Mezzo Game System
(Play Test Version)
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Introduction

What is Mezzo?

Mezzo is a collaborative role playing game. In essence, it's about imagining a scenario and figuring out how characters would work their way through it. Game systems simply add rules to these "imagine if" scenarios. These rules help shape the play experience and resolve conflicts. The latter is especially useful when dealing with multiple players.

By default, Mezzo is a "sandbox" style game. That means there's no set way to "win" the entire game. Instead, players win by having an enjoyable experience and achieving any personal goals they set for the game.

Play Style

Mezzo is built around improvisation, collaborative play, and narrative arcs.

The game supports improvisation through a "fast and loose" style of play. The game requires minimal preparation and lets you add character and details on the fly with minimal effort. The game is meant to start with a few basic ideas and grows in detail and depth during play.

Collaborative play means all players have a similar ability to affect the game world. Every player can contribute and help shape things, though those that build off and work with other players will have an easier time putting their ideas into play.

Finally, Mezzo is designed to support plot arcs. This includes rising tension, a climactic conflict, and the wind down that follows. The players and factions will pick up narrative power as the game continues and can cash that in for a greater impact on the game world.

Legal Details

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The restriction on modifications is there because the doc is currently under development. When play-testing is done, I intend to release a more open version of the game.

Note that copyrights do not cover ideas. If there are any concepts or mechanics you want to copy, feel free. However, if you do make heavy use of these ideas, contacting or crediting the designer would be appreciated.

How to Play

Getting Started

What Do I Need to Play?

Key Components

To play Mezzo, you'll need the following:
- **Players:** As with any game, you'll need at least one player. While the game can be played solo, it's much more interesting when other people are involved. Ideally you'll want anywhere from 3 to 8 players, with 5 to 6 being a good target. Larger groups are

workable, but they tend to play slower and can be harder to manage.

- **Dice:** Mezzo makes heavy use of dice in conflict resolution and action checks. By default, the system uses a 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 sided die. Each of these die is usually referred to by the letter "d" followed by how many sides it has. For example "d8" refers to 8 sided die. See the D6 Games section in Extra Options if you've only have 6 sided die.
- **Pen & Paper:** You'll want some way to take notes. While Mezzo doesn't use a lot of statistics, plenty of traits, details, and relationships can build up during play. Being able to keep track of all of these becomes much easier and more reliable if you write them down. Note that you don't literally need pen and paper. Anything you can write with fills this role well. Some good replacements include:
  - **Index Cards:** Most of the information associated with a given part of the game is fairly compact. As such, you can get away with just writing it up on individual index cards rather than devoting a full sheet of paper to it.
  - **Digital Notes:** Portal electronics such as laptops can also do this job well as you can change things without having to worry about eraser smudge.

Extra Components

The following aren't needed, but can serve as useful additions to your game.

- **Tokens:** While resources can be tracked on paper, there is a certain appeal to being able to see and hold a representation of those resources. Coins, glass beads, and snack items are all excellent stand-ins for point based resources, such as Influence, Adversity, and Momentum.
- **Props:** Any items that help represent the character's actions or parts of the game world can be useful. These items are especially good for setting the mood and helping players get immersed in the game world.
- **Miniatures:** Props or sketches can be useful in showing what a scene looks like. You can also use tokens, miniatures, or other small items to show where the characters are in the scene. Mezzo doesn't make heavy use of movement and positioning rules, so don't worry about getting distances and placements exactly right. The main use of scenery and miniatures is to help players visualize what's going on. They can also help avoid the confusion that can arise when each player is building the scene in their own heads.
- **Music:** As with props, music can be be a good way of setting the mood and increasing player's immersion in the game world.

Plot Arc Set Up

Mezzo is broken up into plot arcs. Each arc covers a single story from beginning to end. A full play through of the game will cover a single plot arc. However, you can also chain plot arcs together to create an ongoing story (see Ending the Game for details).

To start a plot arc, all you need is a starting scene. This can be as simple as describing a location or event. From there, you can use the tools provided by this system to flesh out the rest of the story.

While such a fast start can be interesting and fun, the start of an arc is also an excellent time to talk with the other players about what your desires and expectations are for the arc. This can be as simple as laying out the genres and/or a few ground rules up to building a fully fleshed setting before play even begins.

If the new arc is a continuation of an older arc, many of these details will already be established. All you'll need then is that first scene and possibly an idea of what kind of scenes you're looking for (action, intrigue, etc..).

Player Set Up

Each player begins a new arc with 3 points of Influence. Influence does not carry over between games, so any Influence the players may have had in a previous arc is not available in the new arc. Details on what Influence does can be found in the Resolving Conflicts section. Its main use is to let players sway events in their favor.

Playing the Game

Gameplay at a Glance

The following is a quick overview of how Mezzo works. In upcoming sections, we'll go into more detail on how all of these work.
- Establish the setting.
- Set the first scene.
- Determine character actions.
- Resolve any Challenges that result from those actions.
  - Winners can shape the outcome and cash in on any Stakes they set.
  - Losers can use Adversity to help stay in the game.
- End the scene.
- Check if the plot arc is ready to close.
  - If so, the game ends.
  - If not, set up the next scene and go from there.

Narration

Everything in the game world is created and driven by player narration. At its simplest, this

means everything the player says can become part of the game world. Players only need to describe something to add it to the game world.

Statements & Suggestions

Not everything the players say is something they want added to the world. Sometimes they're simply making suggestions or throwing out ideas. They may also just be joking around or even talking about out of game topics. While you'll usually be able to tell which is which, feel free to follow up if your unclear on anything a player says. By the same token, try to make it clear when something is a suggestion, a joke, or something you really want added to the game.

Additions can only be made to the game world if at least one player stands behind it. Note that this means something you said as a simple suggestion or joke could become a real addition if another player decides to run with it. See the section on Resolving conflicts to find out what happens when player suggestions and statements contradict each other.

Scenes

A scene covers everything that happens at a particular time and place. Scenes are set by describing a location, time, and/or any important events taking place.

The end of a scene is usually marked by skipping over uninteresting events. Common examples are travel time or waiting for something. As a rule of thumb, anytime the action ends and the players want to skip ahead, you've reached the end of a scene.

Details

Anything that describes or defines something else is referred to as a detail. Game details cover every part of the game including any special rules and resources used.

One important type of game detail is story elements. This includes everything from characters, objects, and locations through abstract things like factions and agendas.

By themselves, details have no direct effect on the game. However, they can be used to justify votes and invoke setting laws. Some details also have mechanical effects attached to them. Any detail with these built in special effects are referred to as a trait.

Traits

Traits are ways of attaching game mechanics to a story element. Their main use is to define an object or character by changing how it interacts with other parts of the game world. Each trait alters the rules in a specific, predetermined way.

Trait Format

Trait entries in this document use the following format:

Trait Name [Trait Types] *(source)*
Property Name: Property description and/or rules.

Trait Name is just what you'd expect, a label that identifies the trait.

Trait Types group together traits with similar functions. Some types also change the default values and properties.

The source tag is an optional part that shows where the trait's original write up can be found.

Properties describe how the trait works by breaking its rules into easily readable chunks. More on these properties can be found below.

Common Properties

Most traits will have the following properties. This section also covers the default values for each of these properties. These are written in the order they appear in trait entries.

Requirements
Some traits can only be gained if certain conditions are met. By default, traits have no special requirements.

Restrictions
While requirements limit when a trait can be gained, restrictions limit when it can be used. As with requirements, traits have no restrictions by default.

Owner
This property tells who or what the trait belongs to. By default, the owner of a trait is the owner of the details it's attached to.

Target
A trait's target determines who or what it affects. A trait can have multiple targets of varying types, though most only have one. By default, a trait's target is its owner.

Effects
This part cover the actual mechanics of what the property does when used. Since this defines how the trait works, it has no default.

Extras
Some traits are built to be expanded on, adding another trait onto them. Additions specifically designed for that purpose are referred to as extras. See the Trait Types section for more details on them. The extras property covers how those traits can be gained as well as listing full write ups for commonly used extras.

Examples
This optional property is used in trait entries to show what details could be linked to a trait or what the trait might represent within the game world.

Details
This property simply lists any details, descriptions, and information associated with the trait. It's a useful way to flesh out things like what the trait represents, how the owner got it, what it looks like when in use, and so on. This section tends to vary a lot from trait to trait. As such it has no default and rarely shows up in more generalized trait write ups.

Trait Types

Types not only help categorize traits, they also help define the role of the trait and how it functions. This section covers all the trait types used by Mezzo. Note that traits can have more than one type, though few have more than than two types.

Edges
Edges are traits that make their owners more effective in certain ways. Edges are usually gained through the following trait.

Edge Slot [Resource]
Target: Edge slots start with no target trait.
Restrictions: An edge slot can only be used when it has no target trait.
Effects: When an edge slot is used, the owner can select any trait that meets the requirements. This selection can be disputed as per Resolving Conflicts. If the selection is not prevented, the owner gains the selected trait. That trait also becomes this slot's target trait. If the owner ever loses the target trait, this slot loses its target trait.

