

m e t h o d s . i n . t h e . m a d n e s s

the
Window
2nd edition

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www.mimgames.com/window
comments@mimgames.com

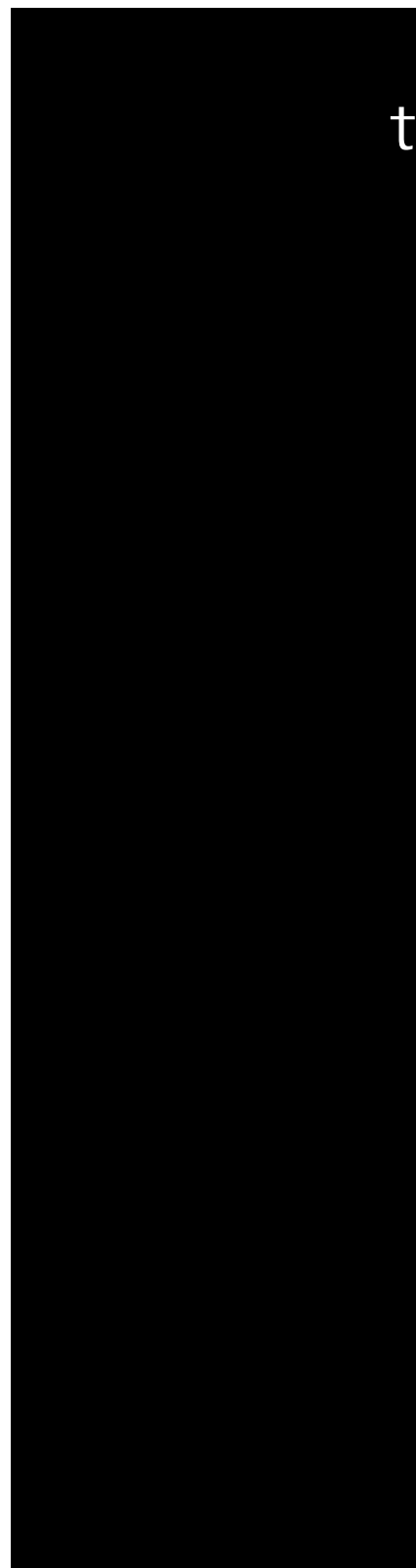


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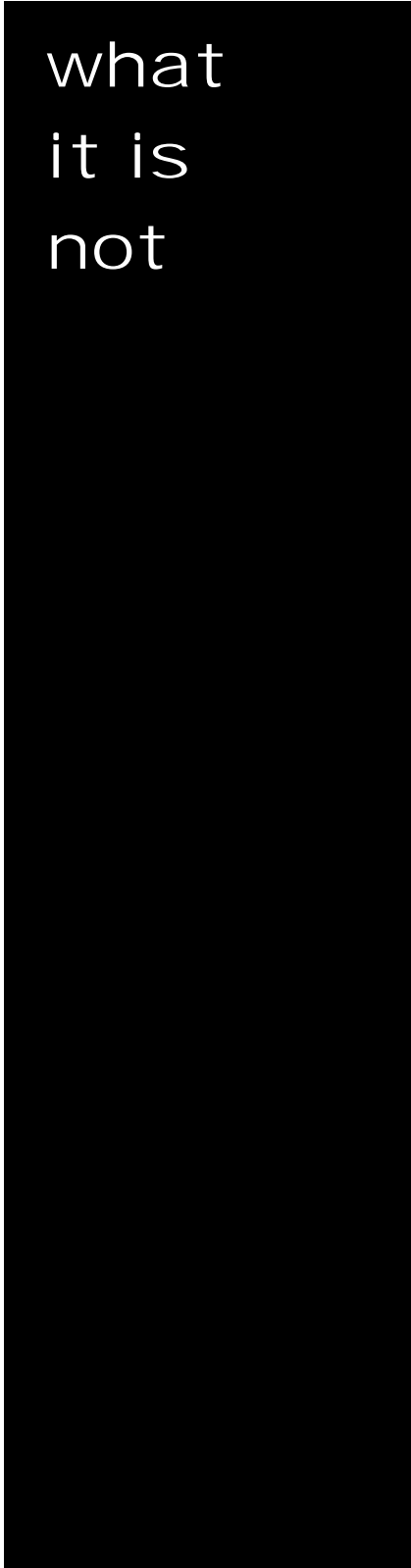
what it is

The Window is a transparent portal into the imagination, a roleplaying system designed with the simple belief that roleplaying is about story and character and not about dice and dick waving. For over five years now the Window has been quietly infiltrating the roleplaying community, changing and growing on the progressive edge of the hobby.

Many of the people who have started using the Window had long since concluded that the term "roleplaying system" is a contradiction in terms. Structure for structure's sake limits creativity and too many rules interrupt the narrative flow. What they wanted was a system working as transparently as possible, allowing them to build the story without concerning themselves with empty mechanics or mathematical charts. They also were looking for something that would quickly and seamlessly mold itself around their own stories and settings, a universal set of rules which could fit any genre without being generic and flavorless.

That is what the Window strives to be: simple, usable, and universal. There's not a lot to it, admittedly, but that's the whole idea. In the end, the Window is more a system of philosophy than a system of rules; if you share these viewpoints on roleplaying then you'll probably like these mechanics, and if you don't, you probably won't.

In addition to all its flighty philosophical bonuses, the Window is also free! You can take this text and do with it as you wish (for your personal use, mind you.) Make photocopies, download it, print it out, Email it to your friends in Australia, whatever you like. Please, just give us credit for the work that we have done, and include a copyright notice like the one on the credits page. (And if you think that the Window isn't worth the photons it's printed on, at least you didn't pay \$30 for it like all those dozens of commercial systems collecting dust on your bookshelf!)



a physics engine

If you are the type of person who prefers a system to have rules for any contingency presentable by Newton, then the Window is not what you are looking for.

an equipment depot

You'll notice that no information has been included on the guns, armor, ammo, clothes, vehicles, knives, explosives, or camping equipment Window characters can own. If you describe your character by the stuff he carries, you're describing him wrong in the first place.

a combat system

Combat in the Window is relegated to the status of just another scene, without a whole chapter of complex rules to manage it. In most stories, combat is nothing more than a fast and exciting byline to a larger plot, and it can be handled using the same simple rules used for everything else. (Every hour spent rolling dice and doing arithmetic could be spent actually roleplaying!)

a beginner's system

If you have never roleplayed before, then most of what you're reading right now probably doesn't make much sense. (Let us first say that roleplaying is NOT inherently satanic and that letting your kids do it has a better chance of swelling their creativity than encouraging them to drink blood.) Though it's quite possible that a beginner could gather some friends and use the Window to run a wonderful game, it's more likely that the lack of structure will be confusing and the story will disintegrate. If you want to get into roleplaying (I certainly encourage it!), you'd do better to make a trip to your local gaming store and pick up a 2nd generation system like GURPS, Champions, Palladium, AD&D, or the like, which all include brief tutorials for starting players.

a new idea

The concepts which form the foundations of the Window have been thought before, by many people, in many places. In the mid eighties there was a thrust in the UK roleplaying 'zines about the sorts of freeform roleplaying the Window espouses, but they were never really realized. Before that, there were almost certainly visionaries quietly practicing this sort of progressive storytelling in closets and smoky backrooms, using AD&D or whatever homegrown systems they hacked together from week to week. Many believe that anyone who roleplays for long enough will naturally develop these ideas on their own.

The difference is that the Window is practical and available right here and right now. It has been playtested, redesigned, and playtested again dozens of times by people from all over the world. As roleplaying continues to evolve, the Window will evolve with it.

the state of our art

Roleplaying as a self-aware form has only been around for about three decades. In that time it's been through three distinct "generations." These generations can by no means tied to a specific system release or year... they've grown naturally as the art of roleplaying has matured. By this reckoning the Window would be considered a third generation roleplaying system.

First generation roleplaying is dice and maps and little metal figures. This is where it all began. The Game Master describes the setting room by room and typically the characters wander around with swords or guns killing things and accumulating money and ever bigger weapons. It's all very childish, but admittedly it can be fun once in a while.

Somewhere along the line, someone (probably lots of someones, simultaneously) discovered that the scope of roleplaying can be a lot larger. The systems started being more universal and the characters more unique. Tactical maps disappeared for the most part, and everyone started focusing on characterization and plot. Out of this perspective exploded a whole slew of new roleplaying genres... horror, espionage, romance, wild west. This is second generation roleplaying, where most mature roleplayers fall today.

In recent years (or considerably further back in some cases), there has been a movement to push roleplaying to yet another level, its third generation. The lines between PCs and NPCs, live-action and table-top, even Gamemaster and player, are blurring. Card tables covered in dice are giving way to candlelit dinners and dramatic background music. The stories being told are on par with "real literature," and players in a game have been replaced by actors in a very intimate drama. These people are interested in constantly trying new structure and experimenting with the potential of the whole roleplaying medium. The Window has developed out of this atmosphere.

a call to arms

The Window is now in its second major incarnation. A couple of years ago it popped up on the Internet and the discussions began... these second edition rules have incorporated many of the best suggestions from the online Window community as well as all the feedback gathered from dozens of gaming conventions and playtesting sessions.

And there's always more holes to be filled! Right now several people are busy writing additions and settings for the Window, and we'll post them to the Window Web site as they are completed. If you've got a ground-breaking setting or a superior rules idea you'd like to see published, here's your chance... I intend the Window to be a forum for anyone who's radically minded and who's committed enough to share their creative vision.

I've dedicated myself to answering every Email personally, and it's my genuine hope that some of the extremely interesting people I've met through this Web site will continue to contribute and share thoughts with one another. So please stay in touch!

I'd like to thank you for taking a look. If you have comments, good or bad, don't hesitate to give me an earful.

Cheers,

Scott Lininger
Methods in the Madness
www.mimgames.com
scott@mimgames.com

the rules...

...are a necessary evil in roleplaying. On one hand they are needed to move the action along in a manageable fashion, and on the other they can very easily become too cumbersome and destroy the action altogether.

Take a moment to think about the rules in a roleplaying game. What purpose do they serve? In most systems, they first provide "balance," ensuring that the characters are not too powerful in relation to the world or to one another. Second, they provide flavor. The way in which the system describes characters naturally affects how you perceive those characters.

But both of these are somewhat secondary to the core purpose of the system: to decide which way the story will go at certain critical points. Will the troupe successfully find the secret door, or will they be trapped? Will they be able to pick the lock? Leap to the next train car? Defeat the enemy in battle? These are the times when the actors are no longer directly in control of things, and the characters choose their own fate by their abilities, luck, and instincts.

