

Using the Cortex+ Rules in Fate Core

Fluid Scene Initiative

In Fate Core, Alertness is used to determine who seizes initiative, with the scene proceeding in order based on the rank of that Skill. Though this is a nice tidy way to determine order in combat, it makes things pretty static in every combat, other than inserting villains. In Cortex+, the initiative in a scene is a bit more fluid, determined by the narrative, and the decisions of the player. This seems more in line with the story-based narrative first approach of Fate Core, so I wanted to adapt that to use.

Framing the Scene

In any scene, as appropriate for the protagonists in the story, the PCs get the first move- one of the PCs as appropriate to the narrative chooses to seize the initiative. This can change if narratively appropriate, i.e. if the PCs are ambushed, then the GM may designate an NPC that seizes the initiative. However, this takes a Fate point to enact, and can be nullified if a PC is willing to spend a Fate Point to seize it from you and invoke an applicable aspect to explain how the situation is changed.

Who Goes Next?

Once the first person in the conflict completes his action, that player chooses the next person to act. This can either be another PC, or one of the NPCs in the conflict. In turn, the player of each character that acts (whether an NPC or a PC) chooses the next character to act.

Starting a New Round

With the fluid nature of combat, the order that the round was resolved is not the order that will be maintained. The last person to act in the round chooses who will act first in the next round. *The character can choose himself to act, making the last person to go in the round key to the flow of the next round.*

The Fate Pool

One of the things I love about the Marvel Heroic Roleplaying game by Margaret Weis Productions is the **Doom Pool**. The **doom pool** is the Watcher's (GM's) resource for adding to the heroes' opposition, and at the end of an Act, populating the Event with additional threats, challenges, and situations. It makes the adventure more reactive to the players' actions, scaling up or down the difficulty to make sure that the scenario is challenging, but not too challenging. I wanted to bring this to Fate Core, especially as I started to make the game more player facing. So I adapted it to Fate Core, calling it (predictably) the **Fate Pool**.

To repurpose the definition above, the **fate pool** is the GM's resource for adding to the heroes' opposition, and at the end of a scene, populating the adventure with additional threats, challenges, and situations. The fate pool is populated with fate points, as normal for the GM

use, i.e. whenever a scene starts, there is one fate point for every PC in that scene. In addition, the fate pool is increased/decreased by a number of points depending on the relative threat level of the scene.

Scene Type	Fate Pool	Example
Trivial	-1	Casing the streets for info
Standard	0	Fight against thugs
High Stakes	+1	Entering the
Catastrophic	+4	F

Building up the Fate Pool

The fate pool increases in size as the adventure progresses, ramping up the tension as in a gripping novel or suspenseful movie and the stakes increase.

One way for this to happen is if the player fails a roll and the GM offers him a fate point to make it success at a cost and the player accepts.

Example: Alucard is sneaking into the villain's compound, and fails his roll. He only missed the roll by one, but doesn't have the fate points to make it a success. The GM offers him a fate point in exchange for success and increasing the fate pool. Alucard successfully makes it past the roving guard, but unknown to him trips a sensor. The camera, however, only catches a glimpse of a squirrel running past the beam. The guards are more alert because of the alarm being tripped, but don't immediately attribute it to an intruder.

The GM can also compel aspects on the player to increase the size of the fate pool instead of immediately affecting the player's actions. In this way, the players' tragedies become linked to the increasingly dark situation that the players find themselves in.

Example: Alucard has the aspect "The Consequences of my Actions". He has successfully interrogated, bullied, and beat up a thug for information. The GM compels "The consequences of my actions," to increase the size of the fate pool. Alucard chooses not to buy off the compel, and the fate pool ticks up by one notch, representing the general increase in chaos and mayhem in the city by the fact of the rumours of the beat down.

A final way to increase the size of the fate pool is by reducing the effect of the villains' actions against the player. This represents the villain causing general chaos and mayhem. It has no immediate consequences, but makes things harder for the players later. The GM increases the size of the fate pool by 1 for every 2 points he reduces the effect by.

Example: A particularly nasty roll has the villain up by 4 points of effect against our Alucard,

who's already battered and bruised. Rather than taking him out, the GM chooses to reduce the effect by 2 points, increasing the fate pool by 1. In a showy move, Grev bats away Alucard's attack, showing his mastery over his hapless opponent when he could have finished him.

In addition, the Fate pool is increased as normal for play, i.e. someone invokes one of your NPCs aspects, an NPC concedes from conflict, or you accept a player driven compel.

Using the Fate Pool

Points in the Fate pool can be used during a scene just like any other Fate points, but they can also be used in a variety of ways by the GM.

1. **Declare a story detail**

After the scene has been set, a Fate Point can be spent to declare an aspect on the scene.

2. **Add to active or passive opposition**

These fate points can be used to invoke an aspect as normal, for +2 to the enemies opposition, passive opposition if there is any, or to create opposition where there is none..

3. **Compel a player aspect on behalf of an enemy**

The fate points in the fate pool can be used by any enemy that doesn't have fate points of his own to force a compel.

4. **Seize initiative**

When using the ideas for Fluid Scene Initiative above, the GM can spend a fate point to interrupt the choice of who goes next and make one of the NPCs act. That NPC cannot have acted already during the turn. The PC whose turn was seized has two options. First he can allow the turn to be seized, in which case, he gets the fate point that was spent. Otherwise, he can invoke an applicable aspect that explains why this was not possible, spending a Fate point that goes into the Fate pool.

5. **Split up the heroes**

The GM can use a Fate point to split up the heroes and separate them from each other by an environmental shift or feature; by the same token, he can also bring them back together.

6. **Activate special effects on the scene, or special abilities of the NPCs**

Sometimes, a scene may have an attribute that is a game changing effect, and requires a fate point to activate. By the same token NPCs can have abilities that require a fate point to use.

7. **End the Scene**

If the fate pool reaches a size where it is double the initial starting size, the GM can immediately end the scene, by paying 2 fate points to each affected hero. This should be done to affect the pacing of the scene, and the tenor of how the scene ends depends on how the heroes look at the time. If the heroes have their adversaries in a bind, ask the heroes how they want to end the scene. If, on the other hand, their adversaries have the upper hand, invite the players to describe how they lost or what they had to sacrifice.

In either case, it's important to remember that the heroes are the protagonists, and should have complete buy-in to ending the scene.

In addition, there may be abilities that, when activated, add to the Fate pool, rather than the character spending a fate point to activate them.

Additional Non-Cortex+ Rules

Fate Core has several rules for speeding up play and placing narrative power in the hands of the players. However, there is an additional rule that I use that takes it to a different level that I did want to include as it places some of the rules stated above in context.

Player-Facing Fate Core

In a player-facing game, the GM, to one extent or another, puts down the dice, and leaves all resolution of events in the players' hands. Though this seems like a large change, to a great extent Fate Core is already geared towards this.

With the average of a roll of the Fate dice being 0, by taking the average on all NPC rolls, the probability of success has not changed, and the number of dice rolls in any conflict is reduced by half, speeding up the game. Unless the enemy is a major threat, i.e. has its own Fate points for the basic determination, the total of the opposition to the player's roll is at the basic level. When rolling to attack, the players oppose the basic level of defense of his target, and when the target attacks, the player rolls his defense against the basic level of attack by the target.

This has had the effect in my games of increasing player agency- they are the ones in the spotlight, and the NPCs fill the space around them as they act.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.