Story elements begin play with no edge slots, but may gain them in play. See the Edge Guide section at the end of this document for a quick guide to gaining edge slots and what they can be spent on.

Extras
Extras are a specialized kind of Modifier trait meant for a certain group of traits. Extra entries are usually included in the write ups for the trait they're meant to modify. How extras are gained usually depends on the traits they're attached to. The trait an extra is attached to is often referred to as its associated trait.

Flaws

Flaws are negative traits or those that make their owner less effective. Flaws are usually gained during Challenges as a result of hostile actions.

Modifiers

Modifiers are traits which change how other traits operate. As such, their target property includes the trait they modify (the "target trait") as well as the modified trait's targets.

Perks

Perks are special traits that grant benefits to a character for successfully completing certain actions. The owner of a perk is actually the action that generated it, while its target is one object or character who was targeted by that action. The character who performed that action is referred to as the acting character. For more on Perks, check out the Action Perks section in Challenges.

Player Roles

As the name suggests, player roles are traits that change how a given player interacts with the game. These effects usually target the role's owner. By default, a player starts with no roles, though they can gain them during play. This document only includes the Actor Role (see the Claiming Characters section), but more can be added as needed.

Resources

Resources are useful but generic traits. They're designed so owners can and often will have multiple copies of the same resource. For most resources, this means the resource can be sacrificed for a special one time benefit.

Setting Laws

Setting Laws are special traits that deal with the narrative rules and conventions of the game world. The owner of a setting law in the game world while the target is a possible outcome supported by the law. For more details on Setting Laws, see the Resolving Conflicts section.

Templates

Trait templates are actually guidelines used to create traits rather than being traits themselves. Each template includes a Set Up property which describes what needs to be done to turn the template into a full trait. A list of common edge templates can be found in the Reference section of this document.

Resolving Conflicts

Occasionally players will have disagreements. This can include arguments over what should be in the game world, what should happen, or whether a rule is being interpreted properly. This

section provides rules to help solve these disputes. These rules also form the basis of the game's dice mechanics and action checks.

At its core, this system breaks down into a few steps.
- Start the conflict.
- Explore your options.
- If the players don't agree on a single option, have them vote on the outcome.

More details on each phase are provided below.

Starting the Conflict

To start a conflict, two players simply need to make opposing statements. The most common way for a conflict to start is through contradictory alternatives or disputed statements.

Contradictory alternatives simply means two possible options when mentioned that can not both be true, at least not without modification.

Disputed statements happen when one player is narrating something or taking an action that another player wants to block. Any addition, action, or event can be disputed. In fact, you'll see some points in this document where you're explicitly reminded that something can be disputed. These reminders usually show up in options that can have a lot of impact on the game world and should be used carefully.

Exploring Options

Start by laying out any additional options beyond the two that started the conflict. This is a good point to introduce compromises or interesting alternatives. From there, each player can make statements for or against a given option. If any option is agreed on by all players, that option takes effect and the next phase is not needed.

Voting

If the players don't agree on which option to take, voting can be used to determine the outcome. Any player may call for a vote. Players can postpone voting if they still have options they want to suggest. Once all new ideas are on the table, voting may be called for again.

Note that players don't have to call for a vote. However, it's often a good idea to do so after a few minutes of debate as this helps keep the game moving.

Once a voting starts, use the following steps to determine the results.
1. **Select Approach:** There are two systems for resolving votes once they're all cast. Decide before casting votes whether you want the end result to be randomly selected (Leave to Chance) or a calculated compromise (Take Median).

2. **Free Votes:** Each player can grant one free vote to the option of their choice.
3. **Invoke Laws:** Each player can grant an additional vote by invoking one of the game's Setting Laws. Each player can only do this once per conflict. Note that this is entirely optional. Each player can choose not to invoke any Setting Laws in a given conflict. The default Setting Laws are described in the next section.
4. **Resolve Results:** Once all votes are cast, use the method you selected to determine the results. Both approaches are described in greater detail in the next few sections.

Setting Laws

A Setting Law is a specialized trait of the game's setting. These traits determine what happens in the game world by adding votes to the outcomes they favor. Below are the default Setting Laws used by Mezzo. Individual games may alter these or add their own Setting Laws.

Law of Consistency [Setting Law]
Targets:
- The target fact is one event or detail which has already occurred. Each event or detail can only be used as the target fact once per conflict.
- The target option is a possible outcome that's either supported by or contradicts the target fact.

Effects: If the target fact supports the target option, that option gains a vote. If the target fact contradicts the target option, that option loses a vote.

Law of Inertia [Setting Law]
Targets:
- The target fact is one event or detail which has already occurred.
- The target option is a possible outcome that changes the target fact in a major or fundamental way.

Effects: The target option loses a vote.

Law of Potential [Setting Law]
Targets: The target is a possible outcome that either opens up or closes off interesting possibilities. Any outcome that makes later events more predictable counts as closing things off, while those that make the future less predicable count as opening things up.
Effects: If the target opens up possibilities, it gains a vote. If the target closes off possibilities, it loses a vote.

Leave to Chance

This approach uses dice rolls to pick a single winning result out of all available options. The winning option is ultimately a matter of chance. The odds can be swayed by the number of votes an option has. Resolving conflicts with this approach breaks down into two steps, assigning dice and rolling them.

Assigning Dice

The first vote gives the option access to a single four-sided die (d4). Each additional vote lets you upgrade that die to the one with the next highest number of sides. For example, the second vote upgrades your d4 to a d6. The third vote turns that d6 to a d8, and so on. Each such upgrade can also be referred to as increasing the odds by one step.

Once the highest die is reached (d12), the next upgrade attaches an extra d4 to the option. All future upgrades go to that new die until it's maxed out and the cycle starts again.

Note that some special effects can decrease the odds by one step. This forces the last die added down to the next smallest number of sides. If a d4 is forced down in this way, that dice is lost.

Here's an example of what the progression will look like in play.

Votes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Dice	0	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12	d12 & d4	d12 & d6	d12 & d8

Rolling Dice

Once the dice have been set for all the outcomes, roll those dice. Each option gets a score equal the highest value rolled on any of its dice. If an option has no dice, treat that as rolling a 1. The option with the highest score takes effect. If multiple options tie for the high roll, see the section on Breaking Ties.

Take Median

This approach tries to find a middle road between every one's votes. This does not use any element of chance, so it's well suited for times when you want a ruling purely based on votes.

To resolve conflicts with this approach, use the following steps.
1. Select the most strongly opposed options from those remaining.
2. Find the lowest number of votes held by any of the selected options.
3. Reduce the votes in all selected options by that number.
4. Eliminate any options that drop to 0 votes.
5. Repeat from step 1 with the remaining options until 1 option remains. The last remaining option is the one that takes effect. If all options are eliminated, treat that as a tie among the last options eliminate. See the Breaking Ties section on how to pick the winning option.

<u>Breaking Ties</u>

When options are tied in either of the above approaches, you can use either of the following to break that tie.

1. **Compromise:** Any player can propose a compromise that combines the tied options. The compromise simply needs support from the majority of the players to take effect.
2. **Tiebreaker Roll:** If a compromise is not found or attempted, the players can roll for the winning option. Roll a d12 for each option. The option with the highest roll is the one that takes effect. If this results in another tie, you can either try for a compromise on the new tie or roll again. Keep repeating this until no ties remain.

<u>Spending Influence</u>

Influence is a special resource owned by players. This resource is set at the start of a plot arc and can be spent to manipulate events as follows.

Influence Point [Resource]
Owner: Influence points are owned by players.
Effect: The owning player can spend this resource to add a vote to the outcome of their choice for each point spent.

Characters

At their most basic, characters are simply the people that populate the game world. The goals, plans, and actions of those individuals lie at the heart of most stories. In fact, much of this game is about imagining how certain people would handle difficult situations. In this section, we'll look at what sets characters apart in game mechanics terms.

Action Checks

Most events in Mezzo are shaped by the desires and opinions of the players. However, characters have the option of relying on their own abilities instead. Whenever a conflict arises over what a character does, an action check can be called for.

In general, action checks should only be called for when there's at least two outcomes which are both interesting and have a reasonable chance of happening. If everyone is only interested in one outcome, you may want to just run with that. By the same token, if the chance of success or failure is virtually guaranteed, you may want to skip the check.

Action checks work as per Resolving Conflicts using the Leave to Chance approach. However, there are a few special ways these checks differ.

<u>Chance of Failure</u>
There must be a way for the acting character to fail for an action check to take place. Set up this failure option just like any other option, including using Limited Scope, Base Chance, Law Limits, and Protected Action rules.

<u>Limited Scope</u>
By default, most actions a character takes will have limited impact on the world. While some may do world changing things, such events are rare. As such, action checks have the following limitations on their effects:

- **Coverage:** The results can affect no more than a handful of targets.
- **Repercussions:** The results have limited long term consequences. While they may have a lasting impact on the original targets, the effect on others is minimal.