The Window provides the means of making these random plotting decisions through simple, quick, and easy to remember mechanics. The core rules can be learned in about five minutes and can be adapted to any genre you like in about ten. After reading the three precepts and the quick start page, you will be more or less ready to start playing. The majority of the sections afterward are concerned with presenting examples and discussing all the finer details.

Some Definitions

There are a few terms used in the Window which need to be clarified. The Storyteller is what other systems call the Gamemaster or Referee, based on the idea that the story is more important than any game or sport. The players are called actors, since that is what they truly are. We refer to the party of characters as the cast or the troupe.

In fact, theatrical and literary terms are used at all levels of the story, from a scene, to an act or chapter (one "adventure"), to a book (a "campaign," like a self contained series of acts), to the anthology or setting (all the books and characters which constitute a single world.)

the three percepts

The Window assumes that the people who use it are intelligent and mature. It is not a system meant to keep unruly actors in line or ensure that the Storyteller is fair about her decisions. This approach leaves certain pitfalls that inexperienced users can get trapped in. That is why the following philosophies need to be stated. These simple rules are the big ones, the guiding light for good roleplaying. If you follow them then using the Window will be a breeze.

the first precept:

“Everything about a Window character is described with adjectives rather than numbers.”

The central idea here is that adjectives tell us more about a character than numbers can, and in a much more realistic way. Those things which define a person in real life are as varied and subjective as the universe itself. Certainly, there's only so much you can say about a person with a number.

The best we can do in the real world is to try and rate an individual's traits compared to other people, or some inexact “average,” and we do this with adjectives. We say something like, “He's extremely good at driving.” Never do we say, “He's a 5 at driving,” but for some reason this is exactly what most roleplaying systems try to do.

As you may have guessed by now, the Window tries to more accurately represent the way that we perceive people by breaking up all their skills and traits into several levels of competency and assigning to each of them an adjective or brief description. In the above example, the character sheet would literally say “Extremely good at driving,” and that would be that; we now know that this character is an excellent driver. Not only is this more realistic, but it also allows an actor to learn about a character at a glance, without knowing a thing about the system.

Always remember that a Window character is a person, described with images and personality just like a real person. Even though there are a few dice and mechanics which the Window uses as storytelling tools, these are not what the character is about. It is considered improper and backwards—against the rules, in fact—for you to describe your character in terms of dice, numbers, or other system-oriented terms.

the second precept

“It is the actor's responsibility to play their role realistically.”

The Second Precept is the Window's way of addressing the “balance” issue which other roleplaying systems provide with hit points, damage dice, and skill modifiers. Such rules are designed to distinctively limit the actors in certain situations, forcing them to be realistic. The Window does not use such rules: it is up to the actor to evaluate his character's situation and react accordingly.

One outgrowth of the Second Precept is the assumption that the actors are willing (and hopefully pleased) to properly roleplay the effects of physical and emotional stress. So if a character is shot, he acts like he's been shot: he doesn't go leaping from building to building or wrestling alligators, for example—unless that makes sense in light of the story and his abilities.

Similarly, if a character is the victim of some severe emotional trauma they should be affected by it in the same way a real person would be.

Separate your knowledge and motivations from your character's. Superior stories can often be told if the actors are aware of things that their characters are not. Recognize this advantage for what it is, and stay conscious of what your character knows (and particularly what she doesn't know.)

Never forget that your character thinks like a real person with real emotional responses to the world around her. Seek out emotional scenes and get into them. Get sad, angry, despondent, loud, happy, frightened, worried, or intimidating as the story demands. Try to leave your own insecurities behind and stand boldly in the spotlight with every chance.

Always stay in character; it will make your role and the whole story come to life. Speak with your character's voice. Act on your character's beliefs. Dress in his clothes if it helps you get into the experience!

the third precept

"A good story is the central goal."

This is a big idea, though a simple one. It starts with the realization that the actors and the Storyteller are all cooperating toward the same goal: entertainment. If everyone takes equal responsibility for the quality of the story then all will benefit when it really starts working.

There are times when a good actor will let go of their own ego and let the story take precedence over their character. There are times when a good Storyteller will allow the actors to narrate scenes. The days of rival camps delineated by a GM screen are over. Though obviously the Storyteller's vision is what creates the seeds of roleplaying, nothing much will grow without the actors' input. An open, out of character dialog about the direction of the story should be maintained so that the Storyteller knows what's working and what's not.

Strive for originality in all things. Your characters, their actions, and their contribution to the narrative are totally up to you to decide, and the essence of roleplaying is a creative one. Don't allow yourself to fall back on stereotypes, and remember that what you create when you sit down to roleplay is totally unique to you and your group of friends. The story you mutually envision should be your own.

Quick Start Page

This first section is a (much shortened) summary of his background, from his birth in early Victorian London through his appointment to the Queen's personal team of supernatural investigators. The final paragraph in this particular portion also gives you an idea of what his personality is like.

Next comes Dr. Jenner's inherent traits, somewhat similar to what other systems call statistics. Instantly, you'll see that Dr. Jenner is not a particularly physical person, though he is perceptive and intelligent. He's not any luckier than the average person, but he is notably "sane," as he tends to be very good at rationalizing the world. Hopefully all of that is clear due to the descriptive adjectives that accompany each. Here you can see the First Precept at work.

These are Dr. Jenner's skills, or what he "is." This section is a simple list of definitions, describing Dr. Jenner as you would if you knew him personally and were telling somebody about him. Again, each area of expertise or profession is rated by an adjective or two, allowing you to now how skillful he is without knowing anything about how the system mechanics work.

The Window is a very simple system. You're about to learn how to use it. The first thing you need to see is an example character writeup. This is Royce Jenner, a typical character from a Victorian Horror setting. Take a moment to study Dr. Jenner's overview:

DR. ROYCE JENNER

Dr. Jenner is the director of an insane asylum in London, and is well known for his books on the truth behind ghost sightings. He believes rather solidly that ghosts are simply scale hallucinations induced by improper diet and a misbalance of humors in the body. He requested the Queen's appointment to these supernatural investigations to test some of his theories.

Dr. Jenner is enormously stable and able to deal with most anything with class. He is constantly stroking at his beard, with a slight smile playing on his lips, betraying his pride in the truth of science and reason.

Royce Jenner has...

Below average strength. (D20)
Average agility. (D12)
Pretty good health. (D10)
Impressive knowledge of the world. (D8)
Very high sanity. (D6)
Strong powers of perception. (D8)
Average luck. (D12)

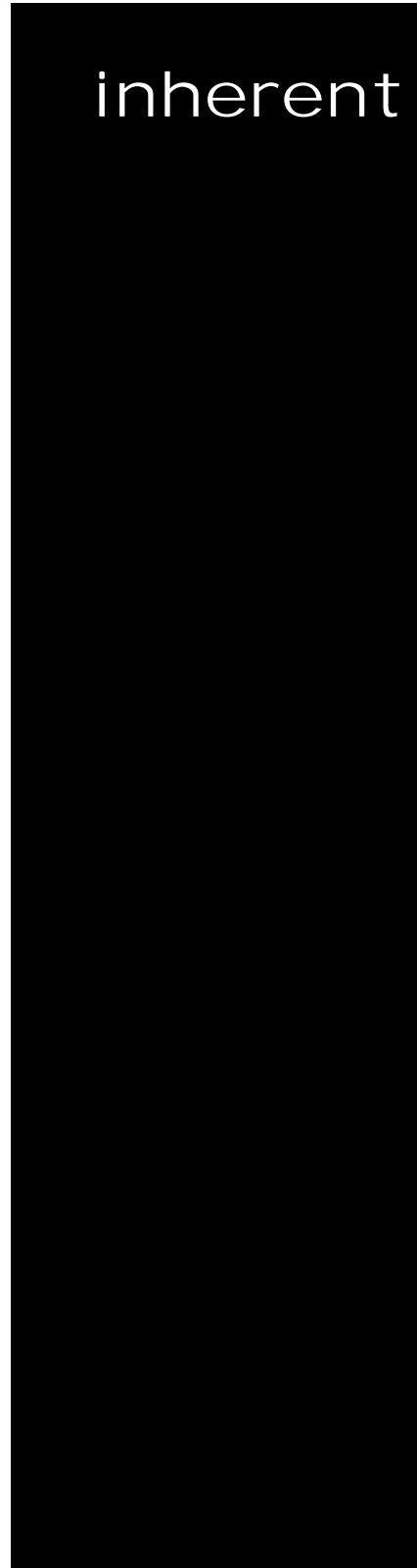
Royce Jenner is...

An expert psychologist. (D8)
A skilled medical doctor. (D10)
A former military man. (D20)
A respected writer. (D10)
A decent artist. (D12)
An amateur cook. (D20)
An average horseman. (D12)
A below average swimmer. (D20)

So, how does the system work? If Dr. Jenner attempts something particularly challenging during the course of the story, the Storyteller might ask for a roll. Notice that each trait or skill has a die listed alongside it in parenthesis; if you were playing Dr. Jenner in such a situation, you would roll the die listed next to the appropriate ability. If you roll a 6 or less, Dr. Jenner succeeds in his task. Otherwise he fails.

If Dr. Jenner were competing directly with someone, you would again roll the die associated with the appropriate ability. Your opponent would also roll. Whoever rolls less wins. In there's a tie, there's a tie.

Congratulations! You've just learned 90% of the Window! Everything in the Window works the same, which is one way it differs from most 2nd generation systems. There are, of course, some subtleties you haven't been exposed to yet, but you have already mastered the basics.



inherent traits

Even in the real world there are some abilities which everyone has and are often challenged, things like strength, perceptive powers, and health. In a Window character, these common qualities are called traits (often known as "stats" in other systems.)

Every actor on the cast will need to define these inherent traits for their character, as they will most likely be tested several times during the course of a chapter.

Following is the list of traits recommended for most roleplaying genres. They are delineated from other abilities and skills simply because they are present in everyone and are common tests for Storytellers to call for. The Storyteller should modify this list to fit their own style and the genre they are playing in.

