

# The Token System

A role-playing game designed and written by Cameron Morgan  
(with thanks to Carol Morgan, Kelly Morgan, & James Lamb for play-testing and suggestions for revision).

At its heart, any role-playing game is about creating a collaborative narrative among all of the players. In order to produce the tension necessary to drive the game, most emphasize uncertainty by adding a random element to the mechanics.

There are other ways to produce this tension, however.

*This* game is not random. In this game, the narrative tension is derived from resource-management and strategy—a constant give-and-take between the players and the game-manager.

Do not be deceived; this game is not a mere test of wits, nor an exercise in rules-mastery. It is a fast-moving game, which can be approached with any level of caution and forethought, or none at all. No matter the approach, it will be fun, for it is, at its heart, a collaborative narrative-building game.

## Table of Contents:

<a href="#">The Core Mechanic</a>	Page 2
<a href="#">Magnitude of Actions</a>	Page 5
<a href="#">Character Generation</a>	Page 6
<a href="#">Advancement</a>	Page 8
<a href="#">Temporary Attributes</a>	Page 8
<a href="#">Genre Templates</a>	Page 9
<a href="#">Managing the Game</a>	Page 12
<a href="#">Improvising</a>	Page 13
<a href="#">Scenario Archetypes</a>	Page 14
<a href="#">Personality Archetypes</a>	Page 14
<a href="#">Obstacles and Opponents</a>	Page 15
<a href="#">Examples of Play</a>	Page 17

## The Core Mechanic:

The game is played by a group of players, who each take the role of a character, and a single game-manager, who presents scenarios, obstacles, and opponents for the players to interact with. Each character has a pool of resources, represented with tokens, which are used to determine the success and effects of actions taken throughout the game. These tokens represent an intrinsic quality; they cannot be traded between characters. The game-manager also has a pool of tokens to oppose the characters' attempted actions. The sizes of these token pools fluctuate during the course of the game, but return to their starting numbers at the start of each game-session.

Closely related to these token pools are the attributes that each character, obstacle, or opponent has. These are ranked, and determine how many tokens can be used in any given action. Attributes and their ranks are assigned during [character generation](#).

As with any role-playing game, the narrative drives the events of the story; the mechanics that are used to get there exist to facilitate this process, but their importance is secondary to the narrative. To put it another way, success in the game is not achieved by collecting tokens, but rather, by using them to achieve the characters' goals within the story!

Characters achieve those goals through a series of separately resolved actions. To do so, the player first describes the action. The player and the game-manager then come to a consensus on which attribute the action will use. If no consensus can be reached within a brief period, the game-manager's decision will stand. The game-manager also determines what attribute will oppose the action, but does not necessarily have to tell the players what it is.

The player then spends a number of tokens on the action, [up to the maximum value of the relevant attribute](#), declaring at the same time what the expected payoff of success will be. Once again, the player and game-manager should agree on the scope of these effects, but, if they cannot, the game-manager's ruling stands. The tokens used in this process come from the character's token pool and cannot be taken from another character's token pool.

The number of the tokens spent serves two functions in this process. Not only does it determine whether an action is successful or not, but [it is also directly proportional to the magnitude of risk or reward that an action will yield](#).

Once the player has dedicated tokens to the attempted action, the game-manager opposes the action by spending tokens to either tie or beat the player's number, while also declaring what potential complication the new stakes

represent. The game-manager may also choose not to do so, at all, in which case the player is automatically successful.

If there *is* opposition, however, the player may then respond with a counter-bid, while describing the new level of potential success that the heightened stakes represent (again, with the game-manager's agreement). This process of raising stakes continues until one side or the other chooses not to respond (or can't).

The results of the action are then determined according to the magnitude of the *lowest* final bid. (This means that the magnitude of the results is something that *both* parties have bought into—no one can ever be forced to take on a level of risk that they deem unacceptable.) In the case of a tie, there is no lowest bid, so the final bid (which both sides have matched) determines the magnitude. At this point, either the character's action is successful, a complication has arisen, or both.

A complication is a narrative twist that is introduced during the course of the game. Complications are the primary way that the world reacts to the characters' actions. Thus, the game-manager's influence in the world is felt through the character's own actions. It is also possible for players to introduce their own complications when actions are initiated against their characters—either by the game-manager, or by another character.

