story.

All Components in Universalis have a role. Role is the first Trait that must be defined for any Component. For most Components Role is pretty self-explanatory a gun has a Role of "gun" (or perhaps some specific model of gun). This discussion will concentrate on the roles of characters in Universalis.

All stories involve characters and all characters have a role to play in the story. Role indicates (although it doesn't restrict) much of what the character's purpose in the story is. A role can indicate an occupation like "battle-hardened ex-soldier" or simply carry story weight like "scrappy sidekick". Roles can be virtually anything, but every character should have one. Example roles include: wizened old hermit, wise old mentor, hard-boiled hero, wise cracking assistant, or buddy partner. However, Universalis supports a wide range of less clichéd roles as well. A character may be the ghost of another character's father, or even a favorite pet. In one of our play test sessions a character was given the role of a sentient starship. Villains, of course, also have roles to play. Even lesser characters have a role to play in the story, even if it's only as "Thug # 3"

Role is always the first Trait to be assigned to a character. The reason for this is to define a narrative territory for a character that other players should act within when controlling that character. Since you will be manipulating the game world and story line primarily (although not exclusively) through characters and their Traits, a character's place in that world and story will heavily influence the nature of those manipulations. The type of narrative you as a player will create while controlling the "Lantern-jawed hero", will be decidedly different from that which you create while controlling "Joey, the eager boy scout". Roles are crucial to establishing what sort of story involvement the character should have. Players should use these when narrating the story as guidelines for what sort of activities they should be engaging in and how much "camera time" should be focused on each character. Sidekicks, may periodically have the story focused on them (as is often done in television) but by and large the primary story should be being told about the protagonist.

If a player has an idea for a specific character at this point it can be Created now, but only after a Role has been established for him.

Using Challenges to Regulate the Game

In a game with no Game Master, one might wonder who decides what is appropriate and what isn't? Who decides, amongst many players competing to put forth their own view of how the story should progress, which vision gets realized? Who decides when a player's "creative interpretations" of the rules is spoiling the gaming experience for others? In Universalis that's where the Challenge mechanic comes in.

First it should be noted that the Challenge mechanic goes hand in hand with the Social Contract and the selection of

appropriate Story Elements in the Game Preparation Phase. If those things are complete, then most players should already be on the same page about what to expect and what is considered appropriate. If these steps are skipped, then everyone will be running off in their own directions and may not understand or appreciate the directions of others. While this sort of totally free form and chaotic game play can be fun (and can also result in some of the most powerfully creative and bizarre games you can imagine), it too is best established in advance that this is how the group intends to play. Giving some thought to Social Contract issues and complete set of Story Elements will go a long way to avoiding unnecessary Challenges because your players will already have a good idea about what is likely to be Challenged and what isn't.

The importance of the Negotiation phase of a Challenge can not be stressed enough. By far, the majority of Challenges in the game should never make it to the bidding stage. Most Challenges are the result of a player taking a dislike to something another player is doing, or thinking they can do a better job themselves. Often times, the acting player will be willing to make adjustments to what they are doing to enhance the enjoyment of their fellow players. They may actually agree that the other player's idea is a better one than their own and will welcome the suggestion. They may just be willing to compromise for no other reason than the expectation of similar consideration in the future. Sometimes they may even convince the Challenging player to drop the Challenge because their way is better. If any of these are true, no bidding ever needs to occur.

Since Challenges do not require an Interruption of a player's turn, most of them can be quite informal. In fact, many playgroups already engage in some degree of kibitzing and friendly suggestions to other players in all of their games. They may not even realize that this sort of activity is part of a formal Challenge mechanic in Universalis.

Only if absolutely no accord can be reached do you have to resort to bidding, and even then a quick straw poll may be enough to estimate who the likely winner of such bidding would be, causing one side to concede. Using Coins for the bidding is a way of causing you to put your money where your mouth is. If your opinion on a Challenge item isn't strong enough to be worth paying for, it isn't worth delaying the game for either. Allowing all players to participate in the bidding ensures that the preferences of the entire audience are represented.

While the most basic use of the Challenge mechanic is to prevent players from violating the rules or agreed upon Story Elements, it should not be thought of as purely confrontational. In fact, the Challenge is a powerful collaborative tool enabling all players to ring in on how they'd like to see a particular Component or plot point developed. Negotiation backed by bidding is designed to allow the players to achieve consensus even if they don't all agree on every detail.

Fines should not be overlooked as a tool either. It is a tool of last resort, but one that fills a very important function in the game. Unlike Challenges it does not employ Coins so there is no bias in favor of the rich. The Fine mechanic gives every player equal voice as an audience member to vote their displeasure (or lack of displeasure) with a player's behavior.

The actual penalty is a modest one. The primary use of Fines is as a gauge of player sentiment. If a player repeatedly engages in play behavior that other players find dissatisfying,

the first step should be Negotiations, moving on to full bidding Challenges if necessary. If neither of these has the desired effect, a Fine, especially one universally levied by all other players, can serve as clear and unmistakable notice that the behavior is not appreciated. Conversely, if there is a behavior that you find intolerable, but when you calls for a Fine the other players do not vote in favor of it, you now clearly realize that your distaste is not shared by the rest of the group and it is a behavior you'll have to live with if you're to continue playing. What the Fine mechanic does is serve as a formal adjustment to a player's expectations. A player who expected to play a certain way is told in no uncertain terms that the other players have different expectations. A Fine that is not supported by the other players informs the initiating player that the activity is acceptable to them and that he is the one who must adjust his expectations.

Through the Challenge and Fine mechanic, Social Contract items can be recognized, addressed, and ruled upon during game play until all players are familiar with the expectations of the group.

The Purpose of Complications

In our [Discussion Forum](#), Ed Heil asked: "One thing that seems vital that is a little hard to get into is exactly what Complications are for and how they work. They're clearly at or near the heart of the game, but they have no exact parallel in any other RPG"

Complications are indeed a key facet of the game. Here are some of the ways in which we've used them. If you've found some other good uses for them, [let us know](#).

An idea starter:

Sometimes you have a scene with a lot of potential but you don't have a clear idea what direction to take it, or how best to spice it up. One way of doing this is by Originating a Complication. The act of Drawing upon Traits (and which Traits get Drawn on) can provide a lot of interesting details to the action when it comes time to resolve the Complication. Often whole new branching story ideas can come from how players responded to an otherwise innocuous Complication.

An alternative to Challenges:

Complications can be used to guide a story another player is telling in a desired direction without resorting to Challenging that player or Interrupting them completely. Rather, a Complication can be used to introduce elements into a scene and force other players to react to those elements.

To introduce a certain degree of challenge or difficulty:

Sometimes in the course of a narrative a player may be having the hero perform all kinds of high flying actions (or even not so high flying). At some point you may want to interject a very traditional concept of "hey let's make him roll to see if he succeeds at that). This is where the Obstacle Complication comes in. When another player is narrating an Event and you want to interject an element of uncertainty into the outcome you can Originate an Obstacle Challenge. The twist is that the roll doesn't determine success / failure of the Event directly. Rather it determines which player (or combination of players) gets to decide how the Event happens.

Another means of adding an element of suspense to the game:

Which player wins will often make a big difference in the direction the story goes. That this is determined with a dice mechanic can add an element of unknown and surprise.

As a way of generating new Coins:

Complications are one of only two ways to earn additional Coins in the game. The interesting detail of how this works is that it encourages you to base Complications off of elements that already exist in the story (which helps maintain consistency). It does this because of the way Complications work. The more dice you roll, the more likely you are to get more Coins out. Also the Winner statistically should average 1.5 times the Coin output of the Loser and the more dice you roll, the more likely you are to win. So obviously, more dice in should lead to more Coins out. There are 2 ways of getting more dice. One way is to buy them at 1 Coin each. However, if you are paying Coins for most of the Dice in your Pool, your net profits will likely be slim (or even a loss if you wind up Losing the roll). So the better way is to get most of your dice from Traits that are already present in the scene. Someone else paid to put those Traits there (or you Introduce a Component that has many useable Traits for just 1 Coin) and you capitalize on their presence.

If you can arrange a situation where you are rolling a lot of dice for which you paid very little: a) you are likely to reap great profits allowing you to pocket those Coins you earn in excess of those you use to bring the Complication to a satisfying resolution, and b) the Complication is likely to be consistent with the story being told because it was built from elements that already exist in the scene.

