

WHAT IS MINIMUS?

Minimus is a storytelling game with a game master, and players who take on fictional personalities called *characters*. The game master, with player input, sets the game's *theme*, using the goals and relationships of characters to structure *plots*. During play, players make choices as their characters would. Every time you play the game is a *session*; plots can take multiple sessions.

Minimus uses playing cards for event sequencing, and 20-sided dice (called d20s) to determine success. There are terms you'll learn as you read the rules.

CHARACTER CREATION

Once the game master has revealed the theme, players should choose roles, preferably ones that work together. "Mercenary", "Detective", "Thief" and "Wizard" are all examples of roles.

Now, write five life changing events from your character's past. Pick an event from childhood, adolescence, full adulthood, and two tied to the game's theme. Most events end up as "After event X, I did action Y". Talk to other players if you're stuck; you can share events.

Pass the sheet to the person on your left. They'll take your events and list seven jobs or skills based on them. The player to your right passes their sheet to you, and you'll be doing the same for them. Try to pick skills that the other person will have fun playing.

You can use the skills in the table below, or make up your own. Skills in parentheses, like (Knowledge) are categories to be filled in.

Knife	1H Melee	2H Melee	Martial Arts	Defense	Running
Throwing	Pistol	Rifle	Bow	Riding	Jumping
Climbing	Swimming	Demolitions	Survival	Notice	Search
Merchant	Persuasion	Intimidate	Pickpocket	Lockpicking	Sneaking
Mechanic	Computers	Medic	(Drive/Pilot)	(Profession)	(Knowledge)

1H Melee is one-handed weapons, 2H Melee is two-handed weapons

Pass the character sheet one more place to the left. That player looks at the five background details and the seven skills, and defines two positive special abilities. Special abilities are adjectives with exclamation points, like Tough!, Smart!, Fast!, Keen Eyed!, or Detective! For magic or psionic abilities, things like Prophecy!, Fire Magic!, or Telekinesis! are appropriate. You'll be doing this for another player as well, as the sheets get passed around the table. After giving special abilities, give the sheet back to the person playing the character.

You may give up one special ability, or let the game master assign a flaw. Next, allocate twelve skill ranks between seven skills, with at least one, and no more than four in each skill.

RELATIONSHIPS, GOALS & SECRETS

Your character will know other people, and those people will have attitudes towards your character. Name three people tied to your character - ties are blood, romance and association. Two of them like your character, one dislikes your character. Each person can do something useful that your character can't; they'll ask for something in return. If you're stuck, work from your "five events" list, asking "Who did I do these things with? How do they feel about me?"

Pick two goals to develop over several sessions. Goals change over time, and should force you to action. Completed goals result in life-changing events, like the five you started with. Sample goals can be "Avenge the insult done to me by person X" or "Liberate my homeland" or "Marry person Y".

Write a secret your character would go to great lengths to keep, or one that involves them that they're unaware of. The game master will assign a second secret that will show up during play.

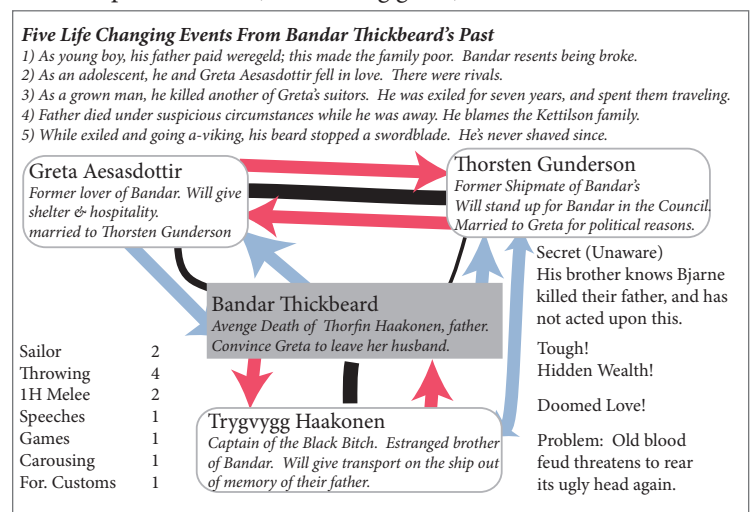
Write your character's name and goals in the middle of a sheet of paper; then place your relationships around them, with what they can do for you, and room to draw lines. Thick lines are ties of blood, medium lines are romance, thin lines are ties of affiliation.