*Example of Action Resolution: A character attempts to jump over a pit and happens to have the Leap attribute at rank 3. The game-manager agrees that the attribute is appropriate and figures that the pit's Gaping Maw attribute, also at rank 3, will contest that leap. The player spends 3 tokens to make the leap, declaring that, at that level of potential risk and reward, he ought to be able to keep his feet and keep running if he lands on the other side. The game-manager spends 3, as well, and, since the player can't beat that, the result is a tie. The character succeeds in the leap exactly as described, except that his landing causes the edge of the pit to crumble further, which will make bypassing it very difficult for his allies.*

Once the action is resolved, the player gives the game-manager the tokens that were spent on the character's action and the game-manager gives the player the tokens spent in opposition to it. In this way, a character who loses a conflicted action will normally have a net gain of one token overall, while the victor will normally have a net loss of one.

It is possible to exceed this limit by using multiple attributes in a single action. Doing so allows a player to exceed an attribute's value by adding another one's value to it—even exceeding the normal cap of 5. However, the cost is very high; the player spends *double* the tokens to perform such an action!

This back-and-forth flow of tokens is the primary tension-balancing factor in the game—the more successful you are through the course of the game, the more resources you spend and the more the game-manager amasses to use against you. Conversely, if you opt for a strategy that accepts a myriad of complications, the game-manager must deplete more resources to produce them, while you cultivate your own. Thus, these tokens are the fundamental resource of the game—always in flux, but in a closed system made up only of the characters and the game-manager.

*Example of Token Exchange: In the above example, both sides pay each other 3 tokens, because the action resulted in a tie. However, if one side or the other had only spent two tokens on the action, the victor would receive those two, while the loser would gain the other three. This would occur after the action had been resolved. If, instead, the character had broken the tie by using the another attribute, the total value of combined attributes would be at least 4, but the cost in tokens would be 8. The character would only gain 3 and would lose a net total of 5 tokens to the other side in achieving the success. Let's hope it was worth it!*

So, what happens if you ever find yourself completely out of tokens? In such cases, your options for success are, at least temporarily, entirely depleted. Any contested action you take when you have no tokens to spend will result in a failure. Fortunately, the magnitude of the resulting complication will always be minor, and afterward, you will be back to one token!

## Magnitude of Action:

When you spend tokens on an action, you are representing a narrative level of risk that you are willing to take with the action, in order to reap a similar level of narrative reward with a success.

The magnitude of an action's effect is equal to the lowest number of tokens spent in its resolution. Thus, it ranges from 0 to 4. Any magnitude greater than 4 (which can be achieved either through a tie, or [through the use of more than one attribute during an action](#)) is treated as a 4.

The following guidelines should help you to determine and describe what the magnitude of your action represents:

**0** = In this case, the stakes are very low. The result of this action is very short-term, lasting for only a moment or so, or otherwise severely limited.

**1** = The stakes are slightly higher, but still low-risk. Results might last for several minutes or even days but will not directly cause real harm to anyone.

**2** = The stakes are moderate. Results could last for days or weeks, might affect a second target, and are significant enough that they cannot be ignored.

**3** = The stakes are high. Results could last for months or even years. Chances are, somebody—and perhaps several somebodies—will get hurt by the exchange in a meaningful way.

**4 or more** = The stakes are extremely high. Results will likely be game-changers, possibly affecting many, and they may well be permanent.

## Character Generation:

Unlike most role-playing games, it really is not necessary that each player's character share the same attributes as another, nor that these attributes are the same from genre to genre. Instead, the players choose their characters' attributes, either from the suggested lists of attributes in the [genre templates](#), or through collaboration with the game-manager.

Determining the genre is a very important starting place when creating a character. As a group, you should all agree on the tone, feel, and setting of the game that you wish to play. A horror game set in the modern day will play far different than a space opera or a high-fantasy game. These are decisions that everyone must agree upon before the game can begin, because they permeate the entire narrative of the game. Moreover, these genre decisions dictate what attributes will make sense in the context of that narrative.

No matter the genre, each character should have the same number of attributes as the others and the totals of their ranks should also be the same. Most genres will use 4 attributes per character, but some may have more or less. Each character's starting token pools should likewise be the same (and will equal the total ranks of the character's attributes).

Depending on the genre, some of these attributes might be vulnerabilities, which may be targeted by opponents through directly-instigated actions, or through complications. In theory, all attributes can be used as vulnerabilities, but some are specifically designed to be.

The values you may assign to your attributes will depend on what tone the group has determined to run. For gritty games, for instance, each character might be limited to rank 4. A super-heroic game might, on the other hand, require a rank of 5 in at least one attribute. At any rate, the total points to be assigned will be 3 per attribute.

