

Playright - Quick start guide

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Core concepts

Clichés

A cliché is few words that say what a character knows how to do:

Captain of the Ithilien rangers

Over enthusiastic space ranger that's been to infinity and beyond

Self loathing IT professional

Cliché advantage

This is the number next to a cliché that indicates how well a character can do what they know how to do:

Captain of the Ithilien Rangers retired (3)

Over enthusiastic space ranger that's been to infinity and beyond (3)

Self loathing IT professional (5)

Cliché specializations

This is an extra bit of description added to a cliché that improves the character's chance of doing what they know how to do:

Surly battle dwarf (3)

with a gift for drinking his foes under the table

Cliché rolls

A dice roll to decide if the character has succeeded in doing what they know how to do is known as a cliché roll.. The advantage of the cliché determines how many six sided dice the player rolls. Success is determined as follows:

Look for the highest die rolled	Outcome
6	The character has succeeded
5, 4	The character has partially succeeded
3, 2, 1	The character has failed

If a character has a cliché specialization then any 1s that appear are re-rolled.

For example, a character who is a

Criminal mastermind (4)

that cracks safes old school (by sound and feel)

attempts to open a wall safe. If the character's attempt is done by sound and feel (like their specialization says) then the player would roll 4 six sided dice.

If the dice come up 3, 2, 3, 1 then the 1 gets re-rolled.

If the final dice are 3, 2, 3, 4 then the character was partially successful. They opened the safe but...

an alarm was triggered or

the item was not in the safe or

there was some other consequence the game master thought of.

Hooks

A **hook** is something quirky about your character that makes their life more challenging or interesting. For example:

Can't resist a wager
Needs to have the last word
Never on time for anything

Tale

A **tale** is a few words of background material that gives insight into your character, and helps to highlight their clichés and hooks.

Inspiration

These are points awarded to a character by the game master for doing something "inspiring". They can be used to improve a cliché roll through:

Extra effort

For every point of inspiration traded, an extra die is added to a cliché roll.

Heroic effort

For every 2 points of inspiration traded, an extra die is rolled after the initial cliché roll is made.

Inspiration points can also be put towards character improvement:

Amount of inspiration traded	Improvement to character
1 point	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add a new cliché of advantage 1• Add a specialization to a cliché
2 points	Increase an existing cliché advantage from 1 to 2
3 points	Increase an existing cliché advantage from 2 to 3
and so on	

Improvement should happen within the context of the game. For example, a character must train with a master to improve their fighting or culinary skills.

Disadvantage

These are points given by the game master that impairs a character's ability to act. Two main types:

Specific

The number of points is the number of dice the player has to remove from their cliché roll for a particular cliché .

General

The number of points is the number of dice the player has to remove from their cliché roll for all clichés.

Disadvantage can be temporary

The sun in your eyes

or more long lived

The effects of a right cross or falling down a flight of stairs

A comedian's scathing comeback to your heckle

Depending on how it was accumulated, disadvantage can be reduced through medical attention, bed rest, healing potions, or group therapy.

Character creation

The game master will set a strength of character or s.o.c. limit. Typically this is 4 points.

Character clichés

For every cliché advantage point the s.o.c increases by 1 point.

Specializations

Each specialization increases the s.o.c by 1 point.

Bonus gear

These are items that are extraordinary in nature. They can have an advantage (and even specializations) associated with them. The long sword

Harmgiver (4)

- that steals souls on contact

would increase a character's s.o.c by 5 points (4 for its advantage plus 1 for its specialization).

Sidekicks

Sidekicks are expressed exactly the same way as any other character; with tales, hooks, and clichés which adds to the s.o.c. of the main character. For example:

A **Tyrannical Halfling Pyromancer** (4)

might have a sidekick

Creepy Imp Familiar (2) with a .44 S&W model 29 (4) bonus gear item.

The s.o.c. of the sidekick is 6 which makes the s.o.c. of the character 10 points!

Wait a minute?

How can you create a character that has a strength of character 10 when you only get 4 points?

Add a tale

A tale reduces the s.o.c. by 1 point.

Add some hooks

Every hook reduces the s.o.c. by 1.

Add a tale and some hooks to your bonus gear

You can do that.

Add a tale and some hooks to your sidekick

You can do that too.

Add a tale and some hooks to your sidekick's bonus gear

You can even do that!

Limits

A typical starting character:

- strength of character limit of 4 points
- has at least 2 clichés
- no clichés advantages greater than 3
- and no more than 1 specialization per cliché

Note that if the s.o.c is less than the limit, the difference can be saved as inspiration points for later use.

An example character

Jack Blaze

Tale

Rather than put his faith in the almighty, Jack has proven time and again that he can win the day with just his trusty man servant and items found along the way.

Hooks

- “Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble...”
- “Follow me I know the way”

Clichés

- **Paladin school dropout** (2)
 - **who's surprisingly good at close quarters combat**
- **That could come in handy** (3)

Bonus gear

- **Lucky rock** (1)
 - **that's really hard to lose**

Sidekicks

Hector

Tale

The only thing more featureless than his personality is his face.

Hooks

- Nocturnal
- It's shiny and I must have it

Clichés

- **A thieving man servant** (1)

Bonus gear

- **Belt of many tools** (1)

Jack's strength of character can be worked out as follows:

On the plus side, it's 6 for clichés and specializations, 2 for bonus gear, 1 for sidekick clichés, and 1 for sidekick bonus gear for a total of 10.