Like and dislike are colored arrows. Blue arrows mean liking the target, red arrows mean dislike. Draw colored arrows between all the names on the sheet. Once everyone's done that, put the character sheets in the middle of the table, and draw arrows between your relationships and theirs. This builds a *social network*. The game master assigns starting equipment based on skills and backstory.

Your character's goals and relationships are important. If you don't care about them, nobody else will!

At the start of a plot, players write introductions giving their character a problem. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* introduces Indy with a hat, a whip and a gun—trying to get an idol out of a tomb.

A sample character (for a Viking game) is shown below.



BENNIES & CHARACTERS

A bennie (short for "benefit") is good luck for your character. *General bennies* can be used at any time, *goal bennies* can only be used for a specific goal. You start with three general bennies at the start of the plot, there may be leftovers from prior plots.

Bennies (of either type) let you re-roll any die roll *once* per bennie used, taking the better result; if multiple bennies apply, you can roll multiple times. *General bennies are gone once used*. Goal bennies remain until the goal is met, and can be used on *every roll* for that goal!

You can rewrite a goal at any time; this converts its goal bennies to general bennies. *Completing* it turns them into *two* general bennies.

Bennies (of either sort) can be spent to activate special abilities.

A general bennie can be spent for a +2 bonus to a single skill that lasts for an entire scene. This can be done twice per skill per scene; two bennies spent give a +4 bonus.

Between sessions, bennies can be spent to improve skills. Getting rank one in a new skill costs three bennies. Improving an existing skill costs bennies equal to the new skill rank—going from rank four to rank five costs five bennies. No skill can go past rank twelve.

You may add a new special ability for twelve bennies, but it has to be approved by two other players and the game master.

If your character dies, all goal bennies convert to general bennies and transfer to your new character. If your character died nobly, you get three extra bennies, plus the three for starting a new adventure.

To get more bennies, see Failure & Bennies on the next page.

SCENE SETTING & DETAILS

After the game master sets a scene, each player gets to ask a “clarifying question”, using only the senses and knowledge of their character. The game master can say “yes” or “no”. If the game master says “no”, the next player gets to ask, and the process repeats until every player has gotten a “yes”, or been told “no” twice. The game master may cut this short to keep the game moving.

Sample clarifying questions: “Was this battlestation built without handrails?” Or “Would that chandelier hold my weight?”. Even “The dusty weather is making Doc Holliday’s tuberculosis act up, isn’t it?” is a clarifying question.

Clarifying questions cannot negate someone else’s actions, or change the psychology or behavior of another character.

Anything the game master says “yes” to is a *detail*. During the scene, any character can incorporate that detail into the description of their action, which adds one to the die roll per detail used.

Equipment can have details defined. Equipment details can be used once per scene; no equipment can have more than three details set.

Words used by another character to describe a failure can be used as details, but only if used immediately, and only one player may “snatch details from the jaws of defeat”.

TASK SEQUENCING

Sometimes it’s important to know “what happens when”. Each player declares what they’re doing, using any details desired, but may not add conditional or sequencing elements like “After Bob shoots, I’ll charge them.” After the players declare, the game master does the same, drawing a card face down for each NPC.

Each player draws one card from a deck of cards, looking at it and placing it face down in front of them. Once all players have done so, they may trade cards for the next 30 seconds. When trading, players may not speak or communicate the value of a card, even to indicate “high” or “low”. A player that flips their card face up is done trading.

When trading is done, everyone flips their card, and actions go from deuce to Ace. Matched cards mean those actions are simultaneous, and a Joker allows that character to act at any point in the sequence. Reshuffle the deck when a Joker is drawn.

Card trading rewards players for listening to each other. Teamwork means flipping your card as early as possible. It makes for exciting, chaotic scenes, not tactical chess matches.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Special abilities act like clarifying questions, but are player initiated and narrated. Use special abilities to gain information, declare something is true in the current scene, or negate a game penalty.