Each attribute is ranked from 1 to 5. These rankings will determine the maximum amount of tokens that can be spent while using them to perform an action. Because this also determines the magnitude of the results of those actions, these rankings are strongly tied to the narrative of the game. Their descriptions follow:

**1** = Barely proficient. A character with this rank in an attribute will only be able to contribute with it minimally.

**2** = Mediocre. A character with this rank in an attribute will regularly be outclassed by even average practitioners.

**3** = Average. A character with this rank in an attribute is not particularly better, nor worse than most who have the ability.

**4** = Excellent. A character with this rank in an attribute will usually succeed at its application, at least when it matters.

**5** = Masterful. A character with this rank in an attribute will be able to succeed in conflicts that have game-changing results.

*Example of Assigning Attributes: The player has chosen four of the attributes from the list provided in the genre template that the group will be using. He has 12 points to assign to his attributes (three per attribute). He assigns 1 to the first, 2 to the second, 4 to the third, and 5 to the final attribute. He will begin each game-session with a pool of 12 tokens, as well.*

## Advancement:

Attributes can be advanced in between game-sessions, if certain requirements are met. To do so, keep track of the number of sessions during which an attribute has been used at its maximum magnitude. When the total of such sessions equals or is greater than double the current rank of that skill, a character may advance that attribute by one point (up to the allowed maximum). The count then resets for that attribute. Each character can make only one advancement in between each session. The character's starting token pool for future sessions increases accordingly.

Any time a character could increase an attribute, a new attribute can instead be added at rank 1 (which also increases the character's starting token pool). If this option for advancement is used, the original attribute's advancement count is reset just as if it had been increased.

The rate of advancement might be quicker or slower, depending on the preferences of the group. This, like all such play-style decisions, is easily adjusted, simply by applying an appropriate [genre template](#).

*Example of Attribute Advancement: The player has used a rank 3 attribute at a magnitude of 3 for six sessions since the last time it was advanced. After the current game-session, he will have a choice: either he can advance that attribute to 4, or he can add a new attribute to his character at rank 1. Either way, the count will be reset and the attribute will not be able to be advanced until it once again meets the requirements. If a new attribute is purchased, it may be advanced after two sessions, if it is used during both.*

## Temporary Attributes:

During the course of the game, it is possible to acquire new options through equipment, or magic, or technology. These new options may not necessarily be permanent enhancements of a character. As such, they are added to a character just as a permanent attribute is (although frequently during the game, rather than in between sessions), but they never contribute tokens to the total starting token pool of the character. As with permanent attributes, a temporary attribute may be advanced by the same means and with the same restrictions.

*Example of Gaining a Temporary Attribute: A character has acquired a magical flaming sword in the course of the game. Immediately, the character gains the Magical Flaming Sword attribute at rank 1, but no additional tokens. Most likely, [the attribute will only be used to augment another](#) at a critical moment, at least until it gets boosted some.*



## Genre Templates:

The rules of this game are loose enough to cover a variety of genres and play-styles. To help the group find the game they wish to play with these rules, the following genre templates are suggested. Each template has suggestions for creating a certain genre through play-style alterations, lists of attributes that would fit the genre, treatments of lethality, or some combination thereof.

These templates are by no means extensive, nor are they necessarily intended to be used alone. The group is encouraged to mix and match the templates to achieve a style of play they wish to explore, or simply create a new one. Use whichever elements you want and drop whichever ones you don't.

A template that lists suggested attributes can be expanded upon to fit the group's needs, but doing so should be a joint decision, as new attributes could potentially alter the very assumptions of the genre.

A template that provides suggestions for character lethality refers only to the likelihood of death for those characters controlled by players; other characters may have different life-expectations. The templates also suggest whether or not such death is permanent.

### *Fantasy*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Backstabber, Berserker, Breaking & Entering, Charm, Command, Endurance, Fighter, Healer, Investigator, Magicking, Misdirection, Observation, Performer, Prayer, Reason, Researcher, Search, Sharpshooter, Slink, Thieving, Tracker, Trap-Clearing.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Unlikely to very likely, not necessarily permanent.

### *Fast Advancement*

**Suggested Advancement Rate:** Halve the number of sessions required for advancement of each attribute (to one per current attribute rank).

### *Futuristic Warfare*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Aircraft-Pilot, Close-Fighter, Command, Evasion, Gun-Fighter, Mechanized Vehicle-Pilot, Repair & Tinker, Scavenger, Spacecraft-Pilot, Systems-Hacker, Tactician, Weapons Systems.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Somewhat likely, permanent.

### *Gritty or Horror*

**Suggested Attribute Limitations:** Each character starts with only 3 attributes, none of which may start above 4. Starting tokens equal 9.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Very likely.