On the minus side, it's 1 for the tale, 2 for the hooks, 1 for the sidekick tale, and 2 for the sidekick hooks for a total of 6.

So 10 - 6 give us a strength of character of 4!

Game play

The running dialog

Whether wandering around the countryside or engaging in mortal combat, the running dialog structure is used to let the story unfold:

Game master: Describes the current situation.

This is where the GM tells their part of the story. Some descriptions will be more verbose than others. For example the start of the game might require a rather lengthy description to communicate all the information the player's need to know. There could be a general description and then individual descriptions for each player's character from their point of view. At the end of each description there is an implied or even a literal "What do you do"?

Players: Respond to the description.

This is where the players tell their part of the story. Responses can be as simple as "I dive for cover" or as complex as "I run towards the table and begin a knee slide as I reload my uzi and let loose with a burst as I slide underneath".

Game master: Translates responses into actions and possibly cliché rolls.

This is where the GM breaks down the player's responses into discrete actions and figures out if and how many cliché rolls are needed and when they should be rolled. They can also assign temporary disadvantage to the rolls depending on the situation.

Players: Make cliché rolls as directed and report results.

Players will now make their cliché rolls as directed by the GM. They can decide whether "extra effort" is required and trade in inspiration points for more dice. After the roll they can decide whether "heroic effort" is required and trade in more inspiration points for more dice to roll.

Game master: Interprets results and describes consequences.

This is where the GM looks at the successful, partially successful, or failed cliché rolls and decides how the story goes:

Successful cliché rolls

No consequences are assigned. The player's response to the GM's description is exactly what happens next.

Partially successful cliché rolls

The player's response to the GM's description is what happens next but there will be an added consequence that is either known or unknown to the player.

Failed cliché rolls

The player's response to the GM's description is not what happens. Instead, what follows next will be a direct consequence of the failed cliché roll.

Consequences are NOT chosen at random. They are carefully decided upon by the GM to make sense in the context of the story and respect the game fiction. Here is a list of common consequences (adapted from [Dungeon World](#)) to help in that endeavor:

1. Use a villain, danger, or location

This is describing what the villain, danger or location does. The Mountain Trolls hurls someone away. It's a long drop to the bottom of the warp core. The Nadazian Nexus drains life energy. If a player's action has left them exposed, add a villain, danger, or location consequence.

2. Reveal an unwelcome truth

An unwelcome truth is a fact the players wish wasn't true. The room is trapped. The helpful goblin is actually a spy. Reveal to the players just how much trouble they're really in.

3. Show signs of an approaching threat

This is a very versatile consequence. "Threat" means anything bad that's on the way. You just show them that something's going to happen unless they do something about it.

4. Deal damage (disadvantage)

When you deal damage, choose one source of damage that's threatening a character and apply it. In a knife fight with a lizard man? It stabs you. Triggered a trap? Rocks fall on you. The amount of damage is decided by the GM and is dealt as points of disadvantage.

5. Use up their resources

Surviving in a dungeon, or anywhere dangerous, often comes down to supplies. With this consequence, something happens to use up some resources: weapons, armor, healing, ongoing spells. You don't always have to use it up permanently. A sword might just be flung to the other side of the room, not shattered..

6. Turn Their Action Back On Them

Think about the benefits an action might grant a character and turn it around in a negative way. Alternately, grant the same advantage to someone who has it out for the characters. If Ivy has learned of Duke Horst's men approaching from the east, maybe a scout has spotted her, too.

7. Separate them

Separating the characters can mean anything from being pushed apart in the heat of battle to being teleported miles away. Whichever way it happens, it's bound to cause problems

8. Show a downside

This is where the building blocks of a character or even their actions can be turned against them:

Hooks

What happens when someone calls Marty McFly chicken or makes White Goodman bleed his own blood?

Race / Species

Do orcs have a special thirst for elven blood?

Clichés

Is the wild magic of the [Self taught sorcerer](#) (3) disturbing dangerous forces?

Actions

The torch that lights the way also draws attention from eyes in the dark.

9. Offer an opportunity, with or without cost

Show them something they want: riches, power, glory. If you want, you can associate some cost. Remember to lead with the fiction. You don't say, "This area isn't dangerous so you can make camp here, if you're willing to take the time." You make it a solid fictional thing and say, "Helferth's blessings still hang around the shattered altar. It's a nice safe spot, but the chanting from the ritual chamber is getting louder. What do you do?"

10. Put someone in a spot

A spot is someplace where a character needs to make tough choices. Put them, or something they care about, in the path of destruction. The harder the choice, the tougher the spot.

11. Tell them the requirements or consequences

Sure they can do it, but there will be consequences. Maybe they can swim across the moat but they will need some kind of distraction to avoid being devoured by the sharks that are in a starved frenzy

Repeat

This is where the game master describes the new situation and the dialog begins again...

Credits

This would not be possible without the brilliant creations of:

Risus: The anything RPG by S. John Ross

Dungeon World by Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel

And nearly every version of **Dungeons & Dragons**

but mostly 3.5 for making me think, "there must be a better way" when trying to level Craig the Demilich