

Combat Critters

RULES

INTRODUCTION

Combat Critters is a tabletop roleplaying game, powered by the Cortex Prime system.

You will need one of three commercial products to play this game: [Firefly RPG](#) by Margaret Weis Productions, or either the [Cortex Prime System Reference](#) or the [Cortex Prime Game Handbook](#) by Magic Vacuum Design Studio.

[Blank Character Sheet](#) • [Blank Character Sheet Rework](#)

CORTEX PRIME MODS

Traits:

Attributes, Skills (with Specialties), Distinctions (with Triggers), Signature Assets, Assets, and Complications

Player Actions:

Basic Contested Action, Reaction, Defenders Set the Difficulty, High-Stakes Action, Complication Recovery, and Heroic Success (with Hero Dice).

Plot Points can be spent to:

Add another die to the Total, Activate a Distinction Trigger requirement, Create a D6 temporary scene Asset, Extend a scene Asset for a session, Roll one of your Hero die, Lend a Skill die, Buy an Opportunity to step back a Complication, and Convert being Taken Out to a Complication.

Plot Points can be earned by:

Using a Distinction as a D4, Activating a Distinction Trigger, GM buying/upgrading Spoiler Complication, GM spending a PP against you, and Reward for great roleplaying.

Players start a session with 1 Plot Point.

Injury is tracked through Complications.

Characters generated through Archetypes.

Growth is managed through Session Histories.

SKILLS

The skill list is rewritten to tell stories of traveling all around the world in pursuit of new experiences, exotic new Critters, and stronger coaches to battle against.

AIM: Throwing or shooting at things. Anything that deals with striking a target from afar.

CHANNEL: Weaving hexes, performing rituals, using your mind to alter reality.

COERCE: Dominating or compelling others by exploiting fear, anxiety, or panic.

ENCHANT: To fascinate, captivate, or enrapture someone.

ENDURE: Perseverance, strength, being able to withstand anything that comes your way.

FORCE: Exerting energy or power upon something.

IMPROVE: Enhancing yourself or others physically, socially, or mentally. This includes treating injuries and counseling.

INVESTIGATE: Getting information out of people, evidence, records, and history.

KNOW: General knowledge and tradition, with specifics covered by specialties. If you have a d6, this includes a free specialty.

MOVE: Running, jumping, flying, swimming, climbing trees, or riding.

NOTICE: Spotting, sensing, or hearing things.

OPERATE: Using things like computers, gadgets, devices, and vehicles.

PERFORM: Acting, putting on a show.

SENSE: Empathy, sympathy, understanding what others are thinking, or reading auras or thoughts.

SNEAK: Sneaking around, subverting others' perception.

SURVIVE: Surviving in the outdoors or wherever.

TINKER: Crafting or breaking things, such as buildings, weapons, tools, or locks.

TRICK: Deceiving or conning somebody, sleight of hand.

WRESTLE: Close-quarters combat, specifically if you're using fists, kicks, and slams.

RULES VARIATIONS

Combat Critters uses the default ruleset outlined in the *Cortex Prime SRD*. The narrative abstraction allowed by Cortex Prime lets us create and play a team of coaches and their critters without having to manage separate character sheets or crunch a ridiculous amount of stats.

The game is played in a world where many fantastic animals are able to be miniaturized and stored nicely in a machine called a Critter Cage. These animals are called "Combat Critters," or Critters for short, and they are carried as tools, friends and partners by Critter Coaches.

Your Combat Critter character sheet reflects your crew as a whole. Each player will take control of a crew that is made up of a coach and their critters. Your crew utilizes the same stats on the character sheet, i.e., your crew uses the same Team Attributes, Signature Assets, Skills, Team Dice, and Plot Points. This symbolizes the bond that strengthens your crew and the like-mindedness that has brought you all together. However each member of your crew does bring something different to the group which is why Distinctions are used to differentiate between each member of the crew. You start play with three Distinctions, one coach Distinction and two Critter Distinctions.