*Modern*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Breaking & Entering, Charm, Close-Fighter, Disguise, Drive, Evasion, Gun-fighter, Infiltrator, Inventor, Investigator, Misdirection, Observation, Performer, Aircraft-Pilot, Planner, Reason, Researcher, Systems-Hacker, Thieving.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Unlikely to very likely, permanent.

*Noir*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Charm, Close-Fighter, Drive, Evasion, Gun-Fighter, Investigator, Motive-Reading, Observation, Performer, Reason, Researcher.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Somewhat unlikely, permanent.

*Pulp Action*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Berserker, Breaking & Entering, Charm, Close-Fighter, Drive, Endurance, Evasion, Gun-Fighter, Hypnotize, Invention, Investigator, Misdirection, Mystical Manipulation, Observation, Occult, Performer, Researcher, Repair & Tinker, Slink, Trap-Clearing.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Unlikely, usually permanent.

*Slow Advancement*

**Suggested Advancement Rate:** Double the number of sessions required for advancement of each attribute (to four per current attribute rank).

*Space Exploration*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Charm, Close-Fighter, Command, Engineer, Gun-Fighter, Healer, Misdirection, Navigator, Reason, Repair & Tinker, Spacecraft-Pilot, Systems-Hacker, Translator, Weapons Systems.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Unlikely to very likely (depending on the color of your shirt), almost always permanent.

*Space Opera*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Aircraft-Pilot, Berserker, Charm, Close-Fighter, Gun-Fighter, Healer, Misdirection, Mystical Manipulation, Reason, Repair & Tinker, Translator, Spacecraft-Piloting, Systems-Hacker, Weapons Systems.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Unlikely, permanent.

*Super-heroic*

**Suggested Attribute Limitations:** Each character starts with 5 attributes, one of which must be rank 5 and one of which must be a vulnerability. Starting tokens equal 15.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Very rare, almost never permanent.

### *Super Powers*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Berserker, Destroyer, Elemental Creation or Manipulation, Endurance, Environmental Manipulation, Evasion, Fighter, Flight, Genius, Mental Manipulation, Metamorphosis, Mighty, Mind Reader, Misdirection, Planner, Regeneration, Speedy, Telepathy, Water-Walker.

### *Super Vulnerabilities*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Arrogance, Code of Conduct, Emotional Bond, Emotional Control, Infamy, Material Vulnerability, Metamorphosis, Secret Identity.

**Note:** Vulnerabilities are attributes that can be targeted by opponents, either through opponent-initiated action, or by attaching complications to them. In theory, any attribute can be used as a vulnerability, but these are specifically designed to be.

### *Western*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Breaking & Entering, Charm, Close-Fighter, Endurance, Evasion, Gambler, Gun-Fighter, Healer, Horse-Riding Tricks, Misdirection, Prayer, Roping, Tracker, Quick-Draw.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Unlikely to somewhat likely, permanent.

### *Wuxia*

**Suggested Attribute List:** Ancient Wisdom, Balance, Block, Chi Manipulation, Deflection, Destruction, Endurance, Feather-Walk, Leap, Meditation, Pin, Strength of Kung Fu, Strike, Throw, Tumble, Wall-Climb.

**Suggested Character Lethality:** Unlikely, usually permanent.

## Managing the Game:

This game is designed to produce a collaborative narrative. Its tension and unpredictability do not result from random elements, as in most role-playing games. Rather, they are derived from resource-management and strategy—determining, for instance, whether it is wise to win a series of easy encounters and enter a climactic scene depleted of many tokens and faced with a game-manager with a pool of many, or to allow a few setbacks to arise in the pursuit of the overarching goal so that the characters have several tokens and the game-manager's pool is instead depleted. Either way, it should make for an exciting game!

The game-manager begins each session with a number of tokens equal to the number each player starts with. If the players start with an unequal number of tokens ([because one or more of them has advanced an attribute](#)), the game-manager should start with tokens equal to the player who has the most.

Because these tokens are traded back and forth through conflicts, the total number of tokens in play will never change during a session; only their owners will! This is an integral component of the tension-building mechanic of this game. The players and the game-manager will all have to weigh the cost of success against the gains of failure during the course of the game—and spend tokens accordingly.

The action is intended to be player-centric. Ideally, each player will have an equal amount of time in the spotlight, but there are no turns in this game, and, so, no specific turn order. For the most part, narrative will dictate the order of events.