And, in point of fact, I find them to just be flat out fun.

Traits, Challenges and Enforcing Story Logic

Sometimes a game of Universalis can get somewhat chaotic. Because the story is driven forward by the input of several different people things can from time to time start to look a bit piecemeal. Different players can have different ideas about what the main character is like, or even who is the main character. As a result the story can start to drift to and fro as if buffeted by gale force winds every time a new player takes a turn.

Sometimes this can be a lot of fun. Some of the most entertainingly bizarre games I've played have been when people just cut loose and go where ever the brainstorming madness takes them. However, other times this sort of play is inappropriate and may detract from some players' enjoyment of the game. Universalis provides many ways to bring focus and vision to the story, this essay is going to concentrate on one of the more subtle, and I've found, underused methods: Traits.

Every player knows what effect Traits have in Complications. They are a source of free dice to roll. They have a noticeable and measurable impact. But what about outside of Complications? Are they just words on a sheet meant to serve only as a storage place for dice?

In a recent thread on our discussion forum, veteran player Tony Irwin explained how to use Traits as a powerful tool for articulating your vision of a character and how to see that that vision is followed by the other players.

Tony Irwin:

I've seen people use characters/components that were central to the story, in ways that were upsetting to others; either because they were using them purely to win coins (and the coins weren't even being used to fund anything) or they were using them with disregard for the story logic that other players took for granted.

What we came up with was that Traits should be viewed not just as "situational modifiers" either giving or removing a dice, but that clever selection of Traits can be used to enforce story logic. For example:

I give Frankie the trait "loves Johnnie"

Now I get a die when Frankie is protecting Johnnie or I can probably remove a die from someone if they try to make Frankie attack Johnnie.

But what people forget is that any time someone uses one of these characters in a way that seems to defy that Trait, I can Challenge for it. I just say "Frankie loves Johnnie, so Frankie wouldn't do that". My coins are worth 2 for every 1 of theirs. People forget that I can Challenge the Complication before it ever gets as far as building dice pools.

Players often forget that all Traits are automatically Facts] You just declare a fact "Frankie loves Johnnie" or "Norgoth feels betrayed by the zombies" or even "Norgoth is slow to anger", and now you have the option to enforce some story logic when people want to introduce Complications [or just narrate something contradictory]

The thing about facts is that they're very obviously control mechanisms for your vision of the story. As soon as you introduce one, everyone (that I play with) starts thinking "How will this affect me and my interests".

I'm going to share a really sneaky secret...

Bid ten coins to get to Frame the scene. Use however many coins you need to get some basic stuff in the scene. Then use the rest of those coins to create Facts that complement and supplement each other. No one can Interrupt while you're framing the scene until you've initiated an Event. Another time to do this is after winning a Complication when you get your uninterrupted opportunity to spend the Coins you won.

Because your Facts supplement each other if someone later says "Here's a coin to get rid of the Frankie loves Johnny fact" then you've still got 3 other Facts as a basis to challenge them doing that.

e.g.

Frankie loves Johnny, He was her man, She paid 100 hundred dollars for Johnny's new suit of clothes, She loves her man

[Now you've got a key relationship in the story sewn up tight, and can use the Challenge rule with the double Coin bonus if other players try to violate this relationship]. All that people can do is to Challenge your Facts one by one as you introduce them (if you can even slip the first one by them then you've pretty much ensured you're in there to stay unless the whole table turns on you), or have a big vote to penalize you if they feel you're "at it" and Fine you coins. (I've seen that happen).

Yeah people can, and will, still take Control of these characters [and use them in ways you didn't expect] but at least now you can pressure them to make sure that their Complications [and narrations] are appropriate to what you envision for the characters and so aren't disruptive to the game.

Once we discovered how to generate lots of Coins [with big Complications] we were very worried that we'd broken the system but soon we discovered ways to balance that (and balance it just by playing the rules as written - no Rules Gimmicks required).

Facts really changed the way I look at Complications. Previously I'd be going into a Complication thinking "How many Coins can I win and keep for my little bank". Now I actually think in terms of "Exactly how many Coins do I need to win in this in order to get my Facts (and events and all the other stuff) into this game during the resolution".

Same goes for framing scenes. I've played lots of games where no-one was bothered about who framed the scene. If you didn't have anything you especially wanted to do then the default bid was 0, because we figured "If I need to I can just take Control". Now however, I and a couple of friends have twigged that framing a scene (and spending Coins when resolving a conflict) is actually the most powerful phase of the game. It's important sometimes just to bid high to stop one of your buddies getting the chance to do something wicked!

Disclaimer: I know that all sounds terribly competitive as if we're playing for money rather than trying to make a story! But actually all that stuff about using Facts to control the game, and also framing scenes is just a way of clarifying "This is what I want the story to be about, and as an equal partner in this game I'm willing to commit myself this much (in Coins) to seeing it go this way". We do create great stories and have a wonderful time doing so! Honest!

What Tony had hit upon is a masterful use of Traits in the game. Traits provide the structure to the whole story. Build a network of relationships with your characters. Who hates who and why. Who is loyal, who is subservient. Who leads, who follows. Give the characters a set of personality Traits that establishes behavior parameters. Who is devious, who is honest, who is secretly jealous, who harbors an old resentment, who is gullible, who has trouble controlling their temper, who consults a psychic before making tough decisions.

Go a step further and actually record goals and objectives. What does the character want. What is the character willing or not willing to do to get it e.g. "More than anything Stacy wants money, she's willing to betray her husband, lie to her family, cheat her employer, but she would never do anything to hurt her son" Depending on your play group the above may be anywhere from 2 to 5 distinct Traits. You've not only solidified your vision of the character for the other players (who most often will be more than happy to work with your directorial cues, but you've also got a solid foundation for Challenging players who try to take the character somewhere you'd rather not go.

Broaden your thinking beyond the characters into the organizations or factions that make up the backdrop of the game. Even locations can have Traits beyond simply the descriptive "dark and spooky". What about a Zen garden that enhances "Tranquility and Calm". A street corner where "anything can be had for a price". A bar that's "prone to violent knifings"

If you find someone doing something with a character or other Component that seems radically different from what you had in mind, take a look at the list of Traits you gave it. Did you provide enough Traits to give the other players a sense of what you'd been thinking? Most of us aren't mind readers after all. When another player turns your dynamic femme fatale into a sad subservient doormat check the Traits. Is there anything there that the other player's description is contradicting that you can use to bolster a Challenge? If not, there probably should have been. Fortunately in Universalis it's a relatively simple matter to invent a new character to be your heroine and make sure you fill the record sheet with Traits reflecting your vision.

If you haven't spent Coin on it...it isn't true.

The Importance of Tenets

I have personally experienced cases where individual players have gone through tenet phases without adding anything substantial to the set of tenets, while other players have added things that they were excited about. In fact, I've been that player once or twice. And I've observed the same phenomenon in all of these cases - the player in question basically drops out of the game. Oh, they may participate nominally. But they don't have the energy that the players who put in "real" tenets do. They'll pass a lot, and they'll tend to only add a little color here, jump in on complications with secondary pools, etc. and never really instigate conflict. They may create characters, but these don't seem to end up going anywhere - even other players don't "get" the point of the characters.

It's not enough simply to agree tacitly to the other players' tenets, either. Or even just modify them via challenge. These indicate a superficial interest in playing what's being thought up, but not the kind of investment that you really want a player to have. RPGs have a sort of "problem" in that the material that's produced is really only engaging if you are invested in that material. Audiences of RPGs (and worse, readers of transcripts of RPG play) note that they find such output to be rather boring. It takes a long time to produce action, and the process is so visible, generally, that it's not at all like watching TV or similar media. The only time these sorts of games are fun is when you're actively participating because you have invested in what's going on.

Universalis has a method to make such an investment explicit. Instead of the general agreement that you have in most games simply to play the material that's provided, Universalis doesn't provide any material up front that the player might invest in. The players have to produce it themselves. And, again, tacitly accepting other's Tenets is not a sign of investment. It's a sign that the tenets are inoffensive at best. The only way to know that a player is really going to be engaged is if they get that bright look in their eyes as they toss a Coin in and say something like, "But the monkeys are intelligent!" That's the point at which you know that the participant has made the game, in part, theirs. And that they'll have a real personal interest in making it come out in an interesting fashion.