There are two ways around these limits. The first is simply to resolve this as a normal conflict instead of an action check. This is good for portraying actions on par with nationwide actions and natural disasters.

The other option is spending votes to purchase Scope Perks. Each perk works to relax the normal limitations on character actions. Players may declare their intent to do this at any time. However, the votes can only be spent after all votes have been cast but before the winning option is determined (the Resolve Results step). Each Scope Perk costs 1 vote. The most commonly available Scope Perks are listed below.

Extended Coverage [Scope Perk]
Effects: The owning action can affect a crowd or other large group of people. In general, everyone affected should be able to fit in a single building.

Local Coverage [Scope Perk]
Requirement: The owning action must have the Extended Coverage perk.
Effects: The owning action can affect an entire community or a sizable location. The target area is big enough the characters are likely to run into it on a daily basis unless they move to a new area.

Regional Coverage [Scope Perk]
Requirement: The owning action must have the Local Coverage perk.
Effects: The owning action can affect a large part of the current setting. Characters would have to make a significant effort to avoid affected targets, such as moving to another part of the world.

Lingering Consequences [Scope Perk]
Effects: The owning action can indirectly affect those who come into contact with the action's targets. This side effect is usually subtle and only spreads until the end of the plot arc.

Contagious Consequences [Scope Perk]

Requirement: The owning action must have the Lingering Consequences perk.

Effects: The owning action's side effects can reach beyond those who have actual contact with the action's targets. In effect, this lets the action indirectly influence an entire community or region. Such events can have significant short term effects and subtle long term ones. This perk also keeps the action's Lingering Repercussions perk from expiring at the end of a plot arc.

Inescapable Consequences [Scope Perk]

Requirement: The owning action must have the Contagious Consequences perk.

Effects: The owning action can have an indirect effect on the majority of the game world and can shape the course of future events. These events have a strong impact and can influence things for years to come.

You've probably noticed these perks are arranged into two progressions. In both, a basic perk unlocks the next step which in turn unlocks another step. That makes getting to the higher steps prohibitively expensive for most actions. However, there are some ways to get around these costs. See the Challenges and Plot Hooks sections for more details.

It's also worth noting that any such purchase can be disputed, especially if the perk doesn't match the action. In fact, many routine actions will rarely use these perks. It's when the characters are trying to do something big that these perks come into play.

Base Chance

Replace the Free Vote step with the following. Instead of each player granting a free vote to the outcome of their choice, the players must decide how likely the action is to succeed. The three levels of likelihood used by most actions are listed here:

Chance	Votes	Action Description	Failure Description*
Negligible	0	Most characters can't pull this off.	Success is a virtually guaranteed.
Occasional	1	Most characters have a limited ability to handle this task	Failure isn't unheard of, but doesn't happen that often.
Common	2	This activity is something most characters can manage fairly often.	Failure is a very real possibility, though not an overwhelming one.

* Failure Description provides guidelines for setting the "Chance of Failure" roll. Don't use this when setting the base chance for the action itself.

Use the action descriptions to set the base chance for any actions the participating characters may take. The failure descriptions are used to set the base chance for the failure option. The

base chance for failure options is usually occasional for a routine action or common for a risky one. If either option has a Negligible chance, no action check is needed. If the players can't agree on the odds, use the rules for Resolving Conflicts to settle the issue.

Pay Off

The first time a story element participates in an action check, it gains 4 edge slots. This gives it the chance to add traits that might help with the current action. Alternately, they can forgo buying traits now to save them up for a later event. For most elements, these will be the first edge slots they gain access to.

This means that not only do characters gain these slots for taking action, but if they're trying to overcome an obstacle, that obstacle gets slots too.

Law Limits

Before apply the effects of Setting Laws to an action check, total up how many votes would be gained or lost by all laws used. If this total exceeds 2 votes gained or lost, reduce that total down to 2.

For example, let's say an action check had 4 laws in its favor and 1 opposing it. That would normally give it a bonus of 3 extra votes (4 supporting - 1 opposing). However, this rule cuts that down to only 2 extra votes gained.

Protected Action

Players can not use narration to undo or cancel out either this action or its effects. They can narrate responses and attempts to mitigate those effects, but the action itself can not be undone.

Contested Actions

When two or more characters take actions that can interfere with each other, you've got a contested action. To handle this, simply let each character make an action roll and have the highest rolling action take effect. Having an opposing character may also mean removing the failure roll, unless there's a way for all participants to fail at once.

Adversity

Adversity represents how much hardship and opposition a character has faced and their ability to fight back against it. This trait can help turn things around when the character finds themselves at a disadvantage. Characters begin with no adversity, but can gain it by participating in Challenges. Full details on how adversity works are provided below.

Adversity Point [Resource]
Effects: The owner may sacrifice adversity points for any of the following benefits. Note that many of these effects cost multiple adversity points.
- **Overcome Flaws**
    - *Cost:* 2 Adversity Points
    - *Effects:* The owner may ignore the effects of a chosen flaw for one action.
- **Fortune's Favor**
    - *Cost:* 2 Adversity Points
    - *Effects:* The owner can add 1 vote to their current action.
- **Sudden Surge**
    - *Cost:* 3 Adversity Points
    - *Effects:* The owner can add 1 to the results of the dice roll for their current action. This effect can be applied after the dice are rolled but before the winning roll is resolved.
- **Unexpected Edge**
    - *Cost:* 5 Adversity Points
    - *Restrictions:* The owner must be participating in a Challenge they have no appropriate traits for.
    - *Effects:* The owner gains a trait of their choice that's appropriate to the current challenge. This purchase may be disputed as per Resolving Conflicts. It's also worth noting that this edge has no edge slot. As such, if this additional edge is lost, it does not free up one of the character's edge slots.

If the owner has at least one point of adversity, but not enough to cover the full cost, they can pay the remainder by taking the Adversity Debt flaw once per point needed.
All unspent Adversity is lost at the end of the current plot arc.

Adversity Debt [Flaw Resource]
Effects: Whenever the owner would gain an adversity point, they instead lose both that point and a point of debt. In effect, the character can not start gaining adversity until they "pay off" their debt. This debt can also be paid off through the following options.
- **Ill Fated:** This option can be used when there's a conflict over an event that hinders, harms, or otherwise makes life harder for the owner. For each point of debt spent, the hostile event gains an additional vote.
- **Tempting Target:** Whenever a harmful perk targets this flaw's owner, the character who set that perk can gain an adversity point. If they do so, this flaw's owner also loses a point of adversity debt.

All Adversity Debt is lost at the end of the current plot arc.

Claiming Characters

As with other story elements, characters come into play as a shared resource. Any player can make suggestions on who the character is or what they do. However, players do have the

option of gaining greater control over specific characters in exchange for less control over other events. To do this, the player must take on the following role.

Actor Role [Player Role]
Effects: The player gains the following special ability.
- **Claim Character**
    - *Target:* Any character which has not been claimed by another player.
    - *Effects:* The player can try to lay their claim on the target character. If multiple players lay claim on the same character, determine the winner as per Resolving Conflicts. The winning player gets the following benefits.
        - **Creative Control:** If a conflict arises over the actions, details, or history of the character, the player may cast 3 free votes instead of the usual 1.
        - **Sealed Resources:** No other player can use this character's resources. This includes filling edge slots and spending adversity or momentum (see the Challenges section for more on momentum).
        - **Character Protection:** The character gains the Plot Protection edge if they don't have it already.
        - **Character Upgrade:** If this is the first time the character has been claimed, they gain 2 edge slots.
    - The character's owner can surrender their claim at any time.

In exchange for this special ability, the player can no longer cast free votes in any conflicts not covered by the Creative Control benefit mentioned above. A player automatically enters and can not leave this role if any of their claimed characters are active in the current scene. However, should those characters leave the scene or become unable to act, the player is free to switch to another role.

Plot Protection [Edge]
Requirements: An owner can only have one instance of this edge at a time.
Effects: Narrated events can not take this edge's owner out of play. Narration can also not render the owner unable to act, though it may limit what actions are viable. The owner may still gain flaws. These flaws just can't permanently take the character out of play. The owner also gains the ability to sacrifice this protection through either of the following options.
- **Final Counter:** This edge's protection can be sacrificed during a challenge to remove all perks generated by a single major action. This may be done after the perks and their effects have been declared but before the results are fully resolved.
- **Heroic Sacrifice:** This character may lend this edge's protection to another story element until the end of the current challenge or scene.

If either of these options is taken, the character can not benefit from this edge until the challenge is fully resolved. This means the character can only use this once per challenge and is vulnerable until after the challenge ends.

Note, the Plot Protection edge can be bought with edge slots to keep a setting element safe even when it's not claimed.

Unusual Characters

While these rules are meant for the people of the game world, these definitions and rules can be stretched quite a bit. For example, in a political game these rules could be used to cover the maneuvering of different factions.