Usually, when a conflicted action is called for, it should be a player who initiates it. Generally, the game-manager won't even take actions; opponents of the characters will often act through complications that arise from the characters' actions, although sometimes, a conflict *may* be initiated by the game-manager, if the narrative dictates—for instance, if a character does not notice something that is concealed.

Sometimes a character will want to spend a large quantity of tokens on an action from the outset, rather than start at the low end and work up. When this happens, it is possible to accidentally allocate more tokens than are necessary to succeed in the action. However, no action can ever cost either side any more than the minimum amount needed to succeed. This means that the overall gain or loss of tokens resulting from a conflicted action will never be greater than one.

## Improvising:

The flexible nature of this game will call upon the game-manager to freely and constantly improvise and often to create obstacles and opponents on the fly. The following tips should help tremendously in doing so:

Think of the game as a river. The players are attempting to navigate the river and you are attempting to make the journey interesting, *but you are not trying to prevent them from completing it*. Instead, you might throw a bend in the course, perhaps a waterfall or some rapids along the way. Perhaps a branch to snag their raft. What you do not want to do is throw a dam across the river; the players should constantly be moving forward!

This is crucial to the pacing of the game, because collaborative improvisation requires momentum and momentum cannot be sustained if you keep shutting down options. Whenever an action is resolved, it should either result in a success for the character, or a complication, or both. *The narrative should never be shut down.*

Traditionally, improvisation calls for a “Yes, and...” response to whatever your collaborators provide you. However, in a role-playing game, an element of tension is expected, and cannot be achieved without some degree of uncertainty.

Instead of “Yes, and...” you should be thinking “Yes, if...” and if the result is a failure, introduce a complication instead of blocking the way forward. In this way, every conflict should build on the story, tighten up the tension, and throw its momentum toward the climax of the narrative.

Keep in mind, the players will have to improvise as well, so it is imperative that they trust you to let them. This means being fair—and flexible—in your adjudications. It also means making it easy for them to improvise, instead of consistently denying their efforts.

It is quite possible that you'll be rolling right along, when one of the players gets stuck while trying to conceptualize a particular action. Help the players out! The game-manager is not their adversary, but a facilitator of fun. Don't be afraid to offer suggestions to the players when they're drawing a blank! This, as much as anything else, will keep the game running smoothly and will help you pace it!

But what happens when *you* get stuck? Much of improvisation is the ability to string together tropes and archetypes that you're already familiar with. It gets smoother with practice, but it never hurts to have a few ideas handy for when you get stuck, especially when you're trying to construct a character or a scenario on the fly.

First, though, you need to remember one number: Three. That's the rank of an average attribute and it is the number you should default to when you make up an attribute on the spot. Raise or lower it if you think you ought to. In general, though, if you don't know, or it doesn't matter—the attribute's rank is 3.

That's the mechanical side, but sometimes the narrative is the hardest part to invent off the cuff. The following lists may prove handy. The first, *scenario archetypes*, is a list of ideas to pull from when you need something to happen. The second list, *personality archetypes*, are ideas to draw from when you need someone to interact with the characters.

**Scenario Archetypes:** Chase, Competition, Conquest, Construction, Crafting, Defense, Destruction, Discovery, Experiment, Exploration, Extortion, Hiding, Hostage, Infiltrate, Investigation, Lost, Mercantilism, Protection, Recovery, Recruiting, Rescue, Research, Romance, Schemes, Search, Theft, Travel.

**Personality Archetypes:** Absent-minded, Alluring, Angry, Annoying, Arrogant, Awkward, Boorish, Brilliant, Bumbling, Distant, Dominating, Enthusiastic, Foolish, Generous, Gentle, Gregarious, Impulsive, Insensitive, Insidious, Loyal, Merciless, Mirthful, Miserly, Opportunistic, Pious, Quick-witted, Reserved, Scheming, Seductive, Shy, Single-minded, Slothful, Smarmy, Snarky, Vacant, Vivacious, Woeful, Wretched.

## Obstacles and Opponents:

In order to better aid the game-manager in providing interesting and varied obstacles and opponents to challenge the characters with, the following sampling is provided. The attributes listed are provided for reference, but can easily be altered as suits the game's needs.

The potential complications listed herein are merely suggestions meant to spur the game-manager's mind in a certain direction. These obstacles and opponents are not meant to be limited to any such set of complications; a complication could be anything that works in the current situation.

Furthermore, they are intentionally vague. A complication may be any twist in the narrative, or may force a character to use attributes (especially vulnerabilities) in certain ways. How can the game-manager apply a complication? In any way that makes sense, given the situation and magnitude!