Interestingly, I find that if you skip the tenet phase entirely, this works too. Essentially everyone is agreeing to a big gimmick in which you all are agreeing to walk the tightrope without a net. Just being in on such a bold dare seems to engage people. And what happens then is that people under-

stand that the tenets are really going to be established in the first few turns that each player takes as they happen in play. This dynamic can work well.

The point is that the tenet phase, even if omitted, must be an agreement forged amongst all the players about what will be fun to play. If any individual player is not an active participant in coming up with the totality, they simply won't be as engaged as the players who have invested a bit of their creativity in determining what the game will be about.

So don't let a player fall by the wayside. If you see them floundering during the tenet phase, don't succumb to the temptation to close the phase and just "get on with it." And don't accept just any mailed-in tenets, either. If a player doesn't seem to have an idea, they might be tempted to just toss something out there that comes to mind, but which they aren't really interested in, just to have completed a social obligation to appear to have invested. Make sure you get that bright-eyed look from them before you head into play. This might only be one tenet if it's important enough. But you'll know it when you see it.

Telling Straight Stories

A common experience with Universalis is for play to wind up silly, or bizarre, or a strange mishmash of competing genres. This is perfectly normal for initial games. Folks confronting Universalis for the first time often require a bit of a "shake-down cruise" to grow comfortable; comfortable both with the rules and with opening one's own creativity up to the judgment and appreciation of one's peers. It can be a daunting task to realize that you aren't there "to be entertained" but instead to actually participate in the entertainment. Often times the safest play is to retreat into silliness so that any criticism can be shrugged off.

Eventually, however, new players realize that the friends they're playing with (if they're worth playing with at all) aren't there to be critical and judgmental but to enjoy the experience of co-authoring a story. They learn that it's ok to delve into drama and tragedy and try to create stories of poignancy and beauty. And they especially learn that it's ok to fail at creating such stories, because the experience of the shared creative journey is its own reward. That and when you do finally hit on one of those special moments when every one leans back a little stunned and speechless it will be all worthwhile.

But what can you do to help the process along? What advice is there for people who want to tell a "serious" story using Universalis?

1) Play a couple of games of Uni completely open without any expectation of getting to a story that is even marginally good literature. As noted above it can take a few games for players to get their feet under them, figure out the flexibility of the system, and get comfortable with the level of ownership and responsibility they have. Early games have a tendency towards farce because it's easier to generate low humor than high drama and less embarrassing when one "screws up". Once players get over the fear of "screwing up" I've found them much more prone to generating good meaty stories.

2) Pay especial attention to the [Tenets](#) being established. If one wants serious play it's necessary to first identify what specifically makes a story "serious" to you, and then ensure that those things get created as Tenets. Emulating an example from literature is a good basic start. There is nothing

wrong with a Tenet like: "This story will be like Wuthering Heights", or "Its set in Dickensonian London".

Even better is to identify what it is about Wuthering Heights or Dickensonian London you find most appealing and make the Tenets about that. The more specific and actionable, the better. Pick your Tenets with an eye towards leading to similar situations in the game.

Something like "All true love affairs must end tragically", "Every character must have a romantic interest in another character as a Trait", "Every character who is married must have a trait that expresses dissatisfaction with their spouse", "Every character must identify another character as their confidant whom they'll tell everything to as a Trait".

Gimmicks are a great way of introducing some specific genre flavor into the game. Imagine a Gimmick where the protagonists own conscience is Created as a separate character. How perfect for a character like Hamlet.

3) Traits, Traits, Traits. Choose Traits that evoke the genre you're trying to achieve. If you're playing in Dickens London, create Traits that could come right from the pages of a Dickens novel.

Consider:

Flora (1 Coin)

Pick Pocket (1 Coin)

Heart of Gold (1 Coin)

Mother (1 Coin) is dying of Tuberculosis (1 Coin)

But don't limit yourself to just a static list of attributes. What role is Flora meant to play. Sure we know she's a pickpocket, but so what. Traits that express relationships with other characters are especially powerful and especially effective at keeping stories from veering off into the space. When no one has any clear idea of what to do next, people start brainstorming, and raw brainstorming can lead to silliness. Creating a tangled web of relationships with Traits means players will always have a notion of what to do next, simply advance those relationships. This will cut down on those groundless flights of fancy in a hurry.

Consider the effect of adding a Trait like "Has a romantic interest in Flora" to the school teacher. Consider how this will likely play out much differently than adding "Believes the school teacher is sweet on me" as a Trait to Flora. All you have to do is throw Flora's friend Jane (who is "Jealous" and "has a crush on the school teacher") into the mix along with the teacher's wife and peers and every player at the table will be instantly chock full of possibilities for the next scene. Possibilities that are entirely in keeping with the desired genre because the selected Traits are all pointing the way.

And don't stop there. Give some thought beyond characterization to why you, as an author, even want this character in the story to begin with. What is Flora's purpose? Is she there to be the exemplar of innocence in stark contrast with the corruption of the other characters? Is she there to provide light comic relief? Is she there to be the one sympathetic character whose tragic story tugs at the heart strings?

Any of these can make splendid Traits. Not only will they serve as guideposts to the other players as to how Flora should be used but they'll give you the weight of Fact to back up any use that doesn't conform.

Consider the difference between adding "Perpetually sweet and Innocent" and "Her happiness is always fleeting" as Traits. Consider the effect of adding both.

Once players are ready to take their Universalis play beyond superficial pastiches of assorted genre tropes effective use of Tenets and Traits will pave the way for stories of startling power and depth. Not every time, to be sure. It would be unreasonable to expect works the caliber of Bronte or Dickens every time you sit around the table with friends. But I bet you'll wind up with stories of much greater caliber than you imagine.

Game Preparation Add-ons

Some optional rules that change the way the Game Preparation Phase is handled.

Additional Coin Refreshment Before First Scene

Submitted by [Roy Penrod](#)

In the core rules, Refreshment occurs at the end of a scene and before the next scene begins. This means that there is no Refreshment before the first scene. Players begin the first scene with whatever Coins they have remaining after the Game Preparation phase (Chapter 2).

With this Gimmick, groups can allow a standard Refresh before the very first scene of a game to give everyone a few more Coins to start actual play with.

VARIANT

Instead of a standard Refresh, reset each player's Wealth back to its starting value (25 Coins is the default) before the first scene. This will encourage players to really spend Coins to add additional detail to the setting during the Game Preparation Phase since any Coins not spent then are wasted since everyone will be reset back to full.

In the core rules the starting Wealth for each player is set before the Game Preparation phase (Chapter 2). The default is Refreshment occurs

Coins refresh to 25 before the first scene is bid on (applies to the first session only).

Setting Creation Phase

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

After the normal Game Preparation Phase, but before the first scene is framed, insert a new special Setting Creation Phase. Give each player a separate pool of 25 Coins (or more if you like) just for this phase. During this phase only setting information can be generated. This includes, but is not limited to, declaring Tenets that relate to the setting, Creating Components that exist within the setting, and establishing a variety of Facts related to historical events. Anything is possible really, as long as the player can rationalize it as setting development (and the other players do not challenge). The phase will continue until all players have either spent all of their Coins, or until all players pass (or the phase can be extended at that point with a new gimmick). At which point any unspent coins are returned to the Bank.

NOTES

Use this Add-on for a game that emphasizes a more developed setting before play begins. This is a more involved version of Roy's Coin refreshing Add-on above.

OPTIONS

One can also insert separate special phases to address characters, or to develop a detailed situation or premise. Whatever you think needs more attention.

Serial Game Structure

Submitted by [Roy Penrod](#)

Declare that a game is to be part of an ongoing series of sessions. Players are required to leave at least one plot thread dangling to be picked up at the start of the next session.

NOTES

I use this Rules Gimmick to add a serial structure to a campaign game of Universalis. It's really just a reminder to make sure we leave a plot thread dangling so we have something to look forward to next session.

Metagame Jobs

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

These Gimmicks can be established at any time, but are least disruptive to institute during the Game Preparation phase. Essentially, a player may be designated with a title and certain responsibilities for which he receives some scheduled remuneration in Coins.

The game pays the player Coins from the Bank to perform certain duties. The payment can be received on a per scene basis; or, for multi-session games, at the beginning or end of each session. It can be on a "per item produced" basis, or any other schedule of payment. The amount and timing should be well designated as well as the nature of the duties. Gimmicks can also be instituted, of course, to terminate any such contract between a player and the game.