Challenges

Challenges are ways of linking actions together to accomplish a larger goal. This lets the players combine their efforts and build on previous successes. Challenges can also yield greater rewards as well as higher stakes than individual actions. As such, challenges are good for handling important events within the game.

Starting Challenges

A player can propose a challenge any time a character is trying to overcome an obstacle or opponent. If another player is willing to support the opposition, a challenge begins.

Alternately, a player can throw support behind the loser of an action check. As in the previous case, if another player is willing to support the opposition, a challenge begins. In this case, the triggering action check is treated as the first round and the winning side gets success effects accordingly.

Adding Challengers

By default, a challenge starts with two challengers, the one who started the challenge and their opponent. Additional characters or obstacles can be added to a challenge at any point before the challenge ends. Each new addition simply needs details on how it's entering the conflict and what its goals are.

Each new addition can be disputed as per Resolving Conflicts. Note that the Law of Potential can often be invoked to push for roughly equal sides in a conflict. After all, if one side has greater numbers, the results are more predictable.

In general, the numbers for each side should be figured out at the start of contest, even if all participants don't come into play at the same time. Adding new members to shore up the losing side should rarely be used as it can extend the time it takes to resolve a challenge and potentially slow down play.

Taking Sides
When challengers are added, they can choose to ally with other characters already in the the

challenge. The newcomer must share the goals of the side they want to join and be accepted by at least one member of that side. Members of the same side can win or lose a challenge as a group and can team up to overcome opposition.

<u>Setting Stakes</u>

When a character joins a challenge, they can state something they want to achieve if they win the challenge. This goal is referred to as the character's stakes. As with other details, stakes can be disputed. This is usually done if the stakes are inappropriate to the challenge or have too much effect on the game world. A character can pursue multiple goals, but can only have one stake at a time.

<u>Obstacles & Hazards</u>

Note that not all challengers need to be characters. Anything that can keep the characters from their goal can be added as a challenger. This includes things like traps, barriers, and environmental hazards. If the hazard or obstacles can be avoided entirely during the challenge, it shouldn't be added as a challenger.

<u>Pay Off</u>

The first time a setting element participates in a challenge, it gains 4 edge slots. This award is only granted for the first challenge they participate in. Any challenges after the first grant no additional slots.

Protected Event

All story elements that either actively participate in a challenge or oppose a challenger gain the Plot Protection edge until they leave the challenge. This means normal details can not be used to take them out of the challenge.

In addition, the challenge itself gains a form of Plot Protection. While details can be revealed that are helpful to specific sides, no detail can determine or control the outcome of a challenge. Any detail that would push a side out of the challenge or otherwise directly affect the outcome automatically fails.

Challenge Rounds

Unlike Action Checks, challenges are rarely ended with a single roll. Instead, challenges are broken up into bouts of activity and contested actions. Each of these bouts is referred to as a round.

Rounds aren't meant to be precise units of time. Instead they're meant to cover as much time

as it take for an average participant to meaningfully contribute to the challenge. In things like combat, a round can be as fast as a single moment or second. If the challenge deals with something like political maneuvering, a round could cover days.

Actions Per Round

Each character can do anything within a round that could reasonably be done in that time frame. What's reasonable can be disputed as per Resolving Conflicts. When in doubt, an action check could be called for to perform the target action with sufficient haste.

For particularly fast paced actions like combat or chases, you may wish to limit each part of the character to one action. Thus they could move, talk, and do something with their hands, but not do two actions with any one of those.

As a rule of thumb, action descriptions should be no more than a couple sentences per character. The idea is to get each character's actions out quickly and keep things moving.

Major Actions

Each round, any participant in a challenge can make one of their actions a Major Action. In addition to its usual effects, these actions can produce special effects that can tip the challenge in the character's favor.

Major actions are treated as action checks. However, they have additional effects based on how the action's roll compares to all opposing rolls. These effects are as follows.
- **Success:** If the roll is higher than the highest opposing roll, the actions gains 1 major perk.
  - **Double Success:** If the roll is double or more the highest opposing roll, the action gains an additional major perk. This brings the total up to 2 major perks.
- **Tie:** If the roll is tied with the highest opposing roll, all tied actions gain 1 minor perk.
- **Failure:** If the roll is lower than the highest opposing roll, the action gains no perks but the action's owner gains a point of adversity (see the Character section for more on adversity).

For more on the perks generated by these actions, see the Challenge Perks section below.

Alternately, a challenger can sacrifice their major action for the round to change their stakes. If their new stakes clash with their side's goals, this can cause the challenger to change sides.

Challenge Perks

As mentioned in the Traits section, perks are special benefits associated with actions. This section covers the perks that can be generated by major actions.

<u>Minor Perks</u>

Minor perks are awarded for partial success. While they can not win a challenge themselves, they can sway things in the character's favor.

Hinder [Minor Perk]
Effects: Use the Dulled Edge or Impaired Ability template to give a flaw to the target. This flaw automatically gains the One-Shot and Transient Flaw modifiers.

Recover [Minor Perk]
Effects: The target may remove a flaw gained during this challenge. The chosen flaw must have the One-Shot and Transient Flaw modifiers.

Discover [Minor Perk]
Effects: The acting character finds something useful, such as a minor item, information, concealed compartments, etc.. Treat this as adding something to the game world. If this addition is opposed, the detail gets an extra free vote in support of its existence.

Expose [Minor Perk]
Effects: Use the Vulnerability template to give a flaw to the target. This flaw automatically gains the One-Shot and Transient Flaw modifiers.

<u>Major Perks</u>

These perks are granted for full or exceptional success. Their effects are potent enough to potentially win a challenge or take out an opponent. A player can opt to trade a major perk in for 2 minor perks if desired.

Note each major perk that brings you closer to victory has another major perk that counters it. Break Free counters Bind, Heal counters Damage, and Ruin counters Push. Each counter has built in limits to keep the challenge from dragging on indefinitely.

Bind [Major Perk]
Effects: The target gains a Restraint flaw with the Transient Flaw modifier.

Break Free [Major Perk]
Effects: The target can remove one of their Restraint flaws, but gains a minor flaw in return. The Restraint being removed must have the Transient Flaw modifier. The added flaw uses the Dulled Edge, Impaired Ability, or Vulnerability template and must be related to either the original restraint or the source action. The new flaw gains the One-Shot and Transient Flaw modifiers automatically.

Damage [Major Perk]

Effects: Choose one of the following effects:
- The target gains a flaw of your choice based on the Dulled Edge, Impaired Ability, or Vulnerability template. This flaw automatically gains the Wound and Transient Flaw modifiers.
- One of the target's wounds gains 2 extras.

When damage is done you can also choose to expend any number of the target's One-Shot flaws. For each flaw you spend this way, the target wound gains an Extra.

Heal [Major Perk]
Effects: Select one wound gained by the target during this challenge and one of the following effects. The selected wound must have the Transient Flaw modifier.
- Remove up to 2 Extras of your choice from the wound.
- If the target wound has no Extras, you can replace its Wound modifier with the One-Shot modifier.

Push [Major Perk]
Target: Push perks target goals rather than characters or things. The target goal must be both something that's supported by the source action and something that can justify victory or defeat for at least one character. Characters can usually use their stakes for this goal. However, goals don't need to be stakes to valid targets.
Effects: The target goal gains a Trump edge. A player can counter this addition by adding a complication to the attempt. Complications are simply details that describes why the task isn't finished yet. If a complication is added, treat this as a use of the Ruin perk where the source action is the complication. As noted for that perk, this can not be used if the target goal has sufficient Momentum to protect its Trumps.
Examples: running toward a goal, solving a puzzle, disarming a trap..

Ruin [Major Perk]
Target: Ruin perks target goals which have at least one trump trait. The target goal must be something the source action can interfere with. Any goal with at least twice as much Momentum as the number of Trump Edges it has can not be targeted.
Effects: The target goal loses a Trump Edge but gains a point of Momentum.

Perk Traits

This section covers the details of all traits produced and used by minor and major perks.

Dulled Edge [Flaw Template]
Set Up: Select an edge owned by the flaw's target. If the target edge has an extra or dependent trait without a Dulled Edge flaw, this flaw must target one of them instead.
Effects: The selected edge can not be used until this flaw is removed.

Favored Flaw [Edge Template]

Set Up: Select one of the owner's flaws or a trait that can be used against them. The selected trait can not already have an associated Favored Flaw.
Restriction: This edge's effects can only be used once per challenge or once per scene outside of challenges.
Effects: When the selected trait is used against the owner, the owner gains a point of adversity.
Extras: This edge starts with no extras.

- **Empowering Flaw** [Extra]
  - *Effects:* The associated Favored Flaw loses its once per challenge/scene restriction.

Impaired Ability [Flaw Template]
Set Up: Select an edge with the Ability template. The flaw's target does not need to have this edge.
Effects: Whenever the selected edge would apply to the character's action, that action suffers a one step penalty to its chance of success.