*Air or Space-Fighter* (Attributes: Endurance 1, Evasion 4, Aircraft- or Spacecraft-Pilot 4, Weapons Systems 3; Potential Complications: Disable, Reinforcements, Tactical Advantage.)

*Battleship-Class Spacecraft* (Attributes: Endurance 4, Engineer 3, Evasion 1, Navigator 3, Repair 4, Spacecraft-Pilot 2, Weapons Systems 4; Potential Complications: Board, Capture, Disable.)

*Beastly Monster* (Attributes: Endurance 5, Close-Fighter 4, Looming 3, Observation 2, Reason 1, Regeneration 3, Tracker 3; Potential Complications: Swallow Whole, Traumatize, Wound.)

*Courtier or Lobbyist* (Attributes: Charm 5, Misdirection 4, Observation 2, Reason 1; Potential Complications: Corrupt, Loophole, Scapegoat.)

*Cruiser-Class Spacecraft* (Attributes: Endurance 3, Engineer 3, Evasion 3, Navigator 3, Repair 3, Spacecraft-Pilot 3, Weapons Systems 3; Potential Complications: Board, Disable, Reinforcements.)

*Elder Dragon* (Attributes: Breath Fire 3, Endurance 5, Close-Fighter 3, Evasion 1, Flight 3, Looming 5, Magicking 2, Observation 1, Reason 4; Potential Complications: Burn, Snatch, Wound.)

*Guard* (Attributes: Fighter or Close- and Gun-Fighter 4, Observation 3, Reason 2; Potential Complications: Alarm, Capture, Disarm.)

*Horde Fighter* (Attributes: Berserker 4, Endurance 2, Close-Fighter 3; Potential Complications: Destruction, Swarm, Terrorize.)

*Incorporeal Undead* (Attributes: Drain 3, Evasion 5, Close-Fighter 1, Flight 3, Ignore the Corporeal World 5, Ignore Prayer 1; Potential Complications: Create Incorporeal Undead, Haunt, Terrify.)

*Mechanized Vehicle* (Attributes: Endurance 4, Evasion 1, Looming 4, Mechanized Vehicle-Pilot 3, Weapon Systems 3; Potential Complications: Destroy, Disable, Tactical Advantage.)

*Mystical Leader* (Attributes: Command 3, Endurance 2, Healer 3, Mystical Manipulation or Magicking 4, Prayer 3; Potential Complications: Curse, Inspire Frenzy, Reinforcements.)

*Pit Trap* (Attributes: Concealed 3, Drop Away 3; Potential Complications: Funnel, Trap, Wound.)

*Poison* (Attribute: Attack from Within 3; Potential Complications: Nauseate, Paralyze, Weaken.)

*Structure* (Attributes: Endurance 4, Stability 2; Potential Complications: Block, Collapse, Conceal.)

*Thug* (Attribute: Close-Fighting 3; Potential Complications: Cow, Hinder, Wound.)

*Turret* (Attributes: Endurance 3, Fighter or Gun-Fighter 3, Observation 3; Potential Complications: Alarm, Explode, Wound.)

*Young Dragon* (Attributes: Breath Fire 3, Endurance 4, Close-Fighter 2, Evasion 4, Flight 3, Looming 4, Magicking 1, Observation 2, Reason 2; Potential Complications: Burn, Snatch, Wound.)

*Zombie* (Attributes: Endurance 5, Close-Fighter 2, Ignore Prayer 1, Infect 4; Potential Complications: Create Zombie, Swarm, Terrify.)



## Examples of Play:

### Example 1:

Five friends have gotten together to play a *Fantasy* game with the *Gritty template* added on. The party has just descended to a deeper level of a dungeon and suddenly find themselves in the midst of a group of zombies!

*Swordly McStabbington* (Attributes: Endurance 3, Fighter 4, Search 2) is down to 4 out of his original 9 tokens and starting to get really anxious about his chances of surviving this adventure.

*Jack the Knifeintheback* (Attributes: Backstabber 2, Slink 4, Trap-Clearing 3) has managed to conserve 8 tokens.

*Holly Yerthanthou* (Attributes: Healer 4, Observation 1, Prayer 4) has had to heal more than a few wounds along the way and, consequently, has 3 tokens.

*Squirm the Bookworm* (Attributes: Magicking 4, Reason 3, Researcher 2) has been holding back up till now, taking a few minor defeats along the way, and has all of 12 tokens!

The game-manager has 18 tokens and six *Zombies* (Attributes: Close-Fighter 2, Endurance 5, Ignore Prayer 1, Infect 4; Potential Complications: Create Zombie, Swarm, Terrify) to close about the party!

