

PRINCIPLES

THE GM SHOULD...

Play to find out what happens. Feel free to bring prepared materials like scenarios, locations, and characters, but don't plan a plot. Don't try too hard to guess what the players might do. See how things unfold, and be ready to improvise.

Present problems without solutions. Don't worry about "balance" or even whether a problem *can* be solved. Let the players surprise you.

Ground everything in the fiction. Describe what happens in the world, not just what happens in the rules. End each description with, "What do you do?" to prompt players to *describe* action before reaching for the dice.

Be generous with information. When players ask questions, prompt them to describe how they search for answers, and give honest answers. If the players struggle, suggest ideas through supporting characters, or just say, "You notice...."

Be a fan of the characters. Presume the players' characters are cautious and competent. Don't demand that they describe checking every door for alarms; if they are someplace that might be alarmed, they're checking. Introduce challenges not to punish them, but to give a chance to shine.

Telegraph risks. Player shouldn't be completely surprised by the results of a die roll. You might not describe the exact details of what might happen on a bad roll, but you should suggest possible impact, and give players a chance to change course before committing.

Use what you need; ditch the rest. Roll on tables if you need quick inspiration, or pick what you want, or ignore them entirely. It's your game.

Put players before the game. Before play, establish as a group which content is *out of bounds* for your game, or okay if "off-screen." (Sexual assault is "out of bounds" by default for many groups.) During play, lead the group in framing scenes both for pacing and for safety.

OTHER PLAYERS SHOULD...

Use your head. Put yourself in your character's shoes. Try to think your way out of problems before rolling the dice. Rolling the dice when death is on the line can mean *instant* death.

Embrace the premise. Come up with excuses to go adventuring and face danger together. If your character wants to escape to safety and retire, let them. Then make a character for *this* game. Keep in mind that you don't need to be super-cautious: The rules might seem lethal, but if the GM doesn't say that an action risks death or serious injury, then it doesn't.

Be transparent about intent. The GM isn't out to get you; don't hide information from them. Don't just ask, "What's in the room?" if you're specifically looking for a chair to stand on; say you're looking for a chair to stand on, and why.

Be flexible about scene framing. In traditional RPGs, it's typically the GM's job to "jump ahead" in time when following along in real-time would be dull. The GM should take the lead in this in 2400, but players also have the authority to *fast-forward* through boring or uncomfortable content, *pause* for a break, or *rewind* to edit or redo scenes that leave a bad feeling behind. Putting these tools explicitly in everyone's hands, and not necessarily coupling them with "safety" all the time, helps keep the game fast-paced and exciting, and makes it easier for people who *do* need such tools for psychological safety to use them without fear of judgment or awkwardness.

BREAK OUT IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

2400 is designed to be open to interpretation. But what if you need more? This document is for those "emergency" situations where you're not quite sure how to interpret something. To ask questions or make suggestions, post a comment at jasonocci.itch.io/2400.

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2400

LO-FI SCI-FI RPG • JASON TOCCI
EMERGENCY RULES



RULES

YOU NEED: 2+ players (one as game moderator, or GM), 1+ full sets of polyhedral dice (4-, 6-, 8-, 10-, 12-, and 20-sided – a.k.a. d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20), and character sheets (paper or digital records of character details).

PLAY PROCEDURE: The GM describes environments, situations, and the denizens of the world; the other players control (at least) a single character each, and describe what their characters do. The GM checks in with each player to ask what they're doing, striving to give everyone roughly equal time in the spotlight (or the option to opt out of the spotlight), but there's not necessarily a rigid turn order. Players must describe their actions and intent; the GM responds based on what players describe doing.

- **If it's impossible**, the GM says why, and advises the player to try something else.
- **If it needs to be broken down**, the GM explains what smaller goals might be possible instead (e.g., "You could close a door before guards get here, but you don't have time to close and barricade them all").
- **If it demands an unavoidable cost**, the GM offers that option, or multiple equally unappealing options (e.g., "You can get through, but it'll either be loud or take a long time dismantle the door"). The player can try something else, or accept a cost to perform their intended action.
- **If there's no risk or obstacle**, the player does what they intended to do. The GM only calls for rolls when the risk is greater than than "you'd need to try again."
- **If it risks an avoidable consequence**, the GM advises them of the risks and gives a chance to change their mind. If the player decides not to change their mind, they roll dice to see if they can avoid some or all risk.

If there is no avoidable risk, nobody rolls dice. Risks might include failure, missing a deadline, being hurt, hurting others, losing gear, etc.

ROLLING: By default, roll a d6 skill die.