Some sample jobs:

Record keeper - *Potentially onerous depending on the speed of play, this player is responsible for taking notes on the game. He records all Components created, all their Traits, and all Facts, and organizes their presentation so that he can recount details when necessary. Having one player do all this (as opposed to each player making his own notes) makes recalling records easier, and frees the other players from note taking leaving them less distracted.*

Librarian - *often the same player as the record keeper if there is one, this player is responsible for keeping all notes between sessions of play. If there is no sole record keeper, he collects the notes from each player. The downside to the librarian is that he must be present at every session, or have his archive accessible for play. Else play is very difficult.*

Illustrator - *players can sell articles of art created during the game or between sessions to the game on a "freelance" basis. Truly gifted artists might be able to do a running account in which case they could be paid per scene, theoretically.*

Journal Writer - *between sessions a player can write the reflections of a character into a fictional journal entry. These can be submitted like art for payment.*

Disc Jockey - *a player can be paid to act as DJ for a session, ensuring that a constant supply of appropriate music (or sound effects) is provided. Discuss well with the group what music is appropriate before hiring a DJ, and promptly fire a DJ that gets out of hand.*

Host - *consider paying the host of the session a fee to account for the problems associated with having the players over.*

Caterer - *similar to the host, payment can be assigned for food brought to share.*

Prop Master - *players can be paid for creation of interesting and evocative props.*

Multiple Tenets

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

Over the course of many games, one of the most frequently forgotten rules is the rule that limits a player to Proposing only one Tenet on their turn. This rule was designed to make sure that all players had an equal opportunity to set the Tenets for the game by limiting each player to just a single idea at a time. As it turns out some ideas require more than 1 Tenet to express properly (especially Story Elements involving adding Traits to Components) and so its become commonplace in many groups to allow players to introduce multiple Tenets on their turn so long as they're all related to the same basic idea

Seed Element

Submitted by Adam Kelly

Discussed in [This Thread](#), this is one of those clever ideas I wish I'd thought of myself. Its ideal to use for an experienced Uni player to use when teaching the game to a new group and makes a fantastic way to give focus to one shot convention play.

The experienced player (or the one hosting the convention game) comes to the table with a single Component already Created. That Component has a largely ambiguous name or role Trait plus 1 other Trait which, while equally ambiguous, serves as a call to action. This Component is then presented at the beginning of the Game Prep phase, introduced as the first Tenet.

In the above thread the Component was named Orion. A perfect choice. It could be a man's name, or a woman's, or the code name of a secret government agency, a constellation, a mythological character, or an entire planet. What exactly it is, is left unsaid it serves as a creative seed for the other players and their efforts to define it is what will give the game focus. This gimmick was used at several different tables and in each Orion was something different. In one it was a ship carrying the last remnants of humanity, in another a teacher in a school beset by zombies (of course, there are always zombies), and in another Orion was a political party seeking equality for wingless faeries.

The second Trait Orion had was the equally effective "needs to be rescued". A specific call to action where the specifics (why, from whom or what) are left open. Other Traits could also be effective such as "On a mission from God", or "seeking Vengeance", or just simply "Searching".

Game Play Add-ons

Some optional rules that change Turn Order or Game Flow.

Open Scene Framing

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

In the Core rules there is only 1 active scene at a time. Other scenes may remain unresolved and waiting for completion, but before players can return to them, the current scene must be formally declared ended by the Framing Player and a new scene started which returns to that previous one. In between, players Bid for Scene to determine who has the privilege of Framing that new scene. Mini scenes allow for small, short, scenes to be inserted into the main scene. This add-on allows several full scenes to be going on simultaneously.

The Bidding for scene procedure was written to keep the flow of the game very structured and progressing in a clearly delineated way. This is especially valuable for introducing new players to the concepts of total player control. The Open Scene Framing Add-on is an advanced technique that does away with all of the above mentioned structure.

When using this Add-on there is no Bidding for Scene Framing. Two new options are added to the players turn. "Frame New Scene" and "Switch Between Scenes" either of which costs 1 Coin.

To Frame a New Scene a player on his own turn pays the 1 Coin and then proceeds to frame the scene exactly as described in Chapter Five. After he Establishes a Location, Sets the Time, and Introduces Components, he continues with his turn normally.

At any time a player can on his turn pay 1 Coin to switch from the current scene to another of the currently active scenes to continue the action there where it was left off. He, or some other player who Interrupts him, can then pay a Coin to switch back again. The Framing Player for a given scene can at any time on his turn close the scene by paying the 1 Coin to Fade to Black. Once closed the scene can no longer be switched to.

This technique is fairly advanced and demands good organization to keep all of the separate scenes straight. It is not recommended that more than 2 or 3 Scenes be active at any one time.

It is also possible (and in some cases encouraged) to use this Add-on like a Rules Gimmick. In other words use the Core rules for Bidding for Scene as the standard in the game. Then, only on the occasion where rapid fire switching between scenes becomes desirable, propose this rule be adopted. When that sequence of scenes is over, revert back to the standard rules.

Judgment, Challenge Variant

Submitted by [Kirt Dankmyer](#)

This Add-on replaces the normal Challenge Variant. It offers the opportunity to bring a more GM like influence to the game.

If players disagree about the legality of a move or the interpretation or application of a Gimmick or Fact, then the player who spent Coins before the current player's turn is to be the Judge and decide the question. Disagreement for the purposes of this rule may be created by the insistence of any player. This process is called invoking Judgment.

When Judgment has been invoked, no one may Interrupt or pass the turn without the consent of a majority of the other players.

The Judge's Judgment may be overruled only by a unanimous vote of the other players taken before the next Coin is spent. If a Judge's Judgment is overruled, then a player chosen at

random from those remaining (i.e. not the one of the previous Judges or the player on whom Judgment had been called) becomes the new Judge for the question, and so on. If all Judges are overruled, well, then, the player on whom Judgment was called can continue without further Judgments regarding that action.

New Judges are not bound by the decisions of old Judges. New Judges may, however, settle only those questions on which the players currently disagree and that effect the completion of the turn in which Judgment was invoked. All decisions by Judges shall be in accordance with all the Facts and Gimmicks then in effect; but when Tenets and Facts are silent, inconsistent, or unclear on the point at issue, then the Judge shall consider game-custom and the spirit of the story before applying other standards.

Alternate Reality Variant

Submitted by [Kirt Dankmyer](#)

This variant requires very careful record keeping with regards to scenes. Scenes should be arranged on a chronological number line.

At the end of any scene, you can split off a "mirror scene". This puts a fork in the number line immediately prior to the just finished scene and adds the mirror scene. This mirror scene starts the same way (time, location, and introduced Components) with no additional framing cost. At that point the group plays the same scene again, likely with different events and outcomes.

There are now two alternate realities. The first where the events proceeded according to the original scene, and the second where the events proceeded according to the mirror scene. There can be many branches formed in this way. The same scene can be mirrored multiple times and each branch may then branch out itself. Only the very first scene of the game, the starting point, cannot be forked.

The cost for creating a mirror scene in this way is 1 Coin per fork (including the newly created one) between the mirror scene and the original first scene of the game.

Each Branch needs to be labeled and each Component must be identified with the branch it belongs to. A component is part of each successive branch after it is Created, but if it is altered subsequently, it is only altered for that current branch (and subsequent ones) and so a duplicate Component must be made specific to that branch. Whoever splits off a new branch, should be appointed record keeper for that branch.

Friendly Control

Submitted by [Kirt Dankmyer](#)

Whoever Controls a component can cede Control at any time to another player, at no cost to anyone

Variant: Anyone can take Control of any Component on their turn for no cost. The current owner can Challenge this with the weight of Fact behind him to prevent it.

Free Dialog

Submitted by [Bob McNamee](#)

Whoever Controls a component can cede Control at any time to another player, at no cost to anyone

Variant: Anyone can take Control of any Component on their turn for no cost. The current owner can Challenge this with the weight of Fact behind him to prevent it.

Losing Challenge Bids

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

In the Core rules all Coins bid in a Challenge are considered spent and returned to the Bank regardless of who wins. This rule is in play to counter the puffing strategy common in auction games where a player who doesn't really want to win the bidding bids up the price for another player who does.