Special ability use must pass common sense: Detective! won’t negate a wound. Tough! can’t define a trail from clue to perp. Using Fire Magic! to weld something shut is perfectly legal, though!

Special abilities that are used all the time cease to be special; as a result, the third and subsequent uses of a special ability in a play session cost one bennie each. Special abilities used in opposition to each other require each player to narrate their action and secretly bid bennies. The higher bid works, and costs that many bennies to use, the loser spends no bennies. Every two details used in narration counts as one bennie for the bid.

For three bennies spent at the start of a session, a special ability can be an “at will” power, costing no further bennies during that game session. At will powers get one bennie for opposed use bids.

The game master may always say a special ability fails.

SKILL RESOLUTION

To use a skill, roll a d20, adding any skill ranks, and +1 per detail incorporated into the description. You need to equal or exceed a target number set by the game master (usually 10-14). The higher or lower the roll, the more one-sided the success or failure is.

If you’re acting against another character, both of you roll; the higher roll wins. The difference between the rolls determines how one-sided the success was, called the Margin of Success (MoS).

FAILURE & BENNIES

If you fail, you describe the failure. A good description lets another player nominate you for a general bennie. If it’s seconded, you get it. The game master can second nominations from other players.

Scenes involving a flaw give a general bennie; other players can nominate you for more, depending on how much you complicated your life by roleplaying the flaw...

Acting on your goals will give goal bennies tied to them; you can never have more than four goal bennies in a single goal.

You may *always* narrate a failure, no matter what the die roll says.

COMBAT

Combat uses opposed skills. Attackers roll their weapon skill, defenders roll their defense skill. Two handed weapons and rifle users roll defenses twice, taking the *lower* roll.

Subtract the armor level from weapon level, and multiply the MoS by that amount. For zero or less, see the table below and divide the MoS by the divisor. Round fractions normally.

Weapon	Level	Armor	Level	Wpn-Armor	Divisor
Bare fist	0				
Thrown rock	1	None	0	0	2
Knife	2	Flexible armor	1	-1	3
1 hand melee, pistol, bow	3	Metal armor	2	-2	4
2 hand melee, rifle	4	Rigid metal armor	3	-3	5
Crew served	5	High tech armor	4	-4	6

The adjusted MoS sets wound levels, per the table below.

Adjusted MoS	Wound Severity
2-3	1 (Cut to extremity)
4-5	2 (Heavy bleeding, broken bone)
6-8	3 (Severed hand, bullet in the gut)
9-13	Out of the fight! Major body trauma!
14+	May be dead.

The target describes where they got hit; for every two full levels of MoS, they take a wound. Wounded characters take a penalty equal to the highest wound level sustained on all skills. A character can take any number of wounds, until hit by an MoS of 8 or higher.

The words used to define a wound can be used as details on the any other player’s next action, but may only be used by one player.

Death can happen if a combat MoS exceeds 14+; whether or not your character dies is up to you, as a player. Other players narrating actions driven by a character death can be nominated for bennies.

Healing occurs when the story allows it; a successful Medic roll heals one level 1 wound. The Healing! special ability removes one wound of the healer’s choice, or for two bennies, removes all wounds.

COMBAT EXAMPLE

Bandar throws a rock (level 1) at a foe in mail (level 2). He rolls an 11, adding 4 for Throwing and gets a 15. His target rolls a Defense of 10, giving a MoS of 5. Level 1 weapon minus level 2 armor is -1, dividing the MoS by 3, giving 1, which is a hit, but no wound.

Later, he uses a spear against this foe with identical rolls. Level 3 weapon minus level 2 armor is 1; the MoS of 5 is a severity 2 wound.

GAME MASTERING MINIMUS

DESIGN INTENT

Minimus is a storytelling game, a cousin to roleplaying games like *Dungeons & Dragons* or *World of Warcraft*. A storytelling game rewards players for describing things, especially descriptions that entertain everyone else. They build plots from character relationships, rather than pre-packaged quests disconnected from a character's backstory. Minimus puts a lot of 'authorial' power in player's hands.

The cardinal rule for running a storytelling game is this:

Story logic trumps realism. If it sounds cool, say "yes".

GETTING PLAYERS

If your group is hesitant about trying Minimus, try these:

If you already play D&D, you already know the basic mechanic.

The entire "player's handbook" is two pages! How hard can it be?

Character creation is a group activity, and math-free!

We recommend Minimus as an introductory game for people intimidated by 250+ page rulebooks, or as a change of pace game.

SETTING A THEME

"What's the game about?" This is the game's *theme*. Get the players involved in setting the theme and get their input; it's their game too.

One way is a survey; each player lists two movies they liked (and why). Look for commonalities and mix and match.

Or, try an auction. Everyone (game master included) gets ten tokens. Defining something (location, person, event or relationship) costs a token. Bidding more tokens makes that element more importance. Bidding can decrease importance as well.

Once the theme is set, let players discuss roles, and define their "five events". Actively work to tie those events into the game's theme.

CHARACTER CREATION Q&A

For players who can't think of five life changing events, try these:

What social strata and location were they born in?

Are their parents still alive? Have they ever lost a loved one, and if so, how did it affect them? Do they have any children? Any siblings?

How were they educated? Formally, on the job, or by travel?

How do they earn a living? Were they ever in the military?

Is there anything they won't do, ever? Why?

Who dislikes them? Why? Who likes them? Why? Give names!

Advise players to keep skills broad; skills are jobs on a resume, not tasks performed on the job. Characters get a lot of competence "on the fly" from clarifying questions and details.

GAME MASTERING BASICS

Minimus is driven by character interactions. Who your NPCs like and dislike is more important than their combat abilities.

Some character types, like the lone-wolf-with-cool-weapon, but no past, family or friends, don't work in Minimus.

Minimus assumes players will listen to each other, and be respectful audiences when someone else has the spotlight. You need to manage the spotlight...and make sure everyone gets time to shine.

You're responsible for making the game fun for everyone. This means talking to bored players and finding ways to engage them. It may mean asking a disruptive player to leave.

TASK DIFFICULTIES

Target #	8	12	16	20	24	28
Rating	Average	Hard	Difficult	Heroic	Incredible	Impossible

ASSIGNING FLAWS & SECRETS

Flaws should compel action and give choices. Foes should be blackmailers or creditors rather than targets the character can kill. Compulsions, reputations and social flaws are also good.

Focused bad karma is an excellent flaw; Doomed Love (where a character is fated to love disastrously) is one example.

If a flaw is ever resolved, ask the player if they'd like a new one. Resolving a flaw can end a character's reason to adventure. Use the resolution of flaws and secrets to bring closure to a character's story, and for the second secret, assign it some time after the game has begun, and you see the character in play.

CHARACTER GOALS

Your players will assign two goals for each character; with a play group of typical size, that's anywhere from six to ten goals you have to keep track of. Those goals are there to make your life easier.

Think of a TV series; in each season, the characters have goals they want to achieve. Each episode (or session), about a third to half of the characters get to advance one of their goals; as the season progresses, those goals help the characters in the finale.

Player defined goals are statements of "This is what I want." Build your plots on them. Like a TV series, you should try to touch on a third of the goals each session, by building scenes to emphasize them.

Goal bennies show drive, grit and will. Building your finale around player goals will make it epic and memorable.

CLARIFYING QUESTIONS

"Clarifying Questions" shape conflict scenes; this is what Minimus uses instead of a map and miniatures. It reflects movies and comics, where heroes win by shooting missiles at cliffs to trigger rock slides.

Details incentivize cool description, but "cool" varies by genre.

In a game of swashbuckling swordsmen, details will be swinging from chandeliers or sliding down a sail by knife point.

In a gritty technothriller, details will be good intelligence, siting your sniper's nest at just the right place, and adjusting for windage.

Clarifying questions get rid of "total failures" in encounters, where it's a easy if the players do exactly the right thing...and no player figures it out. Equipment merely stores details, and its limits are for dramatic reasons. It's more fun to gain an edge from the environment