Squirm decides to lay out an arcane blast of energy with Magicking before Swordly gets a chance to run up into combat. He wants to catch all of the zombies, but is aware that he'll need to have somewhat of a high-magnitude effect to pull that off. He dedicates the maximum of 4 tokens to the effort. The zombies use Endurance to survive the blast and, because the game-manager has plenty of tokens at this point, spend 5 in doing so. This number is beyond Squirm's maximum, so he can't even tie it.

The stakes were extremely high for this action, so the resulting complication will be just as significant as the success would have been. The blast singes the zombies, but fails to drop them, and they then swarm Squirm, who is in a very bad way, right now!

The good news is, while Squirm pays 4 tokens to the game-manager, he gains 5. Squirm is up one, and the game-manager is down to 17.

Holly hopes that, through the holy power of Prayer, she can turn a few of the zombies away, which will be contested by the zombies' ability to Ignore Prayer.

She only has three tokens, though, so she starts by setting her action at a magnitude of 1, stating that all she really needs is to free Squirm for a few seconds. The zombies, (un)naturally, spend a token to tie her 1 (since they can't exceed it) and the game-manager tells Holly that a tie will mean success for her, but the zombies will inflict a minor wound on Squirm in the process. Holly really doesn't want that, since she'll just have to spend more tokens to heal him later, so she increases her action to 2.

Since the magnitude is determined by the second-highest expenditure, it is only 1. The effect won't last long, and it won't harm the zombies in any way, but it is enough to free Squirm from the swarm. Unfortunately, it also means Holly is down to a mere 2 tokens!

Swordly rushes in to drag Squirm to safety. This will be easily done with no contest, so Swordly decides to throw a spear at one of the zombies while he's at it. This will use his Fighter attribute against the zombie's Endurance attribute. Swordly doesn't intend to win, here; he's just trying to earn a token from the game-manager, so he sets the action at 1, stating that he'll be happy if it just hits. The zombie counters with 2, and that is that. One of the zombies now has a spear sticking out of it, but is unfazed, and Swordly now has its undivided attention.

Jack decides that now would be a great time to slip away. The zombies do not have the Observation attribute, so Jack pays his 1 token (against the zombies' 0) to Slink back up the stairs unnoticed.

At this point, Jack's got 7 tokens, Swordly has 5, Holly has 2, Squirm has 13, and the game-manager is back to 18. The zombies are still out there and Jack has run off; things look bad, but the day isn't over, yet.

#### *Example 2:*

Three friends are playing a game with the *Futuristic Warfare* [genre template](#). The characters are deep in enemy territory and have come across an unattended mechanized vehicle designed for use by a pilot and a gunner. They have decided to commandeer it.

Ace (Attributes: Aircraft-Pilot 5, Evading 2, Mechanized Vehicle-Pilot 4, Scavenging 1) has all 12 of his starting tokens and is hoping for a chance to show off his piloting abilities.

Count Z (Attributes: Repair & Tinker 3, Scavenger 2, Systems-Hacker 4, Weapons Systems 3) is looking forward to the challenge of breaking into a new vehicle. He also has 12 tokens.

The game-manager has 12 tokens as well. A piloted mechanized vehicle would normally have the Mechanized Vehicle-Pilot and Weapon Systems attributes at 3, but, because this one is unattended, the game-manager decides to replace them with a rank 3 attribute he calls Security. He also figures that the potential complications will have to change, so he makes up a short list. Thus, the *Unattended Mechanized Vehicle* (Attributes: Endurance 4, Evasion 1, Looming 4, Security 3; Potential Complications: Disable, Distress Signal, Self-Destruct.) is ready to be commandeered.

First, Count Z needs to break in. To do that, he'll need to use his Systems-Hacker attribute against the vehicle's Security. He starts out at 1, hoping maybe he can buy the action for little risk. This, he claims, represents a quick test of the system. If it is unsecured, he's in. Not so. The game-manager comes over the top with 3, the maximum amount allowed with the vehicle's Security attribute. He tells Z that the system is active and will send out a distress signal to all nearby units if it is breached without being disabled. Z can get by that, so he counters with a 4 and he's in!

The magnitude of the action is 3, [since that was the second-highest bid](#). Because the stakes were high, he's able to get it up and running with no difficulty, and very quickly, even pulling the Weapon Systems online quicker than anticipated (a lesser magnitude of action might have required further time and action to do so).