For example, if you are playing in a very non-action oriented world where physical tests are few and far between, the Storyteller might opt to do away with strength or even agility. On the same token, it isn't uncommon for a Storyteller to add their own traits to the list to reflect the setting the characters come from. (Rules are available for several expansion traits, including luck, sanity, and magic. Check out the optionals section.)

the five basic traits

strength

This is the raw physical power which the character possesses, and it is tested in those situations where the character must lift, move, push, pull, or throw something which is unusually large or heavy. It also includes the character's ability to crush or break sturdy objects, hold down an enemy in combat, or other such trials of might.

agility

People who are highly agile are good at jumping over pits, swinging from ropes or vines, escaping from bonds, and picking pockets. It has to do with balance, manual dexterity, hand-to-eye coordination, and limberness, and it can be tested quite often in action oriented Anthologies.

health

Not only is this how good the character is at resisting disease, but also how good they are at running long distances, dealing with poison, holding their breath, etc.. Health rolls are very important should the character be wounded to determine how well they resist shock, pain, unconsciousness, and even death.

knowledge

Often referred to as "knowledge of the world," this is a general measure of how much the character has experienced and how much education they have received. Older, smarter, or more travelled characters usually are more knowledgeable, and this ability is tested when a character needs to see if they know important information on government organizations, how a steam engine works, or similar feats of experience and wisdom.

perception

Often called "powers of perception," the Storyteller will call for tests of this ability when the troupe has a chance to notice something in a scene that isn't readily apparent. This includes seeing hidden or obscure clues, hearing distant noises, or smelling that telltale whiff of poison...



skills

Any ability which a character possesses that is not an inherent trait falls into the category of a skill. Skills can be anything from knowing how to aim a bow to being an expert in a scientific field. They can be magical spells or psionic powers. A skill can be a profession which the character practices, a knowledge of a geographic area, or even something as broad as being an Native American.

Skills can cover very wide areas of knowledge or they can be minutely specific. Exactly how individual skills are defined and what they "cover" is up to the imagination and common sense of the actors and the ruling of the Storyteller. It is far more important that a skill describe a character well than be exactly clear as to what they allow them to do.

For example, if your character were a private investigator, you could choose to list two dozen specific skills describing his strengths and weaknesses or you could simply put "very experienced private investigator." You should include enough detail to represent the image you have of your character without bogging yourself down with minutia.

Again, the idea behind skills is that they should accurately represent how people perceive your character and what they can do. If your character honestly knows six different ways of cooking an omelette then feel free to list them all singly; it's up to you to decide what's important toward understanding your role.

When describing a skill, you can use whatever adjectives fit your vision. Following are some examples:

- Professional UFO investigator. (D10)
- Incredible acrobat. (D4)
- Poor at math. (D20)
- Fluent in french and italian. (D10)
- Able to operate a computer. (D12)
- Student chemist. (D20)
- Irresistible seductress. (D6)
- Chess champion. (D6)
- Well trained pianist. (D10)
- Loves Elvis trivia. (D10)
- A crappy cook. (D30)
- Expert diplomat. (D8)
- Knowledgeable about trains. (D10)
- Licensed helicopter pilot. (D12)
- Raised Catholic. (D12)
- Tireless housekeeper. (D10)
- Right sexy bastard. (D8)

By now you are probably looking at those dice and wondering where they are coming from. Read on!



competency

The Window uses 7 different dice types: D30s, D20s, D12s, D10s, D8s, D6s, and D4s. Each of these dice corresponds to one of the seven "rungs" on the Window Competency Ladder on the next page, and each rung represents a loose level of skill that your character can achieve.

As we have already explained, every ability a Window character possesses, be it an inherent trait or a skill, will be associated with an appropriate adjective or brief description. Once you've got an adjective, it should be a simple matter to decide which rung that ability falls into. Once you've got a rung, you've got a die. (In the Window, low rolls are always good, so obviously a D4 is much better than a D30.)

the window competency ladder

Incredible (D4)

This is the highest rung of competency, and it is generally reserved for those characters who are absolutely unique or singularly masterful at what they are doing. It is extremely rare to find a person with any ability at this rung. Skills of this magnitude could be described as unbelievable, grandmaster, superhuman, supernatural, or even godlike.

Very High (D6)

This level is generally the highest that a “normal” human can achieve. At this rung, one may assume that there are only a small population of people with a similar trait. Einstein might have been on this rung of intellect, or perhaps Bobby Fischer would fit in here with his chess talents. An ability adjective at this rung might be termed as a master, astonishing, remarkable, amazing, stupendous, a prodigy, or unequalled.

High (D8)

This rung is where a typical “expert” would fit in. It is not uncommon to find a skill or two at this level for those people who are exceptionally practiced at their chosen profession or area of study. A few descriptive terms which work well at this level are expert, highly skilled, very good, highly accomplished, a natural, and elegant.

Above Average (D10)

This is the level of competence where those “good, but not particularly good” skills fall into. The typical person would have perhaps one skill (generally their profession) which would be at this rung. Abilities of this level could be described as professional, impressive, talented, skilled, proficient, or practiced.

Average (D12)

This rung is the “average” level, and it could be considered the norm against which the other rungs are compared. Generally, a person will have several of these skills, mostly in those mediocre abilities which everyone has a chance to pick up as they go through life. A few adjectives which fit well could be average, competent, fair, not bad, pretty good, decent, mediocre, and commonplace.

Below Average (D20)

A person could expect to be at this rung on any skill they have begun to practice but not quite mastered. The normal character would have a few of these, be they hobbies, or things they did a long time ago, or skills they just can't ever get the hang of. Some good descriptions of this rung could include below average, amateur, beginner, hobbyist, struggling, and unreliable.

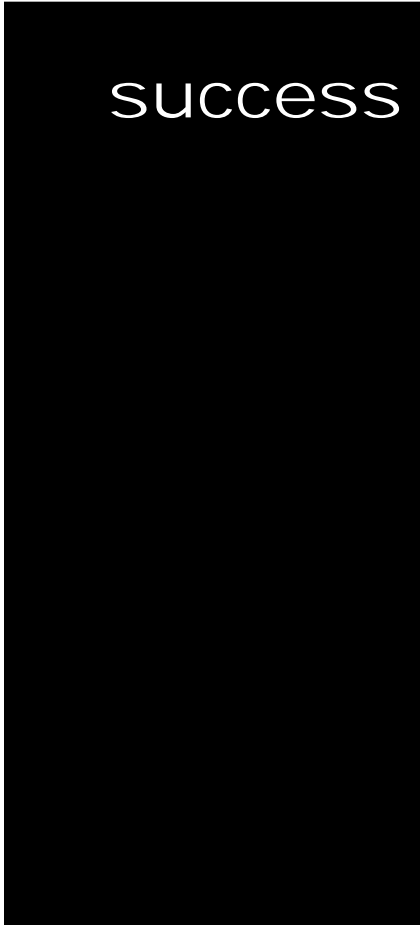
Low (D30)

This rung is the bottom of the barrel, and usually it is only used for those abilities which are markedly horrible. Please note that everyone has almost every “skill” imaginable at this level of competency. (Even if you've never driven a car before in your life, that doesn't mean you couldn't try!) Skills here could be described as low, unskilled, incompetent, poor, crappy, nonexistent, or bungling.



dice rolls . . .

There are five different kinds of dice rolls used in the Window, though they all work in essentially the same way. Below you'll find details about each.



success rolls

A success roll is a die roll used to "test" a trait or skill of your character. As you know, each skill a character has will have a single die associated with it. To test that skill, roll the die. If the roll is a 6 or less, you have succeeded. If roll is greater than a 6, you have failed. The lower the roll the more complete the success, or the higher the roll the more dismal the failure.

As you may notice, that means that a Grandmaster will never fail a normal test, and an average person will fail about half the time. (Well, that makes sense, doesn't it?)

However, sometimes the "target number" will be set differently than a 6 by the Storyteller. For particularly difficult tasks, the target may be a 2 or a 3. There are no charts for this or even guidelines. It's all up to the Storyteller and the influence of the Three Precepts.

For speed of play, always assume that the target is a 6 unless the Storyteller specifically says otherwise. Success rolls (or any other type of roll, for that matter) should only be made when the Storyteller asks for it. Most of the time, the course of the story can be determined narratively, by you and the Storyteller. Dice are only a tool to help guide the action when you can't decide whether success or failure would be better for the flow of the plot, or when an element of chance makes sense or adds to the fun.

success roll example:

The metal catwalk before Ryla's path was slick with rain, gleaming in the torchlight. The Ogrean battle cries continued to grow bolder as the others struggled to hold back the surrounding enemy.

"Move, by god!" Commanded Laerd. Ryla was terrified, but the catwalk was the only way out. With a prayer and a gasp, she teetered out over the chasm.

The Storyteller interrupted the narrative. "Ryla, make an agility roll, target of 4." Ryla was no athlete. Her agility was average at best. (D12) She tossed the die... a 3. All she needed was a 4 or less: she made it.

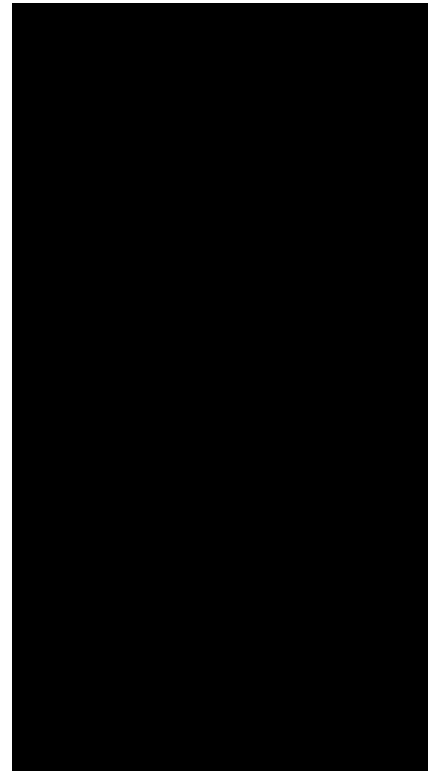
Laerd watched breathlessly as Ryla's torch swayed its way across the catwalk, her feet struggling to find purchase on the slick metal. She reached the other side and turned to look back, motioning frantically for the others to follow. The Ogrean began to charge...

"I'm going to disengage and run across as fast as I can," decided Laerd.

"That's not so easy, Laerd," warned the Storyteller. "Make an agility save, target of 3." Laerd was a warrior, and he had great balance (D8). He spun and dashed across the beam. The die was tossed: a 7.

"Aye!!" Laerd's foot came out from under him. Ryla screamed as she watched him fall and splash into the freezing water below... He hit hard, and was swallowed into the rush.