- **If you have a relevant skill**, use that skill's die instead of the default d6.
- **If you're hindered**, like by an injury or the environment, replace the skill die with a d4.
- **If you're helped**, like from careful preparation, roll an extra d6; if helped by an ally, they roll their skill die. (This only applies when you'd benefit from but not *require* help.) Allies who help share in any risk.

The *highest die rolled* indicates what happens.

1-2 Disaster. Face the full consequences of the risk. The GM decides whether you are able to succeed at your action at all, but if the risk was incompatible with success (e.g., "jump across safely, at risk of falling"), the action fails. If you risked death, you die. If you risked serious injury, you suffer one.

3-4 Setback. You suffer a lesser consequence, or achieve only partial success. If you risked death, you're hurt badly enough to lose a body part. If you risked serious injury, you suffer a lesser injury. And so on.

5+ Success. You succeed. The higher the roll, the better the result.

If a success can't achieve the player's stated aim (e.g., shooting a target that turns out to be bulletproof), the player should still get useful information or set up an advantage.

RECOVERY: Bad rolls leave you with injuries and other *hindrances*. Recover by taking in-game action according to common sense. Being *knocked down* can be fixed by standing. A *lost arm* can be replaced by cyber-surgery.

DEATH: When a character is killed, their player should make a new one to be introduced ASAP. Favor inclusion over realism – find a new ally in the next room, have someone wake from cryo, narrate a harrowing escape and then jump forward in time to recruiting a new teammate, etc.

ITEMS: If an item is necessary for a task (like a computer for hacking, or a gun for shooting), it grants no bonus to a roll. Items of superior quality might *help* with relevant tasks. Most items cost 1 *credit* (€); if something in the real world would cost less than a few hundred US dollars, the only cost is the time it would take to get it.

INVENTORY: Characters can carry any reasonable number of small, lightweight items. Items that take two hands to use, or that prove awkward to wear or carry, are described as *bulky*. Carrying more than one *bulky* item hinders a character when it makes sense (e.g., when trying to move quickly in normal gravity).

DEFENSES: A player can describe how an item breaks to suffer only a momentary hindrance from a 1-4 roll instead of a more serious injury. Items specifically designed for this, like armor, can be broken harmlessly in this way; other items can also be broken as defense as long as it can be described believably (e.g., a cyber-arm deflects a blow, breaking it). In either case, the item is useless until it is repaired by a skilled character with proper tools and working conditions. (This usually means either paying someone to repair a few items, buying brand new items, or getting back to a player character's workspace to handle repairs in peace.)

SKILLS: If you're skilled at something, it has a die rating above d6 (d8, d10, or d12). There's no single, official skill list; anything could be a skill, from *Climbing* to *Robo-wrestling*. If a character has overlapping skills, use the higher one, or the one that makes the most sense in context (e.g., use *Hand-to-hand*, not *Bloodshed*, if you want to just restrain someone without hurting them).

ADVANCEMENT: When you achieve your team's goal, you advance, allowing you to raise a skill one die size (from no skill to d8, to d10, to d12). Common team goals might include a heist crew getting away with a score, salvagers cashing in a wreck, operatives completing an operation, etc.

OPPONENTS: Characters played by the GM can be described by their name, how they behave, perhaps a memorable quirk, and, if conflict is likely, their *defenses* (like armor) and *risks* they present (they have guns; attacking risks injury).

LUCK: The GM can make a *luck roll* when they want to see what happens when luck matters more than players' or characters' abilities. Roll a d6 to check for (1-2) immediate trouble, (3-4) signs of imminent trouble, or (5-6) no trouble. One common use is for tracking limited-supply items, checking whether the supply is (1-2) out, or (3-4) has only one "use" left. Use common sense; you might run out of bullets unexpectedly, but you'll have some warning before running out of oxygen. Calibrate luck results accordingly.

RULINGS: When a situation isn't covered by rules, the GM may make a tentative ruling to avoid slowdown. When a ruling is unsatisfactory to anybody at the table, discuss during a break an alternative for next time.

KEY DIFFERENCES FROM MANY RPGs

NO "HIT POINTS": One successful roll can eliminate an enemy. One disastrous roll can kill a player's character. This means 2400 can be a "deadly" game, or not at all deadly: If the GM never says you're risking death, a bad roll will never kill your character.

NOT ALWAYS BLOW-BY-BLOW: Zoom in or out as needed. The GM might say taking out a tough opponent must be broken into multiple steps (e.g., "You'll have to create an opening before you can take him down"). Or you might be able to handle an entire battle with a single roll (e.g., everyone risks death to "take out the enemies"; a 1-2 roll could mean an ally dies, while a 3-4 could mean injuries, or some enemies remain).

"SUCCEED" ON A 1: A bad roll doesn't have to mean "failing" an action. The risk for hacking an airlock might not be "it doesn't open," but "alarms blare and stuff gets blown into space."