This is good news, because that means that as soon as Ace hops into the cockpit, they're ready to go! Because he's never piloted this particular model of vehicle before, Ace is going to need to use his Mechanized Vehicle-Piloting attribute just to familiarize himself with the interface. However, the vehicle itself doesn't have an attribute that will contest that, so Ace will succeed with a single token spent.

And now would be a good time to get moving, because the characters are both down to 11 tokens, the game-manager now has 14, and an unfriendly Mechanized Vehicle has just noticed them and is closing to investigate!

### *Example 3:*

Four friends are playing a game, using the *Super-heroic genre*, including *Powers* and *Vulnerabilities*. (Vulnerabilities are attributes that can be targeted by opponents, either through opponent-initiated action, or by attaching complications to them.) The characters have battled their way into the villain's lair and are about to confront him for the first time. They turn the corner and there stands Mean Man with four of this thugs.

*Zippy* (Attributes: Close-Fighter 3, Reason 2, Secret Identity 1, Speedy 5, Water-Walker 4) has been successful in his conflicts thus far, and, consequently, is down to 5 out of his original 15 tokens.

*Mad Ox* (Attributes: Destroyer 5, Emotional Control 2, Healer 2, Metamorphosis 1, Mighty 5) has his original 15 tokens.

*Mister Mind* (Attributes: Emotional Bond 2, Genius 5, Planner 4, Reason 2, Tactician 2) has deliberately suffered some setbacks on his way to this point, in order to gain an advantage over Mean Man by the time they meet. He has a whopping 25 tokens.

The game-manager has 15 tokens, at the moment, out of the total 60 that have been in play from the start of the session. He has some prepared stats for *Mean Man* (Attributes: Arrogance 3, Command 1, Emotional Scarring 4, Evasion 5, Planner 2; Potential Complications: Confuse, Despair, Reinforcements) and the *Thugs* (Attribute: Close-Fighting 3; Potential Complications: Cow, Hinder, Wound).

The players initiate the action. As usual, Zippy takes the lead, opting to zip in and out of the thugs, attacking each of them. The game-manager determines that this will require Zippy to use his Speedy attribute. The thugs will oppose this as a single entity with their only attribute, Close Fighting. Zippy starts out by paying 3 tokens to the game-manager—any less than that and the stakes would probably be too low to take out all four of them. The thugs are unable to top that number, because their only attribute has a rank of 3. Even so, the game-manager has no particular reason not to match the number and force Zippy to either accept a tie or raise the stakes. At the same time, the game-manager tells Zippy that a tie would mean success, but also a blow to the head that would take him out of the fight. Zippy chooses to raise his action to a magnitude of 4.

Zippy has payed 4 tokens to the game-manager, but has received 3 back. Because the second-highest bid was of magnitude 3, the thugs are completely taken out of the fight by this course of action. Had the stakes been lower, one or more of them would likely have withstood the assault.

At this point, Mad Ox steps in. Mad Ox is playing a character who is struggling with a dual identity—with a corresponding metamorphosis. Currently, he's a bit of a monster. That being the case, he decides the best thing he could do is collapse the tunnel on top of Mean Man. Mad Ox will be using his Destroyer attribute against Mean Man's Evasion. Though this is the first time the group has met Mean Man, it's not for lack of trying. Mad Ox knows that his foe must have a fairly high Evasion, so he raises the magnitude to 5, right off the bat. Alas, Mean Man is able to match that 5, resulting in a tie.

The results are mixed and the effect is at magnitude 5 ([which has the same effect as a 4](#))! This is a game-changing magnitude; the tunnel collapses onto Mean Man, but not before he delivers a devastating taunt that leaves Mad Ox emotionally scarred. This is doubly effective against Mad Ox, since Emotional Control is a [vulnerability](#). *Nobody talks about Mad Ox's mamma that way!* Because this was a magnitude 5 complication, the game-manager figures the effects will follow Mad Ox around for a very long time—perhaps forever—forcing Mad Ox to use Emotional Control at critical moments just to function.

Just then, 10 more Thugs approach from behind the characters; with the rubble to their backs, they'll now have to fight their way out!

Mister Mind looks around for some way to gain a tactical advantage over the thugs. Huh. He hadn't noticed a rug in the tunnel before, but a good yank should throw the thugs off balance. The attribute he is using is, of course, Tactician, but the thugs have no corresponding attribute to help them avoid it, so the attempt automatically succeeds, as long as Mister Mind pays 1 token to the game-manager.

At this point, Zippy is down to 4 tokens—his options are running thin! Mister Mind lost a token, too, but still has 24! Mad Ox didn't gain or lose any in his exchange. The game-manager is up to 16. Things are just warming up!