"Make a health save, Laerd" said the Storyteller ominously, "and you better not miss this one..."



contest rolls

In some situations, two characters will go head to head. They might be arm-wrestling or knife fighting or hacking a mainframe simultaneously, but the idea is the same. Whenever two people are competing directly for a similar goal, a contest roll may be made.

Contest rolls are simple: each participant rolls the die associated with their appropriate skill or ability, and whoever rolls lower wins. The difference is considered, and the Storyteller narrates the results. If there's a tie, there's a tie. That's all there is to it.

As with success rolls, never make a contest roll unless the Storyteller asks for it. Many times the context of the story makes it pretty clear who's going to win.

combat

Probably the most common time for a contest roll to be called for is when a character is in combat. In such a case, the attacker rolls with his applicable weapon skill and the defender rolls with her agility die, acrobatics skill, appropriate martial arts ability, or whatever else fits the situation.

Note that with combat contest rolls, each side gets input into what happens if they win the roll. For instance, the attacker may state that she's punching her opponent straight on the jaw, while the defender may only be trying to dodge and get out a gun. Alternatively, he could try to disarm his opponent, run away, or anything else he can imagine. It's up to the Storyteller to interpret the results intelligently.

Whatever the case, combat in the Window should be fluid, quick, and exciting. Rolls should be kept to a minimum and everyone, whether Storyteller or actor, should lend their narrative skills to the action. While an actor is hunting for the proper die to make a roll, the Storyteller should be describing another part of the action. The actors should explain what their characters are actually doing, not just "I attack it..." A poorly told combat can be an immense waste of time, while a well told combat can be an extremely exciting part of the story... (though it should never be allowed to become the whole story)

contest roll example:

The moonlight was dim, but it was enough for Anna to see the gleam of the scalpel in the doctor's latex-gloved hand.

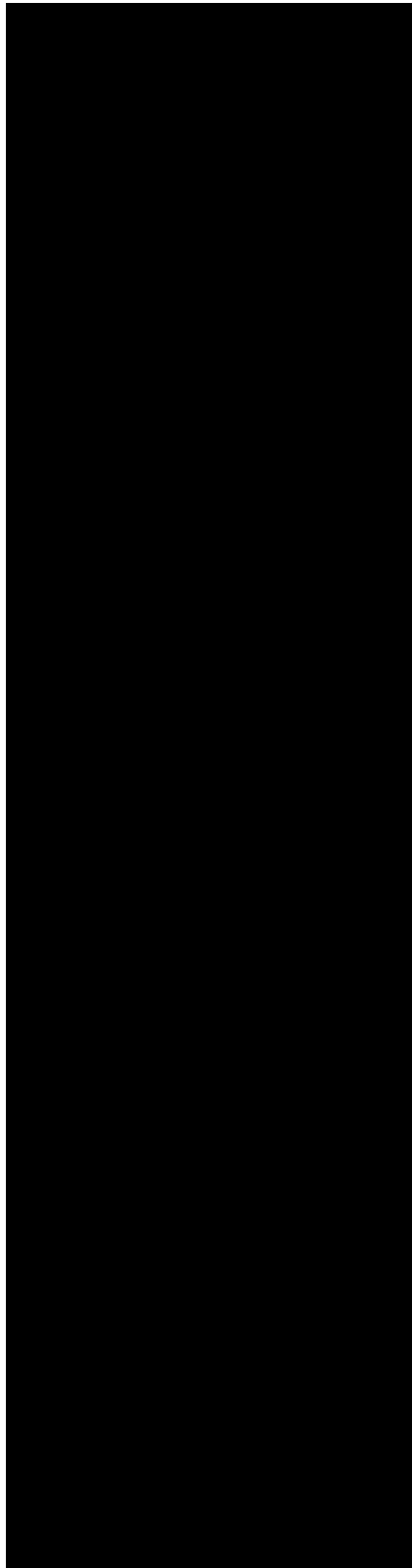
"It's time for surgery," he hissed, then lunged madly..

Anna twisted to the side. She was extremely agile (D6), but the doctor was determined to have blood, and he could handle a scalpel (D10.)

The storyteller tossed a die for the doctor, a 4. "Anna, you squint through the darkness to see the scalpel slashing for your neck." Anna rolled her agility die: a 3, just lower than the doctor.

Anna frowned. "The swing goes high as I duck and roll to the side... 'Enough,' I say as I get out my gun. 'Taste this, you son of a bitch.'" Anna rolled her die, a 2.

The doctor reacted too slowly, rolling a 7, and the bullet tore into his lung. He coughed violently, then fell twitching to the floor.



health rolls

Health rolls are a special kind of success roll. These come into the story when exterior forces directly threaten your character's physical well-being or even his very life. Whether bullets or flying knuckles or drowning, the rules for dealing with them are the same. If your character is hit by such a force, the Storyteller may ask for a health roll, designating a target number based on the damage potential.

The average punch or kick might have a target of 6, while a high powered rifle blast to the chest would be a 1 or so. This is not a set number according to the weapon: it is up to the Storyteller to assign an appropriate number according to who's making the attack, where it hits your character, and so on. Like always, it depends most on the context of the story. The Storyteller should be thinking about the Third Precept, and the actor should be thinking about the Second.

If you roll the target number or less, you succeed. A successful health roll means that your character is able to resist the effects of the damage, at least for a while. (The Storyteller may well call for another health roll later, after the adrenaline wears off or if you try to do something too physical.)

A failed health roll, on the other hand, can mean several things, depending on the situation. It might only mean that your character is stunned for a moment until he gets his bearings. It could mean that he's knocked out or goes into shock (this is a common one). Or, it could kill him instantly. (That would have to be a pretty interesting scene.)

The Storyteller can also rule that a failed health roll will result in your character's health trait dropping down a rung on the competency ladder. (It would go from above average to below average, very high to high, and so on.) This reflects your character's weakening ability to deal with mounting wounds. Only after a period of rest and healing will she get it back. (See the Healing section below.)

If the damage is particularly serious, the Storyteller may also deem that more than one health roll in a row is necessary, with each failure meaning a step down the ladder. In such a case, you must attempt these rolls until you've either made one successfully or your health trait falls so far that it goes completely off the competency ladder (i.e. lower than a D30.) In such a case, your character is effectively dead...



death

Should your character's health fall completely off the competency ladder, he is at best in a coma and at worst very, very dead.

Anytime the plot reaches this point, it's up to both you and the Storyteller to determine whether it's time for your character to pass on and depart from the story as an active participant.

For good roleplayers, death is not necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, it can often be one of the most powerful and memorable plot devices open to the Storyteller and the actors. There is nothing more beautiful than that hero who guards the way from the bad guys as the others escape, thus sacrificing his own life to save the story... There is nothing more memorable than a heroine whose light is extinguished tragically and early.

Besides, after losing a character, you can always build a new one, and in the act of sacrifice or tragedy your character will be remembered and can even play on in the story through the legacy of her actions.

The Window can be the deadliest roleplaying system imaginable, or it can be extremely merciful. It all depends on what you want it to be and exactly what sort of setting you're exploring.

healing

If your character's health trait is dropped a rung on the competency ladder, don't fret; it can be recovered. The following guidelines are here to give you an idea of what your loss in health actually translates into. However, keep in mind that the Storyteller can and will modify these to fit the story. The Storyteller can at any time grant you back a rung if it makes sense to. As with everything in the Window, the best way to determine how and when these levels are regained is by intelligently considering the situation and its context in the story.

One Rung Down. Your character has suffered a relatively minor amount of damage—a flesh wound or something similar. He can recover after a day of rest and basic treatment, or sometimes after receiving first aid.

Two Rungs Down. Your character has just has a very serious brush with the end, and she's very shaken up. This type of damage probably is accompanied by a lot of blood and shock. Healing something like this requires medical attention and several days of recuperation.

Three Rungs Down. Your character took some serious damage, and she considers this one of the most harrowing experiences in her life. This may involve shattered bones and gaping wounds. Basic recovery will require at least a month of serious care.

Four or more Rungs Down. The only way your character came through this is through fate, extreme luck, or divine intervention. Expect him to be in traction or a coma, because that's probably where he's going to be. In a case as serious as this, you and the Storyteller will need to have a frank discussion about the future of your character. Recovery is totally dependent upon finding a realistic way not to drop him out of the story.

health roll example:

Elysia turned and swung her Dicescio wildly. It smashed into the cheekbone of the lunging Locura and shattered through to brain. The creature fell. But there were so many...

Dancing like a dervish of flashing steel, Elysia waded through them each in each, breaking bones and ending their trapped, pathetic lives. Her muscles were weary and her reflexes grew numb... One of the young ones at the edge of the melee held a gun, and he fired.

Elysia felt a chilling pain rip through into her side. "Make a Health roll, target of 4," said the Storyteller.

Elysia blinked as the pain bled into her. She was quite healthy (D10), but she knew it was bad. The die was tossed: a 6. The Storyteller carefully considered the grim situation. "Everything begins to wash as your health is sapped by the pain. Make another save, same target."

Elysia was weakened now, though her health was still decent (D12). She rolled a 3. The Storyteller nodded. "With a rush of panicked adrenaline, you fight through the pain as the final Locura approach..."

plotting rolls

Plotting rolls are unique in that they are made by all of the characters at once. The results of a plotting roll are more abstract than the results of the other types, but they can be very useful if used properly.

Plotting rolls are called for by the Storyteller at times when the story hangs at a crossroads, and all of the characters are involved with what might happen next. For example, this could be as the troupe enters a dark and deserted house, as they careen into an exciting chase, or when a deadly conflict is about to unfold...

In such a case, the Storyteller can ask for everyone to make a roll on a certain trait or skill, without a set target number. Then, the results which come up serve to give plotting guidance for what happens next.

If certain characters roll low while everyone else rolls high, they might see a pivotal warning sign before their companions. Those who roll poorly might be unable to take initiative as a combat breaks out. If everyone rolls well, then perhaps the troupe gains an upper hand of some sort or avoid an unfortunate situation. The possibilities are endless.

plotting roll example:

The unrelenting wind howled past the Threat Response Team as they walked through the Gobi sandstorm. Faintly, before them, they could just make out the silhouette of a low building. The Lieutenant struggled to be heard over the maddening gale as he ordered everyone to ready their weapons. He sent corporal Shannon to reconnoiter ahead.

"Plotting Roll. Everybody give me a perception save," said the Storyteller.

Each member of the squad tossed their perception die and called out the results; two 6s, a 12, a 14, and corporal Shannon rolled a 2.