Coach Distinctions have three triggers per the norm but Critter Distinctions come with four triggers. Both Coach and Critter Distinctions have the free default trigger "Gain 1 Plot Point when you roll a d4 instead of a d8", with a few changes listed below. Critter Distinctions however get another free trigger "Fainted: Shutdown this Distinction to avoid being Taken Out and earn 1 PP." When a Critter Distinction gets Shutdown that Critter cannot be used for the rest of the scene. A player can attempt a recovery roll during the same scene that the Critter was Fainted but the GM gets to add a d8 to their dice pool. Recovery from Fainted is up to the GM and the narrative established in play. Some GMs might state that the Critter needs to visit a medical clinic to recover or simply rest for the night. Also its possible that Critter could be ready to go right after the scene where the Critter was Fainted. It's up to the GM and narrative.

Some terminology has changed to better fit the type of gameplay *Combat Critters* creates. Since the players will be roleplaying as an entire crew, Attributes have been renamed to Team Attributes. Team Attributes best represents the fact that the player controls an entire crew during their journey and not just a single person. All three members of a crew, coach and two Critters, can and should utilize these traits when creating a dice pool. This same concept applies to Skills, Skill Specialties, Plot Points, and Team Dice (Hero Dice renamed).

Assets and Complications follow the norm in that they are unable to be used if it breaks the narrative or disappear when they don't make sense anymore. For example, if a player utilizing their coach created an Asset of "Sturdy Rope d6" and then switched to play as one of their Critters who does not have any arms or way to utilize the rope then that Asset cannot be included in their dice pool because it breaks the narrative. Complications follow the same concept, and it is possible to have Complications that only affect one member of the crew, i.e., Broken Wing d8, or have a Complication that affects the entire crew i.e., Losing Streak d10.

All Critters are attuned to an element or property that shapes who they are and can in turn be shaped and manipulated for their own use. These elements form a delicate balance, and can offset and prevail over one another. If a Critter engaged in a conflict is of an element that has the advantage over their enemy then they earn the benefit of Scale. If Scale is awarded, the side that has the advantage gets a bonus d8 and also adds an extra die result into their total for free. Not just attackers can benefit from Scale but defenders as well.

Most Critters undergo a process of growth where if certain conditions are met they enter metamorphosis and advance to their next stage. Most of these conditions should be discussed between the GM and the players. An effortless method is to make sure that the Critter which the player wants to undergo metamorphosis has all their Distinction Triggers unlocked and then spends a small part of one session (the subplot of that session) dealing with the Critters advancement.

In order to mechanically represent the different stages of Critter metamorphosis the Distinction die

differentiates due to which stage of their life cycle your current Critter is on. There are four stages of Critter advancement: Baby, Basic, Intermediate, and Final. Note that not all Critters go through these stages in the order listed and some may only have one stage. The Distinction die for the different stages are: Baby d6, Basic d6, Intermediate d8, and Final d10. Now while both a Baby and Basic Critter both utilize a d6 Distinction die, a Baby Critter gets an additional benefit of gaining 2 PP when choosing to roll a d4.

While standard Combat Critters starts players with only two Critters it is possible for players to increase their crew throughout their journey. The total number of Critters allowed per player should be agreed upon before play with the GM. Critters can be acquired in multiple ways, either as a reward during competitions, trade between coaches, or simply caught in the wild.

CHARACTER CREATION

Step 1: Pick three Distinctions

Select a Coach Distinction from those available and write in the Highlight Skills granted by that Distinction. Do the same for your Critter Distinction but also write in the die rating for each Critter.

Step 2: Choose Two Distinction Triggers

You automatically get the “Roll a d4 instead, and earn 1 PP” trigger for each Distinction as well as the “Fainted: Shutdown this Distinction to avoid being Taken Out and earn 1 PP” for your two Critter Distinctions. Additionally, you may unlock one more trigger for each of the three Distinctions.