However, some groups have found that since you stand to lose both the Challenge and a sizeable number of Coins you may be less likely to back down. This can lead to unnecessary bidding wars once both parties have too much invested to afford to lose. With this Gimmick you allow one party to concede and recover their bid making them more likely to back out rather than fight to the bitter end.

Using Challenge Bids

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

If the acting player loses a Challenge, this Gimmick allows him to use any Coins that he bid on the Challenge (that would normally be lost to the Bank) to pay for whatever changes the Challenger required. Any surplus Coins are lost to the Bank as normal.

Using Cards as Coins

Submitted by Jonathan Nichol

[Presented with some modification]

Instead of coins, each player gets a deck of cards from which the face cards have been removed to use as the Bank. Shuffle the deck and whenever the rules call for the player to gain Coins, draw a number of cards from the deck instead. Keep these cards in a face down pile to be your Wealth.

Instead of spending Coins, spend the top card from your Wealth by discarding it next to the Bank. When the Bank is empty reshuffle the discards and start a new Bank.

In a Complication, when Coins are spent to add dice to a pool take the cards from the Wealth pile but leave them face down. When Traits are called on to add dice, take the cards from the Bank and add them to the pool face down. To resolve the Complication each player takes the face down cards that have been added to their pools and counts Aces (one) through 5 as a Success treating the face value exactly as a number rolled on a d10. If Coins earned in the Complication are to be added to a player's Wealth, discard the cards from the pool and draw new face down cards from the Bank accordingly.

Variant. Don't remove the face cards but instead create a Gimmick for what they represent when spent. For instance a revealed Jack could mean the person to the right spends the Coin, a Queen, the person to the left, and a King the person across. In a Complication each Jack in the Pool could cancel a Success while each King could count as an extra Success (for purposes of determining the winner but not effecting any Coins earned). A Queen could give you a free Coin but not count as a Success.

Component Creation Add-ons

Some optional rules that change the way the Components Get Created, including three variants on the oft requested "PC Add-on".

Greater Control Over Created Components

Submitted by [Bob McNamee](#)

Add a Trait to any Component you Created called "Controlled by _player name_" (as in "Controlled by Bob"). This doesn't prevent other players from Controlling Component s that you've Created but it is a Fact that gives your Coins double value to Challenge for Control.

---I call this the PC-lite rule. It is by far the simplest means of gaining a degree of traditional Player Character like authority over a particular character in the game.

---Note the possibility for a "hostile takeover" as other players attempt to remove and replace a "Control" Trait and this attempt is Challenged.

OPTIONS

Allow this Add-on to apply only to characters not other types of Components. Allow each player to buy this Trait only once, limiting each player to a single controlled character. Allow this Trait to be applied to a Component even if the purchasing player didn't Create it. Disallow "hostile takeovers" by ruling that Control Traits can never be eliminated or altered.

Public Domain Trait

Submitted by [Kirt Dankmyer](#)

This add-on is something of the reverse of the Greater Control add-on above. Instead of adding a "Control Trait" that makes it harder for others to take Control of a Component, the player adds a "Public Domain" Trait to the Component.

This Component can now be Taken Over for free, without spending a coin to do so. The Take Over can be Challenged as usual.

---This gimmick would be useful in a variety of situations such as: Large complex locations like a castle or city that every player wants to be able to add Traits to at any time without having to spend a Coin to Take Control each time, reoccurring villains so that any player can initiate a Complication using that villain without needing to pay to control him.

---See also the [Friendly Control](#) Add-on for a similar way of handling this.

Royalty Add-on

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

Must first be playing with Bob's Control Add-on above. This Add-on allows players to take Control of a Controlled Component without fear of Challenge if they first play an additional 1 Coin from Wealth, directly to the player named in the Trait.

---Royalties were actually a concept from way in the early days of Universalis, whose intention was to motivate players to Create interesting Component, by paying them if they were something other players would want to use. This motivation proved completely unnecessary and so the rule was scrapped;

but it fit so nicely with Bob's clever Control rule above that I resurrected the concept just for it.

Player Character Add-on

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

A player can, once during the game (across all sessions), spend 5 Coins, and permanently Take Over a single character. This character becomes the Player's Character (PC). Add a Trait to the character of "_Player Name's Character" (as in "Mike's Character").

The PC can only thereafter be Controlled by that player. Further Take Overs of that character are not allowed. The PC can not be altered in any way (such as buying Traits for the character) by any player other than the owner, except through the use of Coins received from a Complication in which the PC was a participant.

This includes being Introduced into scenes. The PC can only be Introduced to a scene with the agreement of the owning player (who still retains Control despite not having Introduced the character). If a player wants to Introduce a PC against its owner's will, he can frame a Mini-Scene in which the PC is involved in a relevant Complication and use Coins won in the Complication to Introduce the PC into the main scene.

The owning player is also solely responsible for all of the character's dialog.

---This Add-on can really alter the game in subtle, but powerful ways. Shifting the player's emphasis from the story as a whole to a specific character, can lead to player myopia and disinterest in parts of the story not involving the PC. It is suggested that not all player utilize this option at the same time. It is perhaps best used to give the hero of the story to a particular player as a PC, and perhaps the major villain of the story to another player as a PC, but for the rest of the players to remain unattached to specific characters.

---See also the [Judgment Challenge Variant](#) Add-on for a way to bring a more GM like influence to the game.

The PC Endowment Pool

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

When a player adopts a PC he gets an Endowment of 25 Coins, which are kept in a separate pool. These Endowment Coins can only be used to give Traits to the PC, or to add to Complication Pools in the case of Complications in which the PC is involved. These Coins are never Refreshed. When they are spent they are gone.

OPTION

Set the number of Endowment Coins at a different amount based on the character's importance to the story and the level of realism in the game.

PC Plot Protection

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

With this option it takes double the normal number of Coins to eliminate a PC by reducing Importance.

---This rule has the interesting effect of causing players who are determined to eliminate a protected character to concentrate first on removing the character's Traits, thereby lowering the PC's Importance before having to pay to reduce it. I

recommend considering this sort of protection for major villains or other important Component as well. Ralph

OPTIONS

Allow this Add-on to be purchased individually for any important Component, not just PCs (even in a game that isn't using the PC Add-on). Alternatively players can make it illegal for any player except the owner to reduce a PC's Importance. Thus only the owner can decide if and when it's time for the PC to be eliminated.

PC Descriptive Paragraph Add-on

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

This is a special method of generating Player Characters which should be used in conjunction with the Endowment Add-on above. Players must write a paragraph (or several) describing who their character is and what he's like. Game balance issues are not important here (they will come into play below) but players should strive to keep their description limited to 100 to 200 words. This will help ensure that the description is tightly worded, and focused on the most essential aspects of the character. Sentences that are merely lists of things the character can do are to be discouraged.

Key elements of a paragraph would be cultural and social background, occupation, personality, important possessions, friends or contacts, hobbies or things the character does exceptionally well. Take this paragraph and use it as a source to draw the character's Traits from. Pay for those Traits (or at least as many as possible) out of the character's Endowment.

---This Add-on is inspired by several RPGs such as Hero Wars which use just such a descriptive paragraph to create their characters.

PC Story Drivers

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

This Add-on should be used in conjunction with the Endowment Add-on above.

The Story Driver is some compelling feature about the character's personality or motivations that serves to provide interest. The Story Driver is the reason why the character is part of the story being told. It is the reason the character is a protagonist of the story and is the motivation that drives the character through the story. If the character does not have a Story Driver it probably isn't compelling enough to be a player character and is best left as an NPC.

The Story Driver is that facet of a character that makes him of interest to the audience. It may be tied to the character's role but this is not necessary. It answers the questions: "Why should we care what happens to this character?", "What makes this character suitable as a protagonist?", "What keeps the character moving forward through the story?", and "Why is this character worth telling a story about in the first place?" It may be a quest to complete, a vendetta to pursue, a mystery to solve, a promise to keep, or a destiny to fulfill. It may also simply be an interesting situation that the character is in that requires immediate action to respond to. For supporting characters, it may be largely tangential to the main story line (which should be concerned with the Story Driver of the protagonist) but it should provide the opportunity for subplots, and exciting narrative in its own right.