Erupting from the building came a trio of screaming wiche. Reacting with the speed of lightning, the corporal hit the sand. A burst of pyrokinetic flame tore over him and knocked down the Lieutenant (12) and the woman (14) standing next to him. The other two soldiers rolled to the side, raised their weapons, and began to saturate the entire building with heavy weapons fire.

The Storyteller spoke: "Shannon, there's gunfire and explosions all around you. You raise your head and see the lead wiche summon some sort of shimmering barrier between it and the rest of your team. The bullets are bounding off of it, and the wind is being deflected. But you might get a clean shot if you act quickly."

The corporal didn't hesitate. He raised his 10mm rifle and said a prayer to the United States Marine Corps, where he first learned guns. "I shoot that mother in the face, man."

optional rules

The Window loves to be modified. Since every roleplaying troupe has a slightly different style than the next and any given setting poses new questions about what needs to be defined by the rules, the Window is designed to be easily altered to fit.

This section provides some of the more common rules modifications that have been used. They're in the optionals section because that's what they are. Some of these rules are a bit more cumbersome than the core Window mechanics, so be prepared to use your own judgement before instituting them in your Anthologies.

Some of these rules came out of specific suggestions from the online Window community. If you have an optional rule idea that you think could be included in this section, please email optionals@mimgames.com.

luck

Luck represents that unexplainable tendency for good things to happen to certain people without their effort or awareness. This is a rule which used to be a part of the core Window mechanics, but has now been relegated to the status of an optional rule. The reasoning behind this is that the luck trait works slightly differently than other traits...

If the Storyteller wants to use luck in her stories, she could add it to the list of traits that all of the cast members must define, or she could allow it as a skill just for specific characters. It works the same in either case.

Luck rolls are called for when chance is all that stands between two paths for the story to take, or immediately after a failed success roll to give a character that one last chance... Another use for luck is to settle minor questions which have little bearing on the story, such as whether a character happens to be wearing a hairpin or carrying a lighter.

Luck can be a character's best friend. If he makes his luck roll he can save himself after a particularly dismal die roll, a feature which allows for a certain heroic confidence when entering dangerous scenes. Luck can also be the Storyteller's best friend. For her, it can be a way to maintain the troupe's sense of hope in hopeless situations, and it provides a good way to solve many minor arguments that arise between her and the actors...

Luck rolls are identical to basic success rolls in how they work: the Storyteller sets a target number and if you roll equal to it or under, you succeed. If no target is specified, you must roll a 6 or less.

By the way, luck can also be called something else if it better fits the setting. In superheroic roleplaying, for instance, luck could be called "heroism," since those sorts of characters rely more on their extraordinary abilities to save them in times of peril. In a setting which is populated by gods or guided by astrological forces, the Storyteller could opt to call it "fate."

Trading Luck

There comes a scene in a character's life when he's hit bottom, when the situation has become so grave that nothing short of a miracle can save him now. In the Window, the luck trait allows one final recourse to turn the story back into his favor...

If such a case occurs where you've failed a luck roll that was really important, you may at that moment choose to "trade" some of your permanent luck to change the roll to a success. This choice causes your luck trait to drop a permanent rung on the competency ladder, but at least your character is still alive and kicking.

Trading your luck in this way can keep your character alive and on top of things for quite a while, but remember, everyone's luck has to run out sometime...

Luck Roll Example:

The Ogreaen were everywhere. Laerd continued hacking into the fray as he watched Ryla cross the perilous catwalk to safety. "I'm going to run across as fast as I can," he said.

"That's not so easy, Laerd," warned the Storyteller. "Make an agility save, target of 3." Laerd was in the militia and had great balance (D8). He spun and dashed across the beam. The die was tossed: a 7.

"Aye!!" Laerd's foot came out from under him. Ryla screamed as she watched him fall and splash into the freezing water below...

"Make a luck save, Laerd," said the Storyteller ominously, "and you better not miss this one..."

He hit the water hard. He felt the icy embrace as he was swept along. At least he was a little more lucky than the average person (D10).

He rolled: a 7. A target hadn't been specified, so he needed a 6 or less...

The Storyteller raised an eyebrow. "The cold is sapping your strength. From above and behind you think you hear Ryla screaming your name. You fight madly with the waves, but the rushing stream is so painfully cold. You gasp in water... you try to cough..."

"Okay, okay. I'm gonna trade a luck rung," said Laerd defeatedly.

"Alright," responded the Storyteller, "your hand reaches out of the water and catches on a rock. Laerd, your luck is now down to average (D12)."

Laerd climbed coughing onto the shore, then collapsed, exhausted.

sanity

The sanity trait is generally only included in anthologies which are set in a horror genre, where a character might encounter things especially frightening or disturbing. Sanity rolls are made to see how the character is able to deal with the terror and strangeness of such situations, and failure can mean bouts of uncontrollable fear, the development of phobias, or even complete madness.

Sanity rolls are similar to health rolls, only instead of your character's physical health being threatened it is her stable mental state. Sanity rolls may be called for by the Storyteller in any situation where your character sees or experiences something truly horrible.

As with other traits in the Window, sanity is a only a tool which helps the Storyteller present the story in an effective way, but like wounding, it is up to the actors to make the situation come to life. (Don't forget about the Second Precept.) A good horror storyteller will have the actors on the edge of their seat with tension and fear already... sanity is a mechanic which reflects the dark consequences of facing the supernatural in a somewhat more concrete way.

When the Storyteller calls for a sanity roll he will set a target number which you must roll equal to or under with your sanity die.

The target number itself is of course based on how powerful the horror is which is affronting your character. For instance, seeing a carcass on the road might call for a roll with a target of 6, while being surrounded by cold, rending tentacles which are sliming through your hair and trying to crawl into your mouth might call for a 2. (Trust me.)

Again, it's up to the Storyteller and the exact situation.

A successful Sanity Roll means you are able to think through the horror and keep control of yourself. Failing a sanity roll can mean several things. One of the most common effects is to freeze up and stare. Another is to flee in terror, or uncontrollable screaming. Another is to fall to the floor and roll into the fetal position. Yet another is to be cursed with a permanent phobia. All these wonderful things and more await your character should they not make one little roll. Sometimes the Storyteller will "take control" of your character for a brief period of time during their fugue, though often they will leave the exact effects of the failed roll up to you.

Oh yes, and don't forget about your Sanity trait dropping a rung on the competency ladder. That can happen, too, just as it happens with health. If your sanity should spiral down until it drops completely off the competency ladder, then your character has gone insane, which is effectively just as bad as death...

insanity

Once a character is insane, they become "property" of the Storyteller for him to do with as he pleases. Perhaps your character will run off into the corn field, only to come back in some future chapter, or simply kill himself, or maybe he'll be taken by the other characters to an insane asylum.

It is possible, with the proper care and possibly hospitalization, that your character could be brought back to the land of the sane, to be used again as your character at a later date, but that's up to you and the Storyteller to discuss.

Remember the Third Precept, and consider how interesting it can be to have one of your former characters locked up in an institution somewhere, to be visited and given fruitbaskets on the holidays. Sanity can provide very enjoyable plot twists, and when used sparingly it can help add a rich layer of fear to your horror anthologies.

sanity roll example:

"Run, Damn it!" Deron Jones stood shouting at his companions, the writhing Darkness before him. His hand held his government issue .45 tightly, white knuckles on black metal, hot from the spent clip.

A tentacle thrust from the mass and coiled tightly about his ankle. His mirrorshades fell from his face as he was pulled to the wet floor with the shatter of glass and plastic. The Storyteller shook his head. "Sanity check, target of 3." Deron's sanity had been damaged before, and he was already bordering on a nervous breakdown (D30).

A die was tossed: a 7.

Deron's eyes gleamed bright with tears. His howling was the last thing his companions heard as they fled screaming through the door and slammed it behind them. The twisting moistness was around his hand now, his neck, his face. In the pit of his mind he knew that he should struggle, to break loose from the embrace. But he could do nothing but scream.

Give me another sanity roll," said the Storyteller. "Target of 5. This one's for real." Deron felt like he was dead already. It was under his clothes now, pulsing and cold. His muscles were reacting violently, spasming. A second die was tossed and came to a rest: a 14. Something inside him... snapped.

"Deron's gone now," said the Storyteller. The others were to the van, cursing and swearing. The realization of their companion's fate chilled them to the bone.

magic

Concepts by Benjamin Baugh

By far the most requested rule expansion for the first edition Window was a standardized magic system. Roleplaying was born out of the fantasy genre, and no matter how far we've come from those first faltering steps, it seems that there is always something calling us back to those realms of wizardry where anything is possible. The following rules provide guidelines for using magic with the Window.

This section is actually excerpted from a much more elegant and richly detailed magic system included with the world of Taalmarath, the Window's first official fantasy setting. Taalmarath will premiere on the Window Web site in 1998.

the precepts of magic

Like the Window's three precepts from which these are derived, the precepts of magic provide a core philosophy for the use of magic in any anthology. These precepts (in addition to the three essential precepts of the Window itself) help provide a practical way of dealing with magic in a mature, story affirming manner.

the first precept of magic:

"Magic must be an extension of character."

Magic must reflect in all its aspects the character who invokes it, his mental state, situation, and outlook. The actor in a magically active role must be willing to take the extra steps required to define his character's power in his own terms. No two magicians will be exactly the same, and thus no two magical methodologies will ever be exactly the same. Styles may be similar, you can have any number of elementalists say, but each will have a unique take on the common magics. If magic ever begins to overshadow character, then it must be reassessed. Magic should not distract from the character's essential core, but should enhance it. The character's powers must be woven into his background and taken into account when defining his personality. Magic shapes the character and is shaped by him.

the second precept of magic:

"Magic must advance the story."

Like any aspect of a maturely played character, magic must advance the story to the satisfaction of all involved. Too often actors refuse to be flexible in their interpretation of their character's actions and it destroys group coherency— few things can disrupt a troupe faster than one member who employs his magics irresponsibility. Magic should never overshadow the wielding character and should also never overshadow the other actors. Magic has a place in all fantastic stories, and it is the responsibility of the actor and storyteller to reach an understanding of that place. The actor should be willing to adjust his character's sorcery to fit the story and the Storyteller should make allowances for well roleplayed magics even if it requires some alterations to the plot. In short, the Storyteller should be careful not to steal the character's thunder and the player should be responsible enough not to abuse her character's power.

the third precept of magic:

"Magic must never become routine."