Step 3: Assign Attributes

Assign a d8 to all three Attributes or distribute a d10, d8, and d6 to the Attribute of your choice. The d10 expresses that you’re above average in one Attribute and the d6 implies that you’re poor in another.

Step 4: Step Up Skills

Every skill has a d4 rating by default. Each Distinction lists three Skills that are highlighted for that Distinction. Each highlighted Skill is stepped up by one die rating. If a Skill is highlighted for more than one Distinction, it gets stepped up more than once. After

you’ve stepped up your highlighted Skills, you get 9 points to spend. No Skill may be stepped up beyond d12. You may spend these 9 points in one of two ways:

- **Highlighted Skills:** Step up the die rating one step for every point you spend.
- **Basic Skills:** For a Skill that isn’t listed on your Distinctions, spend 2 points to step it up by one die rating. To take a d4 to a d6, you’ll need to spend two points, reducing your total points from 9 to 7.

Step 5: Assign Specialties

A specialty is a narrow focus for a Skill. It appears next to the Skill in parentheses. Each specialty provides a bonus d6 to your dice pool when you use it with that Skill. You can create three Specialties for any Skill rated at d6 or higher. You also receive a free Know specialty if your Know die is a d6 or higher, so decide what your character knows a lot about and mark that down.

Step 6: Select Signature Assets

Some characters have iconic weapons, gear, or even special techniques. Signature Assets are about things you have or people you know, not about innate qualities. They’re a way to represent heirlooms or unique weapons or special relationships. You start off with either one Signature Asset at d8 or two Signature Assets at d6.

Step 7: Select a Name and Create a Background

COACH DISTINCTIONS

ACE D8

A battler that keeps their Critter in peak condition.

- ❑ **Never Gives Up:** When you spend a PP to avoid being taken out, you can step back **Endure** for the rest of the session instead of taking a complication.
- ❑ **Element Expert:** When you take a complication due to an opponent benefitting from **Scale**, spend 1 PP to step it back or rename it.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **ENDURE, FORCE, IMPROVE**

COMMANDER D8

A leader and expert at controlling the battlefield.

- ❑ **Tactician:** When you give a command, spend 1 PP to create an appropriate **D8** asset.
- ❑ **Lead:** When working in a group, make a **Social + Coerce** roll; success lets each party member step up one skill for the scene; failure steps back your **Mental** and **Know** for the scene.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **COERCE, KNOW, NOTICE**

COORDINATOR D8

The stage is your battlefield where you show off your companions in exciting and fabulous ways

- ❑ **Cheerful:** Step up **Social** for a scene; the next complication that results from a spoiler you roll is stepped up.
- ❑ **Conspicuous:** When you act as a distraction for a party member, spend 1 PP to step up or double the skill you lend them.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **ENCHANT, PERFORM, SENSE**

MARTIAL ARTIST D8

A front-line fighter that can specialize in a variety of fighting styles.

- ❑ **Always Ready:** Spend 1 PP to take the first action in a scene. For that action, reroll any results of 1 instead of accepting PP.
- ❑ **Powerful:** Spend 1 PP to double **Fight, Move**, or **Wrestle** for your next roll.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **ENDURE, MOVE, WRESTLE**

RANGER D8

A wilderness expert that specializes in solving ecological problems and arresting poachers.

- ❑ **Quarry:** When silently tracking or hunting another character, step up or double **Sneak**; spend 1 PP to do both.
- ❑ **Wild Step:** Spend 1 PP to ignore a complication for a die roll that includes one of your highlighted skills.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **NOTICE, SNEAK, SURVIVE**

RESEARCHER D8

You study various academic fields and apply them to different aspects of your journey.

- ❑ **Compendium:** When you have full access to your own personal collection of knowledge, step up or double **Mental**.
- ❑ **Expert on the Topic:** You may spend plot points for anyone who can see or hear your explanation.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **INVESTIGATE, KNOW, TINKER**

TELEKINETIC D8

You can move objects from afar and wield them as weapons or fine tools.