Momentum Boost [Resource]
Restrictions: Each owner can only trigger 5 Momentum Boosts per challenge.
Targets: The target group is a set of participants in the current challenge.
Effects: When the owner leaves the challenge, this trait is expended and a member of the target group gains a point of momentum. Each challenger can only gain this award up to 5 times per challenge. The award goes to the challenger with the least momentum. If multiple challengers have equally low momentum, the winner can be picked as per Resolving Conflicts.

One-Shot [Modifier]
Effects: The target edge or flaw is automatically removed after its next use.

Restraint [Flaw]
Effects: The flaw's target can no longer use 12 sided dice for their action checks, even if they would normally have the votes to do so. This caps the target's action checks at using a d10. Each additional restraint locks out the next highest die size. Once all die are locked out, assume the character automatically rolls a 1 in all action checks. Any character in this condition can not participate in challenges and must leave the current challenge in defeat.
This trait also gives its owner a Momentum Boost which targets all opponents. This boost is lost at the end of the current challenge.

Transient Flaw [Flaw Modifier]
Target: This modifier targets one of the owner's flaws.
Effects: If the owner has completed a challenge since this modifier was gained, the owner gains the Favored Flaw edge for the target flaw. If this modifier or its target edge is lost, so is the Favored Flaw edge it grants.

Trump [Edge Resource]

Requirement: This edge can only be gained by goals and cannot be purchased with edge slots.
Effects: At the end of a challenge round, trump points may be spent on one of the following effects.

- **Victorious Withdrawal:** If the owning goal has at least as many trump points as it has supporting challengers, those supporters may leave the challenge in victory.
- **Defeated Exile:** If the owning goal has at least as many trump points as it has opposing challengers, those opponents may be forced from the challenge in defeat.

This trait also provides a Momentum Boost with the following modifiers.

- **Owner:** The modifier's owner is this trump trait, rather than a challenger.
- **Targets:** The target group is the supporters of this trump's goal.
- **Leaving the Challenge:** The trump counts as leaving the challenge when all supporters of the trump's goal have left the challenge.
- **Momentum Transfer:** When the modifier is triggered, the trump may draw momentum from its owning goal. For each point spent this way, the modifier can be used one additional time before being expended. That means the trump's goal can spend up to 4 momentum to use this boost 5 times. The first use is free and the fifth use hits the per challenge limit. In effect, this lets the user transfer up to 4 points per trump from the goal to its supporters.

All trumps are lost at the end of the current challenge.

Wound [Flaw Modifier]
Effects: If the flaws can not meaningfully contribute to the current challenge after the target flaw is inflicted, they must leave the challenge in defeat. Any trait with this modifier may be referred to as a wound.
This trait also gives its owner a Momentum Boost which targets all opponents. This boost is lost at the end of the current challenge.
Extras: Wounds have no extras by default, though Damage perks can add extras to them.

- **Corrosive Wound**
    - *Requirements:* The wound must use the Dulled Edge template.
    - *Effects:* Each time this extra is purchased, the wound can target and lock down an additional edge.
- **Targeted Wound**
    - *Requirements:* The wound must use the Impaired Ability template.
    - *Set Up:* Select a significant but non-vital part of the wound's target.
    - *Effects:* The wound affects all actions that use the selected part.
    - *Examples:* bruised limb, clouded judgment, dropped item..
- **Pervasive Wound**
    - *Requirements:* The wound must have the Targeted Wound extra.
    - *Effects:* The wound affects all actions taken by the character.
    - *Examples:* head injury, wind knocked out, exhausted..
- **Vicious Wound**
    - *Effects:* Healing and recovery perks can not remove any other extras until all Vicious Wound extras have been removed. Treating these wounds always

triggers a Recovery Check, though this check can be skipped with extra time (see the Rest and Recuperation section for details).

Vulnerability [Flaw Template]
Set Up: Select a certain type of action.
Effects: When an action of the selected type is used on this flaw's target, that action gains an extra vote. This vote can be used either to raise the action's chances or lower the chance of an opposing action or resistance.

Momentum

Momentum is a special resource that represents a character's push towards victory. This resource can be spent on a variety of useful effects when the character leaves a challenge.

Momentum [Resource]
Owner: Momentum can belong to either a character or a goal.
Effects: When the owner leaves a challenge in victory, they can spend momentum on the following benefits.
- **Victory Narration:** The owner may spend momentum to add votes to any disputed events or actions, provided the target event or action is directly related to the character's victory. Each point of momentum spent grants 1 extra vote.
- **Claiming Stakes:** The owner may spend momentum to attach perks to an action, provided that action matches the stakes they set at the beginning of the challenge. Each point of momentum spent grants 1 major perk. Any perks bought this way with effects that normally last until the end of the challenge now last until the end of the next challenge.
- **Lasting Effects:** Select a flaw held by any setting element that was either involved in the challenge or was part of the owner's stake. For 1 point of momentum, the Transient Flaw modifier can be either added to or removed from the target flaw.
- **Boons:** The owner can spend momentum to gain a temporary advantage. Treat these boons as temporary edges. As with adversity granted edges, these traits don't use edge slots and don't free up any slots when lost. The duration of the edge varies with its cost as noted below.
  - **One Shot:** The edge gains the One Shot modifier. Such edges cost 1 momentum by default. However, the character can add additional uses at the cost of 1 momentum per 2 extra uses. That means 2 momentum buys you 3 uses, 3 momentum buys you 5 uses, and so on.
  - **One Challenge:** The edge can only be used in one challenge, but can be used an unlimited number of times within that challenge. This option costs 3 points of momentum per edge.
  - **One Arc:** The edge lasts until the end of the plot arc. This costs 5 points of momentum per edge.

All unspent Momentum is lost at the end of either the current challenge or the current plot arc.

Leaving Challenges

When a challenger leaves a challenge, they stop participating and can no longer affect those still in the challenge. A character can not normally re-enter a challenge once they leave it. This also triggers a variety of effects, some of which depend on whether they left in victory or defeat.

Momentum Boosts

All momentum boosts trigger when their owner leaves the challenge. The boosts provided by wounds and restraints award momentum to opponents.

Also note that when all characters that support a given goal leave the challenge that goal's trumps all triggers. Each trump produces one point of momentum boost and allows up to 4 additional points of momentum to transfer from the goal to its supporters.

Momentum Boosts have built in limits on how much momentum they can generate and award. As such, challengers usually produce and gain no more than 5 momentum per challenge.

Leaving in Victory

A challenger leaves in victory when their main goals are achieved. The main advantage of leaving in victory is that momentum can be spent on a variety of benefits. See the Momentum entry above for more on these benefits.

Leaving in Defeat

A challenger leaves in defeat when they fail to reach any of their goals or are forced out of the challenge by an opponent. Defeated challengers can not spend momentum on its usual effects.

However, they do gain the option of converting momentum into adversity. For every 2 points of momentum spent, they gain 1 point of adversity. While there is some loss in this trade, keep in mind momentum is normally lost at the end of a challenge while adversity is not. This option can not be used until after all momentum has been awarded.

Surrender

In addition to the methods mentioned above, a participant can choose to voluntarily leave a challenge. Voluntarily leaving a challenge usually counts as leaving the challenge in defeat. However, it does count as leaving in victory iif there are no opponents left in the challenge when this option is used.

Voluntarily leaving the challenge this way normally takes a major action. However, whenever

the character gains a trait that can remove targets from a challenge, they can choose to leave immediately after gaining that trait. The most common traits that trigger this are wounds and restraints.

This is often done to limit the momentum opponents can accrue. After all, if the challenger gives in before they've built up many wounds or restraints, they will provide little momentum for their opponents when they leave. If they're the last member of their side, this could also result in the challenge ending before their opponents can do more.

You can also use these mechanics to represent weaker challengers. Just decide ahead of time when you want them to drop out. The sooner they drop, the easier they will be to defeat, but the less they give those who defeat them.

Ending Challenges

When all remaining challengers have no opponents left, every remaining challenger leaves the challenge in victory. Once all challengers have left and the effects of their departure are resolved, the challenge ends.

Some traits have special effects at the end of a challenge. This includes the following.
- Wounds and Restraints lose their momentum boosts.
- All trumps are lost.
- Transient Flaw modifiers grant their owners the Favored Flaw edge.

Rest & Recuperation

After a challenge is over, participants may still be afflicted with flaws they gained during that challenge. To rid themselves of these, characters will have to take certain actions ranging from simple rest through medical treatment.

Restorative Actions

In game terms, this means this is handled by letting some actions generate perks outside of challenges. However, each of these actions can only produce a specific type of perk. A list of these actions and their perks is below.

Each entry has an "action" and "time" property. The action property covers what the character is actually doing while the time property covers how long it usually takes. If the action or time is variable, handle individual cases with the Resolving Conflicts mechanics.