Magic must always be... well... magical. A sword will kill a man, even do it with style, but nothing is quite so awe inspiring in personal combat as Lodendrake's Cage of Spines. Magic is really just special effects, and any good movie director knows you can only use a certain effect so many times before the audience begins to take it for granted. Players should be rewarded for producing interesting, vital, and original effects with their mystic powers. Certain effects may be used repeatedly so as to deliberately make them routine, but only for a specific purpose such as to advance the Second Precept in character development, or in story development as dictated by the Third Precept.

how it works

Characters who wish to employ magic must start by defining their basic ability to use it. This is represented by an additional inherent trait which the Storyteller might call wizardry, witchcraft, sorcery, or faith, depending on the world. For the purposes of this discussion it will simply be called magic.

This trait plays an important role in the application of spells and rituals. When a magic user summons mystic power he forms it by using his natural potential (represented by the magic trait) and the techniques which he has developed through training or talent (represented by more specific spell skills). He may employ one of his old comfortable spells, or he may take risks or desperate measures and improvise an enchantment. During character creation, the actor invents the specific spell skills. What is required is a detailed description of each and a realistic evaluation of their parameters.

Understand that there are as many possible areas of magical endeavor as there are practitioners, and many more besides. No comprehensive list is possible. It's up to the Storyteller to give you an understanding of how magic works in the world, then within those guidelines you must strive to create a character image which is your own.

For example, if you are creating a priest character you must first choose the deity your character is connected with and weave this all important choice into his background. When did the first great epiphany of connection occur? How has it altered his experiences? His outlook? Make sure your choice of deity lends itself to the character's development and is not just done for the neat abilities. Now record the sorts of spells he's mastered. When were they first realized? First used? Detail the exact relationship the priest has with his god and consider the spells in this context. Before finishing you have to define a competency adjective and rung for his magic trait and for each spell.

Once you have defined your character's magic trait and spells, you're ready to play. Spell rolls are used for activating well known effects, while the magic trait is used for maintaining spells, resisting magical attacks, and crafting variations (or entirely new spells) on the fly.

The Storyteller uses his best judgment to determine the difficulty of a given magical task, taking into account the creativity of the player, the needs of the story, and the individual situation. Following the Third Precept of Magic, it's up to you to describe your character's magic as richly as possible. When adjudicating magical conflict, the Storyteller should use the philosophy that the specific and unique will always win out against the vague and general.

Exhausting Magic

Just like health and sanity, your character's magic trait can drop competency rungs if she is using it a great deal or is up against a particularly draining challenge. The Storyteller can ask for such magic rolls whenever it makes sense in the story. The idea is to represent the oftentimes fatiguing nature of handling mystical power.

The means by which your character regains her magic depends on the world and her particular kind of magic.

If your character's magic drops completely off the competency ladder then she is totally drained. At that point she can still use magic, but all magic rolls are made on a D30 and any further drops in magical competency effect her health trait instead. It is very possible for a magic user to kill themselves by pushing it too far.

character experience

Like a real person, your Window character will be constantly changing. How she sees the world, what her life is like day to day, and which skills she has mastered will grow as the story grows. If you like, the following mechanic can be used to improve your character's abilities as she gains experience.

Character evolution is the bread and butter of literature and roleplaying alike. Through the course of a chapter, your character may well go through many emotional and rational stages as his life is affected by the events of the story. The vast majority of this metamorphosis is impossible to represent with rules: it's up to you to get into your character's head and understand how he sees the world and how he reacts to it. If you are truly in character, the emotions you feel will be identical to your characters. You must then take those emotions and determine how they are affecting your character's viewpoint.

The following rules are offered only to help you keep your eye on the improvement of your character's traits and skills. They are in the optional rules section because you could just as easily determine character improvement by talking with the Storyteller and making modifications only when they make sense.

In any case, the mechanics of ability improvement are simple: after each session of roleplaying, your character will be awarded a small number of experience points. Each of these points may be applied to the improvement of a single skill or trait, and when the number of experience points assigned to a given skill exceeds the level or rung of competency, the ability improves by a level, as summarized on the following chart:

Improve from D30 to D20 = 2 points
Improve from D20 to D12 = 3 points
Improve from D12 to D10 = 4 points
Improve from D10 to D8 = 5 points
Improve from D8 to D6 = 6 points
Improve from D6 to D4 = 7 points

We suggest keeping track of where your experience points are spent by placing stars or check marks next to the ability on your character writeup.

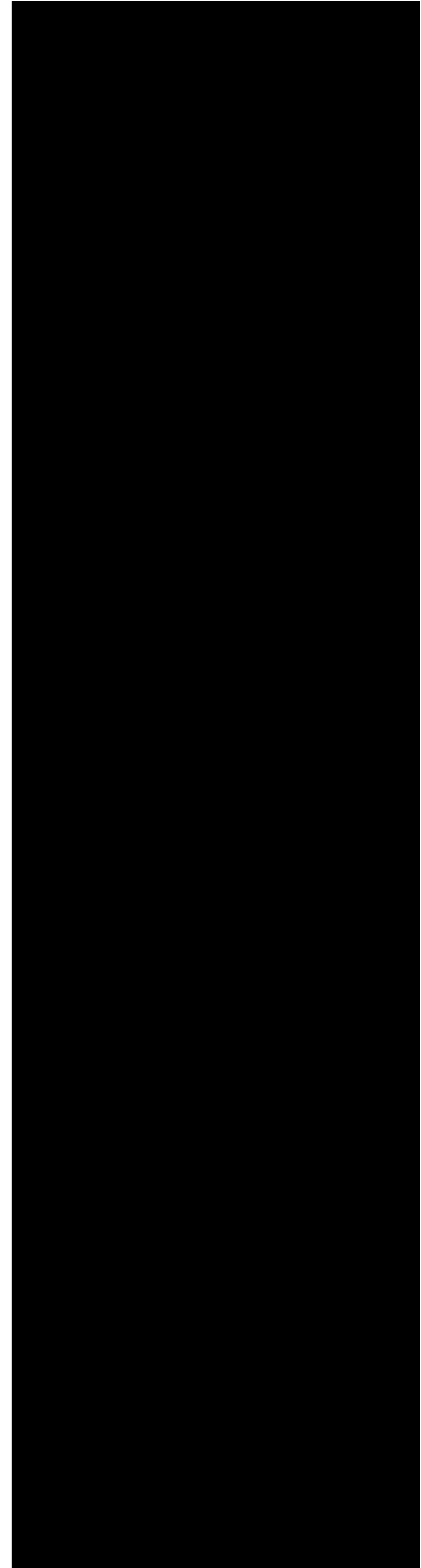
There are, by the way, certain limitations to how many experience points can be spent on a given skill each session. For inherent traits, you may not expend more than one point per session; this reflects the natural difficulty in making these sorts of things "get better." For learned skills, this maximum is based on whether or not you used the skill during the course of the game. For skills that didn't come into play, the limit is one point. (If your character spent the entire chapter fighting zombies it's unlikely that they'd be getting much better at Russian embroidery, for example.) For skills that did come into play, there is no limit.

Now, you're wondering how many points to expect each game. This is based on your ability to answer the following two questions, which will be asked by the Storyteller at the conclusion of the session. Each of the question that you are able to give an intelligent and unique answer for gains you a point:

1. Were both you and your character present and involved in the story? This is usually a very easy "yes." So long as you paid attention and did your best to get involved, you get this point automatically.
2. What questions does your character have about the story or herself after tonight? This is a great way to explore theories about the mysteries in play as well as promote character development. The Storyteller will evaluate your answer (if you have one) and decide whether it's good enough to earn you a point.

Finally, there is a way to gain a "bonus" experience point from the Storyteller. All you have to do is make your character instigate a notably excellent acting sequence or contribute to the story in an outstanding way. This can come in the form of cleverly deciphering a particularly difficult puzzle, taking the story in an unexpected and wonderful new direction, or even something as simple as a memorable quote. It is rare for bonus points to be awarded by most Storytellers, but it does happen, and you should strive for it if it helps improve your roleplaying.

Now, understand that all experience awarded is subject to Storyteller approval. For instance, if she feels that you should be given a free point in a given skill because of something that happened in the story, then she can do that. Alternatively, she can penalize particularly immature or out of character roleplaying by refusing to award you any points at all. (Hopefully this should never happen, though. If you're using the Window then I'd like to think you're quite above that sort of thing.)



armor

In certain settings, ranging from fantasy to science fiction, the type of armor a character wears can seriously change his combat effectiveness. If he's wrapped in scale mail then he's likely to come out unscathed from a barrage of light arrow fire. If he's wearing a magnetic repulsor belt (whatever that might be), he could shrug off bullets. It's also possible to armor a vehicle or a building, a possibility which just might be important to the story at some point.

Most Storytellers who use the Window manage armor narratively. Characters wearing heavy armor won't be asked for health rolls as often. Characters attacking foes with superior armor have to make contest rolls by wider margins to be a threat, etc... However, if you want a more structured way to manage this sometimes important consideration, you can use the rules below.

Like all else in the Window, armor is something that must be assessed in specific relation to the story if it's going to work. Only use it if it truly adds something to your stories. If it only serves to add one more layer of dice rolls to combat, then get rid of it.

how it works

Following the First Precept, define the type of armor your character is wearing in terms of the Window armor ladder below. Understand that these adjectives are relative to the "typical" type of weaponry in your particular story: "excellent" armor in a fantasy setting might only be "mediocre" in a modern setting.

When your character is in battle, this armor die can be used as a substitute for health rolls. If your character is hit and the Storyteller asks for a Health roll, roll the armor die instead. Only if you miss the armor roll do you have to make a real health roll.

If the armor roll fails and the attack is such that the armor itself could be damaged, the Storyteller could ask for an additional armor roll to see if the armor drops in quality. This works just like health rolls — if you fail the roll the armor drops a rung on the ladder, representing its failing ability to protect your character. (Whether to ask for such rolls should be apparent in context of the scene.)