- ❑ **Focused:** When channeling your power, double **Mental**; remove the highest rolling die and add three dice together for the result.
- ❑ **Curse:** You may spend 1 PP to step up a complication inflicted on an opponent when they spend a PP to avoid being taken out.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **AIM, CHANNEL, TRICK**

TRICKSTER D8

People don't see you as a threat and that's exactly how you like it.

- ❑ **Instant Expert:** When you try to pass yourself off as an expert, take or step up a **Web of Lies** Complication to double **Trick** for the roll.
- ❑ **Unassuming Strike:** Spend 1 PP to step up a complication you deal with an underhanded tactic.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **PERFORM, SNEAK, TRICK**

CRITTER DISTINCTIONS

BUG D#

Critters of insectoid nature that get their strength from their swarm tactics. They are fragile in combat but not weak, they go all out with quick low power strikes that have added effect like sleep, paralysis, or confusion. These Critters are sought after by artists because of their beautiful colors but even though they live mostly in forests they can be hard to find due to their natural adaptations.

- ❑ **Hive Mind:** When you interact with other Bug Critters in a non-threatening manner, step up or double your **Skill** die; take or step up a Complication to do both.
- ❑ **Saving Leftovers:** Spend 1 PP to step up or double **Enchant** when you are attempting to inflict a non lethal status effect.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **ENCHANT, IMPROVE, PERFORM**

DARK D#

Critters that are intimidating or use trickery, crime, destruction, and below-the-belt fighting tactics. They can be found almost everywhere but mostly follow a nocturnal life cycle. These Critters love being vicious and try to put their foes at a complete disadvantage.

- ❑ **Devil on the Shoulder:** Spend 1 PP to double **Coerce** or **Trick**, when persuading someone to do something.
- ❑ **From the Dark:** When you try to blend into the shadows after you've been spotted, spend 1 PP to step up or double **Sneak** for the action.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **COERCE, SNEAK, TRICK**

DRAGON D#

Critters of legend who use their inner rage to destroy anything that opposes them, especially strong opponents. They are among the most elusive types, usually only appearing in secluded areas since they are some of the strongest and dangerous Critters. These Critters are eager to fight, easily angered, and don't show mercy nor respect to anyone.

- ❑ **Debilitating:** You may spend 1 PP to step up a Complication inflicted on an opponent when they spend a PP to avoid being taken out.
- ❑ **Failure Is Not an Option:** Step up a Complication to step up one of your **Skill** dice for one roll as long as you already have a d8 Complication.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **COERCE, ENDURE, FORCE**

ELECTRIC D#

Critters that feed, recharge, and control electric currents. They mostly make their homes in urban regions, since they feel attracted to power and technology. These Critters are usually very fast and can discharge their electricity to affect a large area of electric currents or magnetic fields.

- ❑ **Quick Attack:** The first time you set the stakes in a combat, spend 1 PP to step up or double **Move**. If your opponent raises the stakes, step it back for the rest of the scene.
- ❑ **Lightning Speed:** Spend 1 PP to go first in a scene before any attacks can be made. On your first Action, you may reroll any dice that come up 1 instead of accepting a PP.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **FORCE, MOVE, WRESTLE**

FAIRY D#

Critters that are elusive and mischievous who appear to be harmless until the moment to strike. Probably the smallest population of all they can be found in places of interest or power. These Critters are usually slow and not very hardy but wield odd abilities that at best could be described as magical.

- ❑ **Couldn't Hurt A Fly:** Step back your **Physical** die to step up your **Social** die when convincing someone you're not a threat.
- ❑ **Mischievous or Friendly:** Step up a Complication to double or step up Social for all **Enchant, Improve, and Sense** rolls in a scene.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **ENCHANT, IMPROVE, SENSE**

FIGHTING D#

Critters that use their body as a weapon and specialize in melee attacks, such as punches and kicks. They can be found in caves honing their discipline or on a personal strength-seeking pilgrimage. These Critters battle with honor and

face any challenge head-on for the sake of their friends or to defend the weak.