The Story Driver should not just be a static tag line. It should be an ongoing theme in the character's life which become

more developed as the story progresses both from the character's perspective and the audience's. The player should make an effort to work elements of the Story Driver into his narrative where appropriate and keep in the back of his mind the potential for its ultimate resolution or fulfillment, if such is possible.

The Story Driver for a player character can be altered and changed during play as the character evolves and the details of the surrounding world and events get filled in. In this way a character whose Story Driver includes following in the footsteps of his dead and heroic father, can, later in the story, latch on to the idea of making the main villain of the story his father, who is not dead after all.

The elements that make up a Story Driver write-up are not considered Facts for game purposes. They are merely the perceptions of the character whose actual veracity may vary. Elements of the Driver that the player wishes to be irrefutable can be purchased as Facts normally.

Whenever the player manages to focus attention on his Story Driver he can earn Coins from the Bank. For each scene in the game that addresses some aspect of the character's story driver, the owning player may draw 1 Coin from the Bank and add it to the character's Endowment Pool.

Whenever the player manages to actually resolve his Story Driver (if such is possible) the owning player may draw a number of Coins from the Bank equal to the total number of game sessions that character has participated in with that Story Driver in place and add them to the character's Endowment Pool.

---This Add-on is inspired by features found in many games, such as Sorcerer's Kickers. Ralph

Durable Components

Submitted by [Bob McNamee](#)

This is an add-on designed to make it more difficult to remove Traits or Eliminate Components from play.

When Components are Created, they can be designated as "Durable". This is a special Trait that costs 5 Coins and cannot be Removed from the Component. For the rest of the game it takes 2 Coins instead of 1 to Remove a Trait of that Component or reduce the Component's Importance. This will make killing Characters, destroying Locations, etc much harder. It will tend to skew things toward making existing things gain Importance, since it is cheaper to add a Fact to something than to destroy a Fact from it.

A combat example: Bob's has character A attack B. Character B is Durable. After resolving the Complication. A side wins with 10 coins, B side gets 3. B is an Importance 6 character. With this Add-on, instead of reducing Importance to 0 and describing the 6 "coin moves" and keeping 4 Coins-killing B like the normal rules, Bob can't kill B (he would need 12 coins to reduce the importance), so he adds 6 Coins worth of Facts (like...Flesh wounds x2, Weak with Blood Loss x2, Broken Nose, No match for Character A) and keeps 4 Coins. These added traits will have the effect of acting against B in other Complications, but they also increase the Importance of character B to 12. These "negative" Facts are also difficult to remove from B. (and perhaps Bob will destroy one or two trait Facts and add a couple wounding traits etc instead of using them all one way)

If you want to make sure that the group's creative work hangs around longer, this might be a good Add-on for you.

Enigma Traits

Submitted by [Christopher Chinn](#)

This rule allows players to conceal the hidden facts about a character or other Component. You can buy Traits for Components that are not known to the other players, although they do have to be written down, and cannot be used for Complications or Challenges until revealed.

You have to pay 2 Coins for an Enigma Trait (essentially 1 Coin for the Trait and 1 for the privilege of keeping it secret). The Trait is written down and not revealed to the other players. At any point the player desires he can reveal the Trait and bring it to bear in a Complication or Challenge or simply refer to it in narrative.

The purpose of an Enigma Trait is to allow a player to secure "first dibs" on an idea but yet still keep it secret to "spring" on the other players at a dramatic moment. Players can always add "surprise" or "plot twist" Traits to Components via the normal rules. But by waiting for the right moment to purchase those Traits other Facts may be purchased by other players in the mean time that invalidate the player's plans.

For instance. Dave might really want to add a Trait to Elton Frakes that he is, in fact, a werewolf. He decides to wait to a suitable moment to buy the Trait and reveal Elton's secret. Before he gets the chance, Ed buys "Immune to Lycanthrope" as a Trait for Elton. Now Dave could Challenge this, but in addition to the expense it may make his announcement anticlimactic. Using the Enigma Trait rule Dave buys the Werewolf Trait for Elton but records it in secret. Now if Ed tries to render Elton "Immune" he will be too late. Dave can now challenge Ed with the weight of the newly revealed Enigma Trait serving as Fact.

These traits work well for mystery stories, noir stories, heroes with undiscovered powers, and soap operas. Memento comes to mind as a movie that would incorporate this very well.

---This Add-on was first proposed in our Discussion Forum. I tweaked it a bit before posting it here.

Making Protagonists Special

[These Add-ons](#) suggest a few ways to mechanically make the main characters of your story more involved and influential than the supporting cast.

Making the Protagonist Special

Sometimes it can be hard to tell who the protagonist of a story is. Sometimes the story gets overcrowded with so many supporting characters that the main plot gets lost.

These Add-ons suggest a few ways to make the Protagonist more special if you find yourself in such a situation. Most are player submitted and represent great examples of how to use Rules Gimmicks to achieve the style of play a group prefers.

Protagonist Refresh Boost:

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

After any scene in which the identified main character was present (i.e. Introduced), the standard Coin Refresh is 7 Coins

instead of the normal 5 (or whatever level you've set your group's Refresh rate to).

Inspired by a game where it was suddenly realized that the main character of the story hadn't been present in the last several scenes; this Add-on provides a mechanical incentive for not forgetting to include the protagonist more frequently.

Additionally the main antagonist could be included in this rule.

No New Traits During Complications:

Submitted by [Alan Barclay](#)

No buying new Traits during a Complication. The ban covers all components, whether they're in play or not. Once the dice are rolled and results tallied, the ban is lifted.

This moderates a tendency for surprise traits to appear when needed. It encourages players to think ahead and add Traits carefully during regular play. Since main characters are the ones players will be spending the most time thinking about and interacting with, they will tend to have the most complete set of Traits, which helps to distinguish them as the protagonist. It also forces players to rely on purchased dice (and creative descriptive justifications for them) during Complications.

---Alan has noticed that often times during Complications players will add Traits to characters that are amazingly just what the character needed at the time. Mike Holmes points out that this is actually a feature of many movies and TV shows that reveal in the thick of the action some new skill or talent we didn't know the character had. But for some genres this can be inappropriate. Also at times Traits of questionable legitimacy may be purchased just to boost a dice pool. While Challenges are the best way to handle this, if it becomes habitual a Gimmick like this can put an end to it.

OPTIONS

As an alternative to a complete ban, I suggested differentiating between set-up scenes and climactic scenes. The Framing Player can buy a Trait of "Climactic Scene" if desired. During such scenes the above ban is enforced. During set-up scenes, Complications can be thought of as a vehicle for illustrating the characters' abilities and Trait purchases during them may still be allowed.

Named Character Limit:

Submitted by [Alan Barclay](#)

No more named characters may be Created.

I bought this gimmick halfway through a game. I thought we had enough major characters and wanted play to focus on them, instead of new, last-minute creations. Limiting the ability to name characters did indeed limit the creation of new major characters.

---An effective technique in games experiencing a good deal of character bloat. This gimmick forces players to think in terms of using existing characters rather than to keep inventing new ones. Of course, for a newly thought of important character, it is a simple matter to propose another Rules Gimmick which permits an exception to be made.

Only 1 Trait per Turn:

Submitted by [Alan Barclay](#)

No character may gain more than one neutral or advantageous Trait per turn (or even per scene).. This is intended for introduction after major characters have been introduced, to limit burgeoning casts. The limit makes it difficult for any new characters to achieve the same number of Traits (and hence Importance) as the main character(s) were able to pre-gimmick.

No Purchasing the Same Trait Multiple Times:

Submitted by [Alan Barclay](#)

No component may purchase the same Trait multiple times (e.g. Marksman x3), except to represent numbers.

Instead of Marksman x3, this Gimmick encourages more creative thought like: Marksman, Eagle Eye, Combat Reflexes, or the like. The goal here is 1) for the additional variety of Traits to flesh out main characters in more detail, and 2) to make it more difficult to suddenly invent a minor character who had a high degree of proficiency in just one thing

---This Gimmick is a direct replacement of a rule from the book which expressly does allow for Traits to be purchased multiple times. Which is entirely acceptable for a Gimmick to do.

Protagonists Must be Most Important Character:

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

One character is named as the "Main Protagonist" (by buying this as a Trait). No other character in the story can ever have an Importance higher than the "Main Protagonist" except for the "Main Antagonist".