If need be, the Storyteller can also define armor to have different levels of protection against different kinds of attacks. For example, a suit of chainmail might have good protective qualities vs. physical attacks (D12) but be virtually worthless (D30) against magic. This is up to the Storyteller and the world she is using.

the window armor ladder

godlike armor (D4)

In a fantasy setting this might be protection from on-high. In a sci-fi anthology this would be some unbelievable super technology. A character in godlike armor is essentially immune to damage. Only an attack on an equally amazing level would be capable of getting through.

incredible armor (D6)

This is likely either highly magical or extremely ultra tech. A character wearing this kind of armor is invulnerable to normal attacks and most special attacks as well. Armor of this kind is inaccessible to all but the fewest fortunate souls.

excellent armor (D8)

This is the highest sort of armor a normal person could acquire, and it is only available to those with very impressive contacts and/or wealth. In fantasy settings this might include well-crafted, magical platemail, the kind reserved for kings. A character wearing such armor would be able to survive well against the majority of normal attacks.

high grade armor (D10)

This is the type of armor which would be given to elite troops or owned by nobles. In a fantasy setting this translates into full-plate or exquisitely crafted chainmail. Armor of this kind will keep its wearer alive against many physical threats, though it is not impregnable.

good armor (D12)

This is the sort of armor worn by most professional warriors. In a fantasy setting this is typically equivalent to a suit of chain or scalemail with bracers and perhaps a shield. Good armor provides solid protection, but it can certainly be bypassed by skill or force.

mediocre armor (D20)

Armor of this rung is generally the much less expensive version of "good" armor. This might be studded leather or a full suit of lighter leather in a fantasy world. Though it is definitely better than nothing, this armor provides little more than shock absorbence: it typically won't turn blows or be much use against missile weapons.

poor armor (D30)

This is the sort of thing worn by street thugs and athletes. It might provide protection in specific situations, but for the most part it will do little more than keep your elbows from getting scraped. In a fantasy setting this is perhaps equivalent to leather breeches and a pair of leather bracers.

As you can imagine, managing armor for every character can be more record keeping than its worth. Since some actors handle this level of complexity better than others, it is recommend that you playtest this rule with your whole troupe before putting it into effect.

super powers

The Window has been used for many genres, from the most mundane contemporary murder mystery to the most outlandish superheroic adventure. Below are some ways to manage those exceptional types of stories where more-than-human beings are involved, such as superheroes, dragons, or Lovecraftian monsters.

the shebang! notation

One problem which arises in representing truly amazing abilities is how to fit them onto the competency ladder. Obviously there wouldn't be much variety if the actors were sitting around rolling D4s for everything — contest rolls would be tied too often and success rolls would be mostly pointless. The basic competency ladder only represents the levels of ability that a human being can achieve; what happens when the character in question isn't really human at all?

To address this, the Window uses a second competency ladder which is "above" the normal one. A simple system called the Shebang! notation (with a nod to Larry Wall) is used to delineate these amazing traits and skills from normal abilities. It works by placing an exclamation point (!) after the die and including more specific descriptions of what the character is able to do.

For example, a character with superpowered physical strength which allows him to lift up to the weight of a car would have the following trait listing:

Amazing strength. Able to lift a car. (D12!)

The Shebang! lets you know that his strength is "superheroic," which means that he would never have to make a strength roll against "normal" tests; if he wanted to break down a door or carry a companion to safety he would simply succeed. However, if he were going up against a challenge that itself was "superheroic" in magnitude (perhaps he's wrestling with a powered up supervillain), he would use a D12 to make that roll.

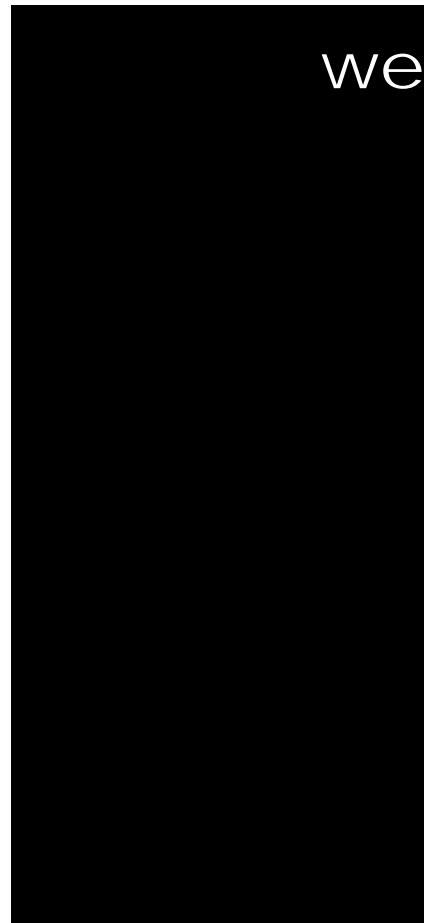
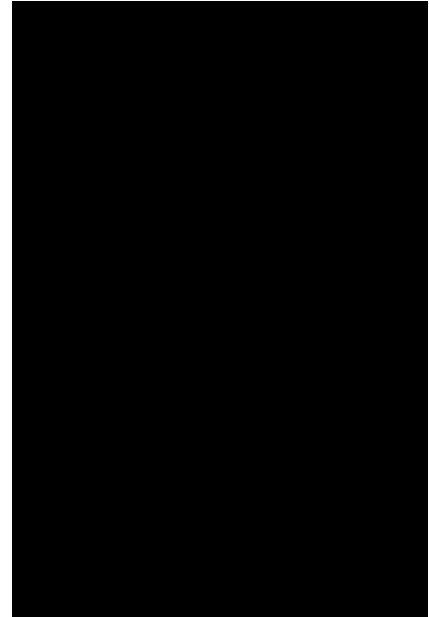
The idea is that superheroic or unearthly characters exist on a level all their own. They are so astonishing that competition is only meaningful if it is against someone (or something) in their own league. The important thing to do with any Shebang! ability is to describe the power sufficiently enough that it's at least somewhat clear what is possible with it. From there the actors and the Storyteller can roleplay through superheroic encounters without much slow down.

multiple competency rungs

With some powers, it is difficult to assign just one competency rung and still represent the power accurately. One such case is an ability that is extremely “powerful” but rather hard to control (or vice-versa). Another is a power which works very well in certain situations but very poorly in others. In such a case, two or more competency levels can be used, each describing a different aspect of the ability.

For example, imagine that your character has the ability to throw fireballs from her hands. These fireballs are extremely deadly — just about anything they come in contact with will be immediately vaporized (D6!). However, she’s not very good at getting the things to hit where she would like (D20). Having two different rungs like this allows the Storyteller to test the aspect of the ability is in question in any given scene.

For examples of Window characters using the Shebang! notation and multiple competency rungs, check out the Window Character Menagerie online at www.mimgames.com/window/menagerie.



wealth

Concept by Justin Forman

One of the goals of the Window is to free the actors from bookkeeping minor details. Who in their right mind wants to bother with encumbrance, hit points, or damage dice when there’s roleplaying to be done? All that these do is add up to more number oriented thinking, and that goes against the philosophy of the first precept.

That being said, there is little in this world which is more number oriented than money, and while first generation roleplaying has a healthy tradition of recording cash down to the last copper piece, some actors would rather not bother at all. On the same token, in some settings it is important to have an idea of how wealthy a character is.

To deal with this problem, the Storyteller can choose to define an inherent trait called wealth. If a situation comes up in the story when limits in a character’s monetary resources become a concern, the Storyteller could ask for a wealth roll. A success means that the character has the money available for the task, while a failure means he’s short. Like always, this rule is one that requires intelligent interpretation by everyone involved.

characters

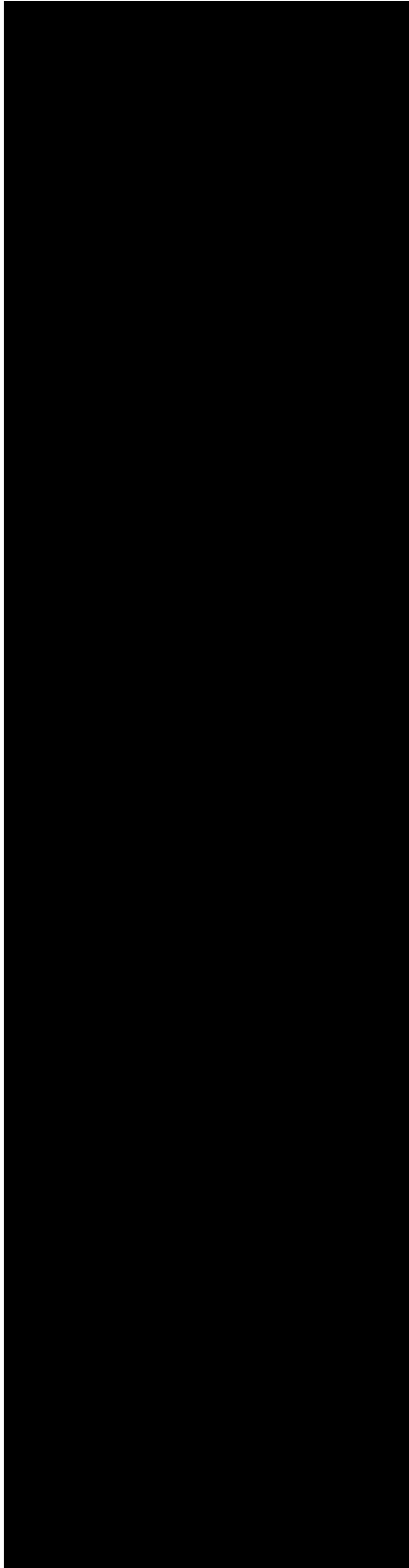
Characters who are unique and entertaining are central to good roleplaying. When characters are fully fleshed out, with personalities, backgrounds, and polished demeanors, the crude plot framework which the Storyteller lays out becomes full and alive. It is the characters, after all, who guide the interaction, and through their deeds each chapter is made memorable. The process of character creation is one of the most important aspects of how the actors add to the story.

Character creation is not at all about rolling dice to get traits, cross-referencing charts to figure stat levels, or adding up points to make sure your character is balanced. It's not about following a series of steps to fill out a character sheet. It's not a specific process at all. True character creation is that undefinable storm of creative energy where you come up with a unique, imaginary individual whom you bring alive.

Most other roleplaying systems maintain a complex hierarchy of checks and balances to pigeonhole your character into their world stereotypes and make sure he's exactly as "powerful" as everyone else on the party. If you conceptualize a character who doesn't fit into this mold you're forced to either change your character or change the rules; neither option makes much sense. The Window character creation rules guarantee that you'll play exactly the character you want.

The Window assumes that the Storyteller and the actors can take care of themselves. There is one universal alternative to any rule, and that is good roleplaying. So long as everyone follows the Three Precepts, the creation of character traits and skills ceases to be a competitive issue. How "good" your character is becomes a moot point. The question is how real is she? How does she fit into the story? How personal and truly unique is the description you've constructed for her? Playing "weak" characters can be every bit as fun as playing super-people, and most mature roleplayers are skilled enough to involve themselves in the story no matter what sort of character they're acting.