- ❑ **Standing Tall:** When you stand up to a group by yourself, step up or double **Wrestle** or spend 1 PP to do both.
- ❑ **Blood, Sweat, and Tears:** Spend 1 PP to ignore a Complication for a die roll that includes one of your highlighted **Skills**.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **ENDURE, MOVE, WRESTLE**

FIRE D#

Critters that resist heat and can shape fire to burn anything in their wake. They are rare and few in number and tend to be hot-headed, passionate, or proud. These Critters engulf foes in unyielding flames from long range and turn fields to cinders in a matter of seconds.

- ❑ **Pronounce Doom:** When you are spurned, insulted, embarrassed, or treated poorly, spend 1 PP to give your abuser a d8 Complication promising impending tragedy.
- ❑ **Payback's a Pain:** When you spend a PP to avoid being Taken Out and take a Complication to stay in the fight, you may spend a PP to use that Complication as an Asset when you next attack who almost took you out.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **AIM, FORCE, WRESTLE**

FLYING D#

Critters that control the wind currents and are masters of the sky. They're diverse and adaptive enough that they can be found in almost every conceivable environment imaginable. These Critters emphasize evasion above everything else, attacking from up high where land dwellers won't reach them.

- ❑ **Aerial Superiority:** Step up or double **Move** while flying. Step back **Move** and **Endure** when you're grounded.
- ❑ **Awareness:** Spend 1 PP to create a d8 asset related to your heightened senses.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **AIM, MOVE, NOTICE**

GHOST D#

Critters from the underworld who lurk in the shadows and prey on the vital energy of the living with their curses and otherworldly powers. They are very rare and usually live in abandoned

houses, cemeteries, funeral places, or mysterious locales. These Critters tend to be extremely naughty, pranking humans just to see their faces and reactions.

- ❑ **Vicious Glare:** Spend 1 PP to remove an Asset from an opponent as long as they fear or cannot see you.
- ❑ **Destiny Bond:** When someone hurts you, you may choose to take a **Life Bond** d8 Complication and inflict a **Life Bond** d8 Complication on the one who harmed you. Spend 1 PP to step back your Complication.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **COERCE, SNEAK, TRICK**

GRASS D#

Critters that feed on sunlight and have a plant-like appearance such as flowers, vines, or thorns. While they are slow to move, they are strong and sturdy with the ability to drain their foe's energy. Additionally, they are well-behaved, loyal, and dependable.

- ❑ **Photosynthesis:** When in direct sunlight, step up your lowest die; without any natural light, step back your highest die.
- ❑ **Got Your Back:** If a Critter on your team was Shutdown, step up or double your **Attribute** on your next die roll.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **ENCHANT, IMPROVE, PERFORM**

GROUND D#

Critters that live underground and can affect a large area with their control of the terrain. They are hardy and lonely creatures that make their homes in caves, rocky terrain, and desert regions. These Critters are able to control the battleground and are very effective combatants when below the Earth's surface.

- ❑ **Lay of the Land:** Spend 1 PP to reveal a fact about the natural world you're on as a d8 Asset, i.e. sand trap, poisonous plant, etc.
- ❑ **Underestimated:** Spend 1 PP to ignore a Complication die for an Action when you try to catch your opponent off-guard.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **FORCE, MOVE, SNEAK**

ICE D#

Critters with the ability to control ice, snow, and cold temperatures in some manner. Their habitats

are the top of mountains, frozen caverns or poles. These Critters are very hardy and rough around the edges, and are capable of defeating most foes with just a small amount of luck.