These actions should not be used during challenges. If allowed, they should cost 3 major actions to use. While this makes them very costly, it does allow recovery without a dice roll.

Take Breather
Action: The character takes a few moments to catch their breath, regain their balance, or otherwise shake off the effects of their ordeal.
Time: As the name implies, breathers cover roughly the span of a single deep breath. This usually works out to around 5 seconds.
Effects: The action gains the Recover perk. This perk loses the "gained during this challenge" restriction on which flaws can be removed.

Escape Restraints
Action: The action depends on the nature of the restraint. For physical restraints, this usually means either breaking or slipping out of the things that hold them. For mental restraints, this usually means resting and reorienting.
Time: The time taken varies with the action. As a quick rule of thumb, assume a character can escape roughly 3 restraints per minute.
Effects: The action gains the Break Free perk. This perk does not generate a new flaw when it removes the restraint perk.

Treat Wounds
Action: The action depends on the type and severity of the wound. Basic wounds may take little more than first aid or support (for mental wounds). More advanced injuries can require any thing up to surgery or therapy.
Time: Treating wounds can take anywhere from around a minute for quick first aid to hours for complicated procedures.
Effects: The action gains the Heal perk. This perk loses the "gained during this challenge" restriction on which flaws can be removed.

Delayed Recovery

You may have noticed that some restorative actions call for special equipment or take a while to perform. This can mean the action can't be performed in the current situation. It can also lead to another challenge happening before they've fully recovered.

If that happens, keep in mind that Transient Flaws grant a Favored Flaw edge at the end of their first challenge. That means if the character isn't fully recovered and the fact is used against them they may gain adversity from that. The character can also use the surrender option to leave the challenge early if needed.

Recovery Checks

Some flaws can be hard to shake off. This can be represented by requiring an action check before the restorative action's effects can be applied. This option generally can not be used if the character has abundant time to recover as the character can just keep rolling to overcome it. As a rule of thumb, assume having triple the required time is enough to skip recovery checks.

By default, only Vicious Wounds have this effect. However, these checks may be called for and disputed as per Resolving Conflicts.

Plot Hooks

In stories, a narrative hook is something placed in the beginning of the story to catch and hold the reader's interest.

In Mezzo, plot hooks serve a similar function while also supporting escalating conflicts. In essence, each hook is bits of information that catches the player's interest and helps further the story. They often take the form of questions (ex. "Where is the map?"), goals (ex. "We have to make it to the cove before the Barnacle Gang does."), or clues (ex. "The only thing left of Johnson was his jacket.").

Creating Plot Hooks

A plot hook can be suggested at any time, just like any other detail. The player simply needs to point out the question or idea they want emphasized. To actually turn that idea into a plot hook, that idea must be brought up within the game world either through narrated events or character actions. Resources may then be spent on the idea. It costs 1 point of Influence, 1 point of Momentum, or 2 points of Adversity to convert an idea into a plot hook.

Plot Hook [Resource]
Owner: Hooks belong to plot arcs.
Set Up: Determine the hook's focus. The focus is the question, goal, or statement the hook is based on.
Effects: A plot hook is triggered when a player or setting element either performs an action or provides a detail that's related to its focus. When a hook is triggered, the player or element that triggered it may choose one of the following effects.
- **Invest:** The user can store Influence, Adversity, or Momentum in this hook. Each type of resource should be tracked separately. Momentum invested in a plot hook is not lost at the end of a challenge.
- **Tap:** The user may draw a point from any resource stored in this hook and add it to their own reserves.
- **Resolve:** This hook can be resolved when its focus is no longer relevant to the plot arc. Resolving a hook takes it out of play but rewards the user with their choice of 1 point of Influence, 1 of Momentum, or 2 points of Adversity. If the hook had any resources, the user can distribute those points among all other players or elements as they choose. However, the number of points a target may be awarded is capped at 1 more than the fewest points awards to a potential target. This means no one gets a second point until everyone has been awarded 1 point, nor a third point until everyone has been awarded 2

point, and so on.

If an action or event triggers multiple plot hooks, the additional options become available. As with the previous options, only one effect can be chosen per triggering event or action. Note that each of these options requires a certain number of triggered hooks.

- **Raise Stakes**
  - *Requirements:* At least 2 plot hooks must be triggered.
  - *Effects:* All used hooks may be tapped and their resources can be redirected to one challenger's stakes. Every point of influence or 2 points of adversity transferred this way is converted into momentum. Momentum invested in a stake can be spent by any of the stake's owners, provided they left the challenge in victory. However, a stakes momentum must be spent in support of that stake.
- **No Escape**
  - *Requirements:* At least 3 plot hooks must be triggered.
  - *Effects:* The user can chose removal of a certain setting element when they set their stakes. If they do so and leave the challenge in victory, the user can spend 2 momentum to ignore the target's Plot Protection edge until after the end of the current challenge.
- **Turning Point**
  - *Requirements:* At least 5 plot hooks must be triggered.
  - *Restrictions:*
    - **Challenge Based:** This effect can only be used during a challenge.
    - **Once per Arc:** This effect can only be used once per plot arc.
    - **Minimum Resources:** The total resources in all triggered hooks must be at least as great as the number of challengers.
  - *Effects:* If this attempt is not blocked, the following effects come into play.
    - **Adversity Boost:** Every challenger can draw a point of adversity from one of the target plot hooks. If the plot hooks don't have enough adversity, a point of momentum or influence can be sacrificed to add 2 points of adversity to the hooks.
    - **Arc Theme:** Those who leave the challenge can establish a theme for the plot arc. This theme functions as Setting Laws but expires at the end of the plot arc.
    - **Resolution:** Until the end of the plot arc, the cost of plot hooks is doubled but each hook yields double the normal amount of resources when they're resolved.
    - **End Game:** Players can call for the end of the current plot arc at the end of each scene. The end of the arc may be disputed as per Resolving Conflicts. In these disputes, the Law of Inertia can use unresolved plot hooks as target facts.

Plot arcs and their effects expire when their associated plot arc ends.

Ending the Game

Ending Sessions

A game session ends whenever the players want to stop playing for a while. The best points to stop at are the end of plot arcs, but the game can be stopped mid-arc if needed. In that case, it may be a good idea to take some quick notes so the group can readily resume the arc the next time they play.

Ending Arcs

As you may have noticed, the only way to end an arc is to first trigger the game's turning point. This is done by tying multiple plot hooks into a single event. The turning point signals the peak of the story. After that, resolving old hooks becomes more rewarding than setting up new ones. As such, most of the scenes after the turning point will center on tying up loose ends. At the end of each of these scenes, the players have the option of ending the arc. As always, this option can be disputed and resolved as per Resolving Conflicts.

The following effects kick in when a plot arc ends.
- All Adversity and Momentum are lost.
- Linger Consequences fade.
- One Arc boons expire.
- All remaining plot hooks expire without rewarding any resources.

In addition to those effects, players have the option of giving out edge slot awards to memorable setting elements. All a player needs to do is bring up the element and how it impacted the story. While most of these awards can be disputed, each player is allowed one free award per arc which is safe from dispute. This means the character can guarantee at least one setting element gets the opportunity to improve.

Since this is the end of the arc, these edge slots have little immediate effect. However, they can be very useful for building up characters and other setting elements in an ongoing series.

Game Series

Each time this game is played, players are free to start with a new setting and new characters. However, many times players will want to continue where a previous plot arc left off. A set of connected plot arcs is referred to as a series.

Adding a new arc to a series runs much like starting a new arc. However, keep in mind that most resources will be reset. Adversity and Momentum are drained at the end of an arc while Influence points are reset at the start of new arcs. However, characters and most of their edges are kept. The only exceptions are edges that are set to expire at the end of an arc.

Reference

Edge Guide

This section provides a quick summary of how setting elements can gain edges as well as a list of the edges they can gain. This makes it a valuable tool for quickly fleshing out what edges a character or other setting element should have.

Gaining Edges

Edge Slots

Setting elements can gain slots for the following:
- 4 slots for the first time they're involved in an action check.
- 4 slots for the first time they participate in a challenge.
- 2 slots for the first time they're claimed by a player.
- 1 slot at the end of each plot arc where they're deemed a memorable element.

This means an element caps out at 10 slots in their first arc and increase from there.

Each slot can only hold a single edge. However, if the edge is lost, the slot becomes free and can be used to pick up another edge.

Unexpected Edges

These edges can only be gained when a setting element is in a challenge they are ill suited for. If the element has any edges that apply to the challenge, this option is not available. Each edge gained this way costs 5 Adversity and is not replaced when lost.

Boons

These edges are gained by spending momentum after leaving a challenge in victory. The duration of these edges is based on how much momentum was spent.
- 1 point gets you a single use of the edge.
- 2 points gets you 3 uses of the edge.
- 3 points gets you either 5 uses or unlimited uses for a single challenge.
- 4 points gets you 7 uses.
- 5 points gets you unlimited uses until the end of the current plot arc.

As with Unexpected Edges, these are not replaced when lost.