With all of this freedom, you may feel a bit directionless and not know where to start. Some roleplayers argue effectively that there are advantages to more structure in the character creation process. If you're one of those people, I tip my hat and encourage you to use whatever system modifications you think are necessary to make the Window better fit your style. However, I also encourage you to give the freeform style a try; you may find that it works for you...



how it works

Whatever means you use to come up with your character is up to you and your own creative process. Thus, there isn't a lot to this section. You no doubt have your own passions that inspire you, and all that you need to do is delve into them and come out with a character idea that interests you.

As you develop the seeds of your character, be sure you understand the world and the kind of story the Storyteller has in mind. Ask him any questions that will affect your final concept before you get totally connected to it. As you translate the character from your imagination onto paper, make sure that the Storyteller is there as you do it. He will very likely have questions which will help both of you get a firm grasp on who this person is. As your character history evolves he may offer some plot threads to help the character meld smoothly into the story and into the troupe. Though the Storyteller will never understand your character as well as you do, it's imperative that he understands well enough to tell a good story.

Some people are good at fashioning a very refined character with their first effort. Others discover that it takes them a lot of thought and often several sessions of roleplaying before they really get into their character's head. The Storyteller and your fellow actors are a great ally in achieving this goal. (The Tips and Tricks pages of this section also has some ideas to help you flesh out your character.)

solidification

Once you've completed the internal process of creating your character, all that remains is to sit down with the Storyteller and define the rules part of the character, a step known in the Window as character solidification. If you've done the work of making the character real in your mind, this part should be easy.

With each inherent trait, simply come up with an adjective that matches your character image, and then fit it into the appropriate competency rung to find the proper die. To define your skills, brainstorm the list of definitions that describe your character well, set an adjective to each of them, and attach the die from the competency ladder that works best. You may have whatever skills you wish and assign whatever adjectives best fit your character image, so long as the Storyteller approves. Use the examples in the Window Character Menagerie as a guideline, and just go for it.

You're finished! Now you can concentrate on getting comfortable with your new role.

character creation tips and tricks

The following ideas are offered to help you flesh out your character. Some might speak to your style and others might be useless to you. Scavenge whatever effective bits you can. If you've discovered a worthwhile character development trick which isn't listed below, email it to tricks@mimgames.com and I'll post it for all to see.

be specific and original

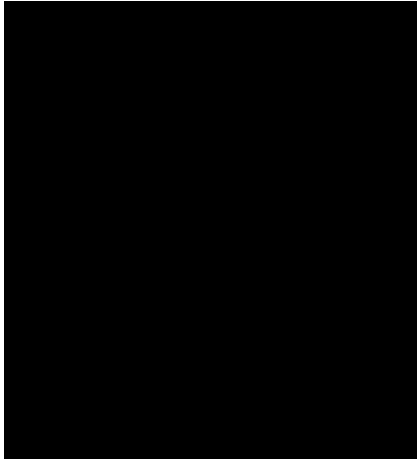
Oftentimes, a few very specific notes about a character can say more than volumes of generalizations. One good metaphor can build a rich character image better than paragraphs of dry description. Don't use stereotypes, and don't just cobble your character together from books you've read or movies you've seen. There is nothing keeping you from creating your own character, one that has truly never existed before. If you achieve this goal, your roleplaying will be more personal and much more memorable.

This tip comes first because it can be applied to all of the others below.

ten big background questions

Here's ten questions that can give you a good start toward understanding your character's background:

- How old is he?
- Where was he born?
- What did his parents do for a living?
- What religion did his parents practice?
- What was his relationship with his parents like?
- Where did he live as a child?
- Was anything happening historically during his childhood?
- How did he spend his time as a child?
- Was he happy as a child?
- How did he decide what to be as an adult?



ten big personality questions

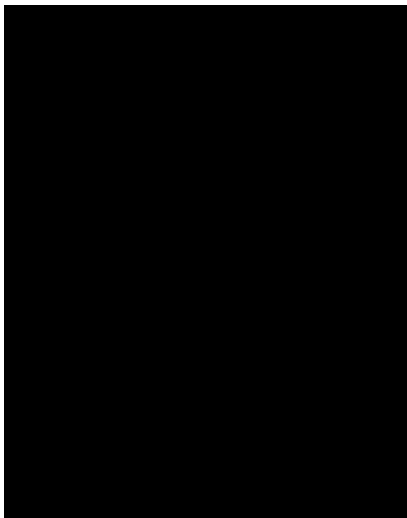
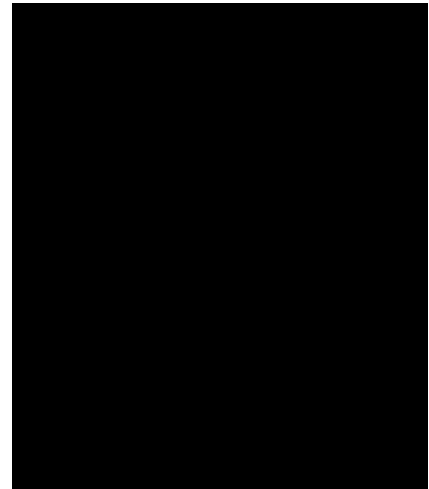
Ten questions that can help you define your character's personality:

- Are there any adjectives which embody his personality?
- Does his personality remind you of an animal or object?
- What are his goals and motivations?
- How far will he go to achieve his goals?
- What does he fear most?
- What does he love most?
- How competitive is your character in various aspects of his life?
- What are his best and worst qualities?
- How does he act when he first meets men? Women?
- How do they react to him?

mental picture painting

Oftentimes, the visual image of a character can go a long way toward visualizing the whole character. If there's an artist in the troupe, convince them to make sketches of all the characters. (However, they must do this before the story begins... if you roleplay a character for a session or two then everyone will get a different mental picture in their head and the artist will never be able to satisfy them all.) If there isn't an artist in the troupe, then paint a picture in your head. Consider the following aspects of your character's appearance: height, build, eyes, hair, skin tone, and notable facial features.

How your character dresses can also reveal a great deal about them. We all wear uniforms, whether we admit it or not. The style, color, age, and associated stereotypes of a character's wardrobe can show allegiances, points of view, and personal self confidence.



personal connections

For each stage in your character's background (childhood, teen years, college, young adulthood, etc.), think about the people who affected her. These could be friends, relatives, teachers, enemies, lovers, or whoever. Build an image of these people, and record some details about them. Imagine how they changed your character and where their relationship lies now.

Also, define your character's relationship with the rest of the cast. Who is she close to? Who acts as her foil? Who contrasts with her? Who is similar? This is also a good opportunity to consider what is going to make the other actors like your character. What qualities make him a character they will be as interested in as you are? What qualities may make them dislike him? The answers to these questions can be pivotal in deciding how much fun you will have playing this character.



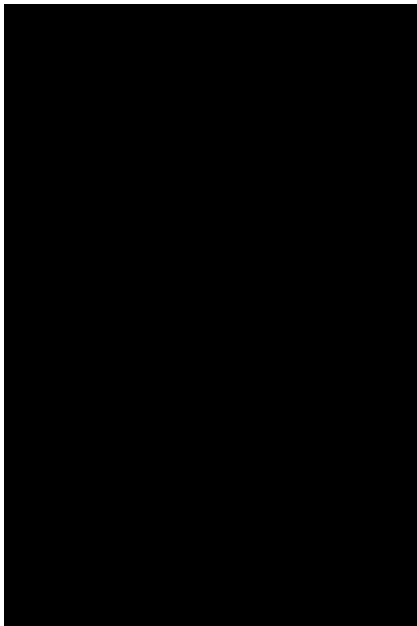
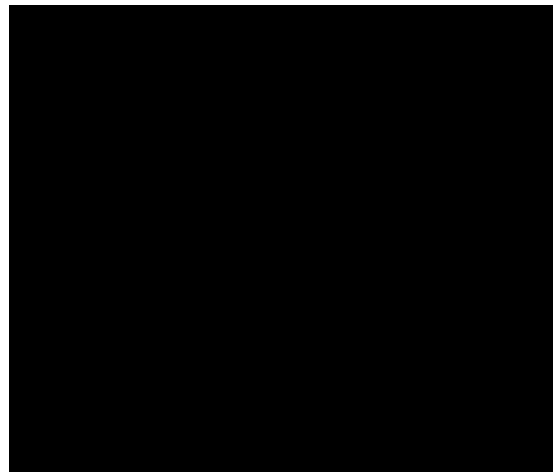
pivotal events

This is a game which can be played both by the actors and the Storyteller. Essentially, the idea is to build up an understanding of the pivotal events in your character's past. What was his first real encounter with death? With love? With betrayal? When and where did they happen? What people were involved? How did these events change his point of view? These events can also be roleplayed if the Storyteller would like. The supporting cast for each event can be played by the Storyteller or by the other members of the troupe... this helps everyone obtain an understanding for each character and gives the other actors a stake in the larger story.

the voice

One of the most important steps in getting into character is mastering your role's particular voice. Does your character talk fast or slow? Does he talk a lot or hardly at all? Deep voice? High voice? Does he speak with any sort of accent? What phrases or figures of speech is he partial to? Does he view talking as a tool or as social interaction? Is his voice soft? Abrasive? Enthusiastic?

If every character on the troupe has a distinct and believable voice, it makes complex dialogue scenes clear, especially if the actors are roleplaying more than one character. It also makes slipping into your role very easy once you've grown comfortable with it.



posture and expression

Step back and take a look at your character. How does he stand? How does he sit? How does he walk? Relaxed? Slouched? Straight? Is there a particular stance which he often falls into? If so, take a moment to assume that stance yourself and think about it. Oftentimes, putting yourself into a single pose which you associate with your character can instantly snap you into the role.

Just as a character's bodily stance can reveal truths about them, so can their facial expressions. I once saw a character played whose entire personality centered around the way the actor clenched his teeth. That one simple gesture communicated anger, impatience, and even the character's personal philosophy. It also helped the actor stay in character.

t h e . w i n d o w c r e d i t s

c r e d i t s

System Design . Scott Lininger

Design & Graphics . Scott Lininger

Illustration . Scott Lininger & Phillip Challis

p l a y t e s t i n g

Heather Barnhorst, Jon Aimes-Cooley, Phillip Challis,

Laura Gordon, Wick Gordon, Donna Hume-Eason,

Loren Hume-Eason, Mark Hughes, Devon Jones,

Brian Kroeger, Kris Marquardt, Dawna Milligan,

Dan Morehead, Rachel Newell, Kris Nuttycombe,

Stephanie Schulz, Chris Sears, Griff Sickendick,

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