A variant would allow each player to select 1 main character for an ensemble cast. No other character can have an Importance higher than the highest Main Character (or alternatively the lowest Main Character). Again, except for the equivalent antagonists.

Narration Add-ons

Some optional rules that change how players can narrate the story.

Plot Pools

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

If you have a particular idea for a subplot or even main plot that you want to ensure has a life of its own, give it a Plot Pool. Depending on how important the plot, give it between ten and fifty Coins from the Bank. Any player may, on their turn, spend up to two of these Coins per scene so long as their spent in a way that relates to developing the action or backstory of the plot with which they are associated.

OPTION

Adjust the rate of spending, increasing the number of Coins per scene to bring a Plot to the forefront, or reducing the rate to draw its conclusion out.

Plot Thread

Submitted by [Matthijs Holter](#)

This Add-on is designed to help keep story plot lines tight and focused by offering rewards to other players for picking up a desired thread and following through with it.

The Plot Thread is Created as a Component defined as "an unresolved conflict". It costs one coin to Create, and must be given an appropriate name that summarizes the nature of the conflict.. The Creator must identify any number of existing Components that are part of, involved with, or tied to this conflict. Each Component named in the Plot Thread costs an additional coin.

Each time a Plot Thread is introduced into a scene (costing one coin), it gains a point of Weight.

When a Plot Thread is resolved, the player resolving it gets its Weight in coins. Declaring a Thread resolved can be challenged as usual.

VARIANT

submitted by Christopher Bradley

Plot Threads cost 1 Coin to Create as above, but no additional Coins have to be spent for identifying involved Components. Plot Threads are not Introduced but instead automatically increase in Weight by 1 each scene. When a player resolves the Conflict they gain its Weight in Coins.

VARIANT

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

Plot Threads cost 1 Coin to Create and can be given additional Traits further refining the nature of the conflict exactly as for ordinary Components. These special Components can be Introduced and Drawn Upon to provide dice in Complications related to that conflict. Like any other Component a Plot Thread can be Eliminated by buying off its Importance, or, as it moves towards resolution, individual Traits can be bought off through narration exactly as for damage or injury.

Complication Add-ons

Some optional rules that change the way the Complications are handled.

Dice Can Only be Added to Dice Pools

Submitted by [Roy Penrod](#)

The core rules allow dice to be added or subtracted from dice pools. This rule prevents dice from being subtracted from a pool. Any event that would logically be justified as subtracting dice from a pool is instead added to an opposing pool..

NOTES

I use this Rules Gimmick to make sure we never end up with an empty dice pool (no dice to roll).

For example: A named character only has 1 die to contribute to a Complication (e.g. his name). He does, however, have a Trait that can be used against him (e.g. Cowardice). Using the standard rules, the character would end up with an empty dice pool. Using this Rules Gimmick, the character still contributes 1 die to his dice pool while the opposing dice pool is also given 1 die for the character's negative Trait.

Multiple Targets to a Complication

These Add-ons illustrate several different variations on the standard Dice Pool for Complications which players may find more accurately reflect a given situation.

If there are multiple Targets to a Complication there are several different ways they can be treated. Sometimes the standard system described in the core rules may not necessarily reflect the nature of the Complication as its been defined.

The following choices are available to handle multiple Target Pools differently. Any player can propose one of these choices as for any Rules Gimmick and, if not successfully Challenged, it becomes the way this Complication will be resolved. Players are free (and encouraged) to use these choices as suggestions and come up with their own variations if they desire.

Standard Pool:

This is the system described in the Core Rules, included here for completeness. All of the Complication pools are counted together as a single side. And all of the Target Pools are counted together as a single side for purposes of determining the Winning side.

All of the Pools on the same side are counted together as one, and all Pools on a side Win or Lose accordingly. Each player then spends his own Coins from his Pool himself. All Winning Pools narrate in order from most to least Coins before any of the losing Pools which then narrate in order from most to least Coins. Ties are handled in clockwise order from the Originator.

This method works well in an abstract fashion for most Complications. Combat or other confrontations between a group of protagonists each with their own Pool against a number of opponents rolled in the aggregate is handled particularly well.

Independent Target Pools:

Like the Standard method, all Complication Pools are counted together as a single side. The various Target Pools are not combined together, however, as a single side. Each Target Pool opposes the Complication Side separately.

Each Target Pool rolls one at a time, and all Complication Pools (the same number of dice, with the exception of bought dice that only apply against limited Targets) is re-rolled against each one. There is a separate Winner and Loser determined for each match up and all Free Coins are spent before rolling for the next Target Pool. Essentially, there is a separate Complication for each Target. Target Pools in this method can either all be built first before any are resolved. Or they can be built one at a time in whatever order is appropriate. This depends on what is appropriate for the nature of the Complication.

The multiple Pools can be resolved in any order the players choose (often determined by which character goes first). If disagreements arise, Pools with the most Dice are resolved first, and in the event that this is tied, closest to the left of the Originator goes first.

Targets who roll first can use their bonus Coins to Buy Dice for Pools that haven't rolled yet if it can be justified how such assistance is possible.

This method works well for situations where the characters are confronted with a hazard and each character will make it or not on his own. Scaling a wall is an example of a hazard where each Target's Dice Pool could be built separately, one after another. Surviving a bomb explosion is an example where each Target's Dice Pool should be built at the same time.

Note: This method is essentially the same as originating a series of Standard Complications against each Target separately, except that the Complication Pools only need to be built once.

Split Allocation Pool:

This method is very similar to Independent Target Pools above. However, the Complication Pool is not re-rolled for each Target. Instead all of the Pools are rolled at the same time. The Originator then takes the Successes rolled from each of the Complication Pools (from any player) and allocates them against each of the Target Pools in whatever manner he chooses. Each Target Pool will then Win or Lose based on how it compares to the Successes the Originator allocated.

This method is generally much quicker than Independent Pools and gives largely the same type of results (each Target can Win or Lose independently of the others). However, it gives the Originator much more control over which Targets Win or Lose which may or may not be an appealing feature to a given play group.

Technically, this method does not have to be limited to 1 Originator vs. Multiple Targets. It could just as easily apply to a single Target faced with multiple opponents run by different players (such as when a hero is confronted with multiple enemies).

---This method is one of my personal favorites. Ralph.

Individual Pools:

This method is very similar to Independent Pools except there is a separate Complication Pool facing each Target. All Targets make their own roll opposed by their own Complication Pool. Many times this can be combined with the Split Allocation Pool where some Targets are faced with a separate Complication Pool and some gang up on another Complication Pool.

Resolution order is determined as for Independent Pools and bonus Coins in one Pool can be used to purchase additional dice into another Pool.

This method is suggested only for situations like a climactic combat where each hero is facing off against a separate villain

Note: this method is very similar to running a series of different Standard Complications simultaneously.

All or None Pool:

All Target Pools make their own roll at the same time, and all Complication Pools are treated like a single side. The worst Target Pool result is the only one which is compared to the Complication Pool and all Target Pools are considered to have Won or Lost based on that worst Pool's result.

Each Pool calculates its bonus Coins based on its own pool using the overall winner or loser status.

This type of Complication is appropriate for situations such as when characters are attempting to hide or sneak or are in disguise as a group and a slip up from any one of them will give them away.

Best Efforts Pool:

This method is essentially the reverse of the All or None Pool. All Target Pools make their own roll at the same time, and all Complication Pools are treated like a single side. The best Target Pool result is the only one which is compared to the Complication Pool and all Target Pools are considered to have Won or Lost based on that best Pool's result

Each Pool calculates its bonus Coins based on its own pool using the overall winner or loser status.

This type of Complication is appropriate for situations where multiple characters are cooperating, and due to the sheer number of involved Targets the Target pool would be exceptionally large and almost certainly overwhelm the Complication Pool. This method can be an alternative to the Originator having to find extreme ways to enlarge the Complication Pool in order to make it competitive.

Nested Complications

Submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

A nested Complication is nothing more than a new Complication that is Originated before an existing Complication has been completely resolved. This sort of Complication can either be internal to the current Complication or external to it.

An internal Nested Complication is one where the source of the new Complication was generated within the current Complication. For an example inspired by Ron Edwards' [Sorcerer](#), imagine a Complication which involves a party of sorcerers fighting an enemy deep in an underground stronghold. One of the players seeks to draw upon Traits from a powerful demon that a character is bound to. This demon has not had its Needs met in a while and so is likely to resist its master's commands. Another player begins a new Complication pitting the character against his demon in a battle of will to see if the demon will obey or not.