- ❑ **Survivalist:** When you get an extraordinary success, you may choose to forgo the Team Die and instead gain two PP.
- ❑ **You Call That Pain?:** When you activate an Opportunity to step back a physical Complication, step up **Endure** or **Survive** for the rest of the scene.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **ENCHANT, ENDURE, SURVIVE**

NORMAL D#

Critters that have great versatility and adaptability. While they may not be proficient in one specific area their diversity makes them a jack-of-all-trades. They are very common and can be found in any region that they can call home.

- ❑ **Risk Takers:** If you replace your **Skill** die in a roll with a d4, you get a **Team Die** equal to that **Skill's** normal die rating if you successfully set or raise the stakes.
- ❑ **All or Nothing:** When you are about to be Taken Out in a scene, spend 1 PP to reroll your dice. If you fail to set or raise the stakes on your second roll, you cannot spend a PP to stay in the fight.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **PICK 3 SKILLS**

POISON D#

Critters that carry venom on their body and bring poison and toxins into battle. Their specialty is harassing the enemy with their toxicity and residual damage. Their commonality depends on what region of Earth you live in, but they can be mostly found in urban areas and forests. These Critters are extremely dangerous and look more monstrous than most other Critters which is why they usually get an inaccurate and misguided reputation.

- ❑ **Sniper:** Spend 1 PP to enter a scene hidden and in a position to do some harm. Take or step up a Complication representing a tenuous or precarious position to create a d8 Asset, i.e. Aimed Shot, Target in Sight.
- ❑ **Front & Center:** When you get in close with an opponent, spend 1 PP to double **Trick** for the roll.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **AIM, SNEAK, TRICK**

PSYCHIC D#

Critters that feed on mental energy and use their mind to control matter, energy, and thoughts. They can be usually found in urban environments and like to be near the populace but rarely obey orders from humans. These Critters tend to be very intelligent and spiritual, and regularly like to figure things out before acting.

- ❑ **Tough to Shock:** When you resist intimidation or scare tactics, step up or double **Sense** for the roll.
- ❑ **Mental Backlash:** Take or step up a **Fragmented Mind** Complication to reroll a die when you fail a roll in a mental situation.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **CHANNEL, KNOW, SENSE**

ROCK D#

Critters who are extremely resilient and use their body as armor. They are physically strong in both attack and defense, and tend to reside in caves, arid lands, and mountainous regions. These Critters are slow but extremely powerful, able to crush a foe beneath a pile of rubble or shoot massive boulders from a safe distance.

- ❑ **Aimed Shot:** When you have the time to calculate the trajectory of your throw, spend 1 PP to double **Aim** for a roll.
- ❑ **Rocky Hide:** When you would spend a PP to avoid being Taken Out, you may instead spend a Big Damn Hero Die to avoid being Taken Out. If you do, step back the Complication you take to stay in the fight.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **AIM, ENDURE, WRESTLE**

STEEL D#

Critters whose bodies are covered in steel plates, due to this they have great defense but are very heavy and slow. They are not evil nor dishonest, on the contrary if you can tame one, they are reliable command followers. These Critters utilize brutal attacks that lead to prolonged battles, and can be found in caves, mountain regions, and urban areas.

- ❑ **Honing Steel:** When you fail a roll with **Endure**, step up **Physical** for your next Action.

- ❑ **Steely Gaze:** Step back **Social** for the rest of the scene to step up **Coerce** for the rest of the scene.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **COERCE, ENDURE, FORCE**

WATER D#

Aquatic Critters that breath underwater and wield the power of the ocean itself. They are very common but some can't live outside a pool of water. While they are very flexible and carefree, they also have the power to weather down anything in their way.

- ❑ **Hard Outer Shell:** When you take a complication representing physical damage or harm, spend 1 PP to step it back or rename it.
- ❑ **Bull's-Eye:** When you spend a PP to roll and add a Team Die during an **Aim** Action, you may reroll the Team Die for free, if it comes up a spoiler.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS: **AIM, ENDURE, MOVE**

SIGNATURE ASSETS

MEGA EVOLUTION D#

Critters of

Z-MOVE D#

Critters of