Edge List

Basic Edges

The following edges can be found in the How to Play section of this document.

Favored Flaw [Edge Template] *(from Challenge Perks)*
Set Up: Select one of the owner's flaws or a trait that can be used against them. The selected trait can not already have an associated Favored Flaw.
Restriction: This edge's effects can only be used once per challenge or once per scene outside of challenges.
Effects: When the selected trait is used against the owner, the owner gains a point of adversity.
Extras: This edge starts with no extras.
- **Empowering Flaw** [Extra]
    - *Effects:* The associated Favored Flaw loses its once per challenge/scene restriction.

Plot Protection [Edge] *(from Claiming Characters)*
Requirements: An owner can only have one instance of this edge at a time.
Effects: Narrated events can not take this edge's owner out of play. Narration can also not render the owner unable to act, though it may limit what actions are viable. The owner may still gain flaws. These flaws just can't permanently take the character out of play. The owner also gains the ability to sacrifice this protection through either of the following options.
- **Final Counter:** This edge's protection can be sacrificed during a challenge to remove all perks generated by a single major action. This may be done after the perks and their effects have been declared but before the results are fully resolved.
- **Heroic Sacrifice:** This character may lend this edge's protection to another story element until the end of the current challenge or scene.

If either of these options is taken, the character can not benefit from this edge until the challenge is fully resolved. This means the character can only use this once per challenge and is vulnerable until after the challenge ends.

Edge Templates

This section provides some guidelines and templates for creating your own edges.

Ability [Edge Template]
Set Up: Set the following properties for each new ability.
- **Action Type:** Select the kind of action needed to use this ability.
- **Intended Result:** Select a possible outcome for using actions of the selected type. This outcome must be something that could reasonably be expected from that action within the current setting. This means your choices are limited by any setting assumptions the

players may have.

In effect, each ability links a cause (action type) and effect (intended result).

Targets: Abilities target an action that matches their selected action type.

Restrictions: Only one Ability can be applied to each action.

Effects: The owner may apply this ability to the target action. If they do so, this edge's extras may also be applied to that action. However, this also restricts the target action's outcome to events covered by this ability's intended results.

Extras: Abilities draw most of their effectiveness from their extras. Each ability starts with one free extra. Additional extras may be purchased as edges.

- **Aptitude** [Extra]
  - *Effects:* Raise the base chance of the associated ability's target action by 1 step for each Aptitude extra the ability has.
- **Cross Training** [Extra Template]
  - *Requirements:* The associated ability must already have at least 1 Specialty extra.
  - *Set Up:* Select another ability besides the one associated with this extra. This extra's owner doesn't need to have the selected ability.
  - *Effects:* When the owner uses the selected ability, they can use one of this ability's extras as if it belonged to the selected ability. If the owner doesn't have the selected ability, this extra lets them use it. However, this does not grant the free extra that comes with actually gaining the selected ability.
  - *Examples:* Applying game expertise such as chess or poker skills to a social situation. Using mundane skills like cooking as a basis for martial arts. Applying chemistry as a metaphor for spiritual transformations.
- **Extraordinary Ability** [Extra Template]
  - *Set Up:* Select an alternate intended result for the associated ability. This alternate outcome is not restricted by setting assumptions.
  - *Requirements:* The associated ability must already have at least 1 other extra.
  - *Targets:* This modifier targets one of the associated ability's intended results.
  - *Restrictions:* This extra's target can not be changed after its first use.
  - *Effects:* You may change the target result to the selected alternative. If this extra is lost, the target result reverts to its original details.
  - *Examples:* In many games, this extra will be needed for things like walking through walls, reading minds, or unaided flight.
- **Focused** [Extra]
  - *Requirements:* Each ability can only have one Focused extra.
  - *Targets:* The target edge is one ability used to oppose or resist the associated ability's target action.
  - *Restrictions:* Only 1 Focused extra can be applied to a given action.
  - *Effects:* If the targeted edge is more broadly defined, versatile, or has fewer restrictions than this extra's associated ability, the target action gains an extra vote.
  - *Examples:* deflect spells vs general magic ability, swordsmanship vs weapon

master ability, etc..
- **Forte** [Extra Template]
  - *Set Up:* Select a situation or condition that would interfere with this extra's associated ability.
  - *Targets:* The target votes are any votes that are played against the associate ability's target action. These votes must be based on the selected situation or condition. This does not include votes that support an opposing action.
  - *Effects:* Two of the target votes are removed from play.
- **Specialty** [Extra Template]
  - *Set Up:* Select 2 challenge perks. Each selection can be either a minor or a major perk. Having at least one minor perk among an ability's Specialty selections is strongly recommended.
  - *Requirements:* The associated ability must already have at least 2 other extras.
  - *Restrictions:* Only one Skilled extra can be applied to a given action.
  - *Effects:* If the owner limits themselves to the selected perks, they may add one vote in favor of the associated ability's target action succeeding. If the owner only rolls well enough for a minor perk but does not have a minor perk as one of their Specialty selections, reduce the number rolled by 1.
- **Versatile** [Extra Template]
  - *Set Up:* Select a possible intended result that the associated ability doesn't already have.
  - *Effects:* The associated ability can use the selected result as one of its intended results.

Asset [Edge Template]

Set Up: Select a setting element. The chosen element should be something that can assist this edge's owner. Common choices include tools, objects, vehicles, locations, and characters. Multiple asset edges can use the same selected edge. This is useful for modeling group ownership of an asset.

Effects: The edge's owner is assumed to have reliable access to the selected setting element. If the owner loses that access, they gain the Favored Flaw edge for that lost access. This means that when the loss is played against them they may gain adversity. This can also be triggered if they enter a challenge or situation where access to the selected thing would be especially helpful. The Favored Flaw edge is not gained if it takes only a simple normal action to reclaim the item. If the user loses this edge, the Favored Flaw it grants is also lost.

Extras: This edge starts with no extras, though they can be purchased as edges.
- **Asset Investment** [Extra]
  - *Targets:* Each investment targets an edge of the owner's choice. The target edge should not be one already held by the asset's selected element.
  - *Effects:* The following effects apply to the selected element of this extra's asset edge. Once this extra is used, the target edge can only be changed if the selected element loses the target edge. If this extra is ever lost, the selected element loses these benefits.

- The selected element gains the target edge.
- The number of Empowering Gift edges the selected element can use at once increased by one. This means if this extra was purchased twice, the selected element could lend out up to 3 edges at a time through its Empowering Gift edges.

Examples: Weapons can be modeled as assets with investments in attack oriented abilities. Vehicles can be handled as assets with mobility oriented investments.

Attractant [Edge Template]
Requirements: The owner can not already have a Repellent edge for the selected element.
Set Up: Select a type of setting element, situation, or event.
Effects: In any dispute over whether the selected element is present, add a vote in favor of its presence. The owner must be active in the scene for this effect to apply.
Examples: weirdness magnet, danger magnet, weapon scavenger..

Background [Edge Template]
Set Up: Select a detail based on the owner's past or origins.
Effects: Whenever the owner is involved in an action related to the selected detail, they can spend a point of adversity to temporarily gain another trait. That trait gains the following modifier.
- **Phantom Edge** [Edge Modifier]
  - *Effects:* Only one edge with this modifier can be applied to a given action. The modified edge is lost at the end of the current scene.

Empowering Gift [Edge Template]
Set Up: Select another edge.
Targets: This edge can target any single setting element other than its owner. The target must be in contact with the edge's owner.
Restrictions: Only one Empowering Gift edge can be lent out by the owner at a time.
Effects: One target gains access to the selected edge as long as they maintain contact with this edge's owner.
Extras: This edge starts with no extras, though they can be purchased as edges.
- **Empower Self** [Extra]
  - *Effects:* The owner can be the target of this edge.
- **Lingering Gift** [Extra]
  - *Effects:* The target does not need to maintain contact to retain the selected edge. Instead, the granted edge lasts until the end of the scene or until the target of this edge changes.
- **Shared Gift** [Extra]
  - *Effects:* The number of targets that can be granted the selected edge doubles each time this extra is purchased.

Repellent [Edge Template]

Requirements: The owner can not already have an Attractant edge for the selected element.
Set Up: Select a type of setting element, situation, or event.
Effects: In any dispute over whether the selected element is present, add a vote against of its presence. The owner must be active in the scene for this effect to apply.
Examples: calming presence, aura of normality..

Resistance [Edge Template]
Set Up: Select either a type of negative condition or a possible cause/source of those conditions.
Targets: Any action which inflicts a condition of the selected type or from the selected source.
Restrictions: The owner can not use a resistance edge and an ability edge to counter the same action. They must either actively counter (Ability) or passively endure (Resistance).
Effects: Resistances function like a modified from of Ability edge. They can be used whenever the owner is targeted by an action or event that can inflict conditions of the selected type or source. This lets the resistance's extras apply to the triggering action.
Extras: As with Abilities, one free extra is gained when a resistance is purchased. Additional extras may be purchased as edges.

- **Aptitude** [Extra]
  - *Effects:* Raise the base chance of resisting the associated resistance's target action by 1 step for each Aptitude extra the resistance has.
- **Focused** [Extra]
  - *Requirements:* Each resistance can only have one Focused extra.
  - *Targets:* The target edge is one ability applied to the associated resistance's target action.
  - *Restrictions:* Only 1 Focused extra can be applied to a given action.
  - *Effects:* If the targeted edge is more broadly defined, versatile, or has fewer restrictions than this extra's associated resistance, the owner's attempt to resist the target action gains an extra vote.
  - *Examples:* curse resistance vs general magic ability, blade turning vs weapon master ability, etc..
- **Fortified** [Extra Template]
  - *Set Up:* Select a situation or condition that would weaken this extra's associated resistance.
  - *Targets:* The target votes are any votes that are played against the owner's chance to resist the target action. These votes must be based on the selected situation or condition. This does not include votes that support an opposing action.
  - *Effects:* Two of the target votes are removed from play.

Signature Flaw [Edge Template]
Set Up: Select a flaw. See the Challenges section for flaw templates. You can also use modifiers like Treacherous Edge to turn an edge into a flaw.
Requirements: This trait can not be gained if the owner already has the selected flaw.

Effects: The owner gains the selected trait as well as the Favored Flaw edge with the Empowering Flaw extra. The Favored flaws selected trait is this edge's selected flaw.

Modifiers

This section covers modifiers used by edges and edge templates.

Treacherous Edge [Edge Modifier]
Effects: The target trait becomes a flaw. The owner loses the ability to use the target trait. In contrast, any opponent who targets the owner has the option of using the target trait against them.

Extra Options

D6 Game

The following rules cover how to play Mezzo with just 6 sided die. This helps if the players either prefer these dice or don't have access to a full set of step die.

Chance Changes

When using the Leave to Chance mechanics, change the assigning and rolling dice mechanics to the following.

Set Multiplier

By default the die multiplier for a given option starts at 1, but players can choose to raise this value by spending votes on it. For every 6 votes spent, the multiplier can be increased by 1. When the die are rolled, the result will be multiplied by this value.

Set Threshold

The burst threshold of an option is equal to the number of votes it has left after you've set the die multiplier. The higher this value is, the greater your chance of boosting the multiplier.

Rolling Dice

Once the multiplier and threshold have been set, roll a d6. If the result is no greater than the option's burst threshold, you may choose to increase the option's die multiplier by 1 and re-roll the die. This effect is only triggered by the initial roll. Re-rolls do not grant another opportunity to trigger a burst.

Once the rolling is done, multiply the last number rolled by the option's die multiplier to get a score for that option. If an option has no dice, treat that as rolling a 1. The option with the highest score takes effect. If multiple options tie for the high roll, see the section on Breaking Ties.

<u>Breaking Ties</u>

Tie breakers are largely unchanged by the switch to six-siders. However, you should substitute a d6 for the d12 if the tie breaker comes down to rolling dice.

Seed Deck

Seed decks are a way to add new ideas and an extra element of unpredictability to the game. Their main purpose is helping the players out when the action stalls or ideas are running low. However, they can also provide an interesting creative challenge by providing things the players hadn't considered using before.

Building the Deck

Before you use the deck, you have to put it together. The fastest way to do this is by using a deck from another game. Ideally you want a deck with evocative images, text, or symbols. As such, number and suit decks such as poker and Uno decks are less useful. However, there are plenty of card and board games which provide a good starting point.

Another option is to create your own deck. This takes a bit more time, but it lets you customize the deck to match the kind of game you want. The easiest way to do this is just taking a set of index cards and jotting down an idea on each one. There are also programs that let you print out cards using a format similar to certain collectible card games.

You can also add cards to the deck between sessions as new ideas, themes, characters, and background elements emerge during play. This is easiest when you have a custom deck, but can be done even if you use an existing deck as a starting point. You simply need to mix the new cards into your base deck.

In either case, your starting deck needs at least 3 times as many cards as there are players. Ideally you'll want more than that to leave room for inspiration draws.

Using the Deck

<u>Initial Draw</u>

At the start of a new session, each player can "buy" cards with their starting Influence. For

every point of Influence they spend, the player can draw a seed card and place it in their hand.

The initial draw determines how deep into the idea draws the player wants to go. Drawing leaves the player with less starting Influence, but gives them the option of earning more in the long run by working their cards. If only one player draws cards, they can link their own cards, allowing for potentially rapid Influence build up.

Playing Cards

Any time a player wants to add something to the game, they can try playing a card from their hand. The contents of the card must be related to what they're trying to add. If the connection isn't there or is too weak, the card can not be played.

If the card is played and the idea is added, the card becomes active. Place that card face up in front of the owning player to represent this. If the card has connections to an active card owned by another player, the player can try to link them.

To link cards, the player simply has to state a common bond they share. If the player can show that a newly active card builds on another active card, the two are linked. As mentioned, linkages can normally only be made to cards owned by another player. Players can only link their own cards if they are the only player who owns cards.

When a card first becomes linked, the owning player gains a point of Influence. The owning player should rotate or otherwise mark an active card when this Influence is gained.

If the card is played but the linked detail doesn't make it into the game world, the card is depleted. Place the card face down in front of the owning player to show this.

Refreshing the Hand

At the end of a challenge or scene, each player can surrender one of their cards to the discard pile. If they do so, they may draw a new card from the seed deck and place it in their hand.

The best targets for discarding are usually depleted cards, followed by either cards from the hand or active cards that have already been linked. Active but unlinked cards are often the last to go as they will earn influence as soon as another player links to them.

Drawing Inspiration

At any point a player can try to draw inspiration from the seed deck. To do this, the player draws a card from the top of the deck and shows it to all the players. If anyone has a suggestion on how to add the card's contents to the game world, the card can be played. Otherwise, the card must be discarded. The card is also discarded if the suggestions isn't

added to the game world.

If the inspiration card and its related details make it into the game world, the card becomes active and is placed face up in front of all players. If an inspiration card is already active, the previous card is discarded and replaced by the new one.

Inspiration cards can be linked to other cards. However, these cards are not owned by any player, so no player gains Influence for linking them. Influence is still gained as normal for linking one of your own cards to them.

Dice Variant

The seed deck idea can be used without cards if desired. Simply pick a die and assign a keyword to each number the dice can roll. Then when a player "draws" a "card", simply roll the die and give the player the appropriate keyword.

Glossary

This section covers some of the basic terms and definitions used by Mezzo.

Adversity is a character resource that represents how much opposition the owner has faced. It's usually used to boost die rolls, but it can also provide additional edges in the right circumstances.

Details are properties or qualities of some part of the game.

Edges are setting element traits that give their owner an advantage in certain situations. These traits can be purchased with edge slots.

Edge Slots are reusable resources that can store an edge for their owner. The owner has full access to edges stored this way. Edge slots are gained the first time a character participates in certain events or is claimed. They can also be gained at the end of the story if the owner did something memorable.

Extras are specialized traits that expand on an existing trait. In effect, extras act as upgrade options for the trait they're associated with.

Flaws are traits that make things more difficult for their owner. Flaws are usually inflicted by opponents during challenges. However, the Signature Flaw edge lets the character voluntarily take a trait in the hopes of building up adversity.

Influence is a player resource used to shift events in the owner's favor. Players start with

limited influence but may gain more when plot hooks are resolved. If seed decks are used, influence can also be gained by building off other player's ideas.

Modifiers are traits that change how another trait operates.

Momentum is a setting element resource that grants rewards at the end of challenges. The more opposition an element faces, the more momentum it builds up. Until adversity, momentum is only usable when opposition is overcome. Opponents can also limit how much momentum is built up by leaving the challenge before they're forced out.

Perks are action traits which increase the effects of their associated action.

Player Roles are player traits that alter how the player interacts with the game. This includes things like changing what they can vote on or adding traits to target of their choice. See the actor role in Claiming Characters for an example.

Plot Arcs cover everything that happens over the course of an entire story line, from the introduction of major conflicts through their resolution.

Plot Hooks are points of interest within the current story line. These include any interesting facts, leads, details, ideas, or questions that arise during play. Plot hooks can be invested in to give them additional impact on the course of the game.

Resources are traits that can be spent on certain effects. Spending a resource usually uses it up. However, there are a few which are simply tied up while they're applying their effects. For example, edge slots can be filled, but doing so doesn't get rid of the slot.

Scenes cover everything that happens at a given place and time. The end of a scene is usually marked by the players skipping to the next interesting event in the storyline.

Setting Elements are the contents of the game world. This can range from tangible items such as objects, characters, or places to more abstract things like ideas, laws, and customs.

Setting Laws are narrative rules that the players can use to shape events. Each rule supports certain types of game play and story lines.

Templates are guidelines on how to create a certain type of trait.

Traits are details and properties which have mechanical effects attached to them.