An external Nested Complication is one where the two Complications are entirely separate and running parallel to each other, but where the outcome of one Complication can influence the outcome of the other. The classic example of this is where one group of characters is responsible for establishing a "diversion" while another group proceeds with the mission. These Complications could be going on separately within the same scene or actually simultaneously in two different scenes.

Both types of Nested Complications are handled the same way. One of the Complications must be resolved first and has the capability to impact the Dice Pools of the other. In the case of multiple Nested Complications going on simultaneously, they all might impact the same primary Complication, or they may all impact the next Complication up daisy-chain style. A word of caution: multiple Nested Complications are an advanced technique that, while they can be extraordinary fun, requires lots of dice, lots of table space, and careful organization. Which Complication is resolved first is up to the player Originating the new Complication. Almost always it will be the new Complication being resolved first.

Each Nested Complication will have its own set of Dice Pools, and are separate Complications for purposes of Drawing upon Traits. Resolving the Nested Complication is handled just as any other. Common uses of the bonus Coins generated by a Nested Complication include: purchasing a new Trait attached to the scene which can then be Drawn

upon to provide dice to another Complication; describing Events and Facts related to the Nested Complication that can be used to provide justification for Drawing upon Traits in another Complication that otherwise couldn't be used; to Introduce or Create new Components that can be used in another Complication; or to damage or even eliminate Components that could be useful to another Complication before they're Drawn on.

Using d6s Instead of d10s

submitted by [Jonathan Nichol](#) & [Wilhelm Fitzpatrick](#)

When resolving Complications one normally rolls d10s with 1-5 being successes and the sum of the numbers rolled being the bonus Coins received. In a thread in our [discussion forum](#), Jonathan and Wilhelm described using d6s instead.

Simply treat odd results as successes (which maintains the same 50% chance of success) and add the numbers normally. In this case the numbers 1, 3, and 5 have the exact same average sum as the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 when using d10s.

As Wilhelm said, "the simple elegance of that approach is astounding"; which leaves me a little embarrassed that I hadn't seen that myself. --- Ralph

Extended Complications

submitted by Christopher Bradley

After dice pools are assembled for a Complication but before the dice are rolled, a player can make the complication "extended." This means that rather than resolving the complication with one roll of the dice, the dice pools are divided and each is rolled separately.

The person who pays to extend the complication gets to decide how many sub-pools the complication will be divided into. The dice in each side's pool are then divided as evenly as possible into that number of sub-pools.

The smallest sub-pools on either side are rolled first. Edge dice are accumulated in the sub-pool that rolled them. The winner narrates the victory as usual. Then proceed to roll and narrate each of the other sub-pool pairs in the same way.

The purpose of this Gimmick is take a complication and convert it into a number of separate stages allowing the full complication to be narrated back and forth in multiple steps rather than resolved all at once. This is especially useful for climactic battle scenes with arch villains and other similar scenes where players might want the action to trade back and forth.

Using Cards Instead of Dice

submitted by [Jonathan Nichol](#)

Instead of coins, each player gets a deck of cards to use as their "coins". Another deck is used for the Complications placed face down to the side. Shuffle the decks and draw your starting Wealth in Cards into your hand. When you use a coin, play the card of your choice from your hand face-up into a discard pile. When you refresh draw new cards from your own deck. For Complications play cards face down secretly, to be revealed during the resolution. Only cards 1-5 count as successes. When drawing upon existing Traits draw the top card from the Trait Deck and play it to the Complication. Cards are reshuffled only when that deck is exhausted. Be sure to discard cards into their appropriate discard pile.

Complications would be resolved a lot faster since the coin spending and die rolling is combined into one card-playing action. Also, there is a little resource management going on as you play the higher cards for traits and such but save the lower cards for complications.

Quirk #1: Drawing from the Bank Deck in Complications won't have the same 50% chance of success. Ignoring the fact that cards mess with probabilities as they become "used" there are 13 different cards in a suit, making a success as defined above 5 out of 13 (somewhat less than 40%) rather than 5 out of 10. You'd need to discard out of play the face cards (or find some cool new Gimmick where they represent something special other than a normal "coin") to keep the odds the same

Quirk #2: The current rules reward developing permanent Traits for Components and then reusing those Components throughout the game (so you can keep getting free Dice out of your initial investment). You lose some of this when you go to a hand of Cards that you can choose from. Calling on an existing Trait may give you a free draw from the Deck, but it's a random draw. Inventing a new Trait or environmental feature on the spur of the moment, however, lets you play a card from your hand...where you can select intentionally the card you want to use; guaranteeing success if you have the right cards.

VARIANT

submitted by [Ralph Mazza](#)

Play as above but keep each player's Wealth in a face down stack in front of them. When ever a "Coin" is spent draw the top card off of the Wealth stack. When additional Wealth is earned add the new cards to the bottom of the stack. When Bonus Coins are kept following a Complication shuffle the kept cards into the Wealth Stack. As an alternative rule have players discard the kept cards and draw fresh cards from their deck to add to the bottom of the stack to maintain randomness.

Intersession Add-ons

For games of Universalis that are intended to go for more than a single session, players may want to set up a set of Tenets for continuing play. Below are a set of standard Tenets that can be adopted by the group via social contract before play, or paid for with a single Coin after play has begun. They are very standard and intuitive, and most people playing adopt something very similar even if the specifics are unspoken.

Standard Intersession Rules

The first scene framed in the subsequent session is considered concurrent with, or immediately following the end of the last scene of the previous session, unless Coins are spent to set the time differently..

Scenes that are open at the end of the last session are still considered open, and can be continued as normal.

All players begin the next session with the same number of Coins that they had at the end of the previous session. at the end of the last session.

At this point play continues as if there had been no interruption

Players Present Limit

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

Subsequent sessions can only be played if all players from the first session are present, and wish to play.

Revisit Game Tenets

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

At the start of the subsequent session, a new Game Preparation phase occurs wherein players can discuss and modify current Tenets. When this is finished begin with a new scene. This gimmick is intended to address any concerns players may have over the direction the story is going, and to make sure everyone is on the same page to start the new session (players satisfied with the current direction of play may just pass in this phase in order to get directly to the first scene).

Introduce New Players

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

Each new player is introduced to the game by a special Rules Gimmick so that the other players can object to the new player's presence if they so wish. Alternatively, one can have an "open-door" policy, and allow any player to add any other new players that they like.

If new players are allowed, the number of players who are involved in the story can be capped, as can the total allowed to play in a single session. If the latter is selected, and too many players present themselves for play, players should bid Coins in round robin fashion for the right to play. Those who bid lowest cannot play in that session.

If persons who were not players in a prior session are allowed to become players, then a rule for how many Coins they start with needs to be adopted. Often a group will endow new players with whatever the standard starting Wealth is for that play group. Other options include starting them with the same number of Coins as the player with the most or least Coins; or an average. Any number that seems sensible can be select-

A Slytheran Shock Trooper with body armor and assault rifle.

ed. Such a Coin level Gimmick can be declared to be a one-time thing, or a policy for all new players.

(One can also see here the possibility of using similar player-adding gimmicks to allow new players mid session. The author highly recommends this.)

Coin Option Gimmicks

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

Some players may wish to allow for the level of Coins to be adjusted between sessions. This can take many forms:

For example, the end of a session can be treated like the end of a scene, and additional refreshment can occur.

Or, normalization of Coin totals for each player can occur, perhaps resetting the number of Coins to a certain level (perhaps the starting level) at the beginning of each session.. This latter option will have the result of having players spend all their Coins during the course of a session as the "Use em or lose em" mentality sinks in.

As always, any adjustment of Coin availability will affect the pacing of the game; potentially dramatically. Players can conceive of other methods of moderating the number of Coins available, and should consider the potential effects before putting them into play (or allowing them into play unchallenged).

Create Components Between Sessions

Submitted by [Mike Holmes](#)

Gimmicks can be established to allow players to flex their creative muscles between sessions.

Allow for a limited amount of Coins to be spent between sessions on creating things. Potentially players may be given a pool of Coins for just such a purpose that are used or lost between sessions. The results of such creativity can be presented at the time of the Game Preparation phase at the start of the following session, each player presenting one Component on his turn, at which time they can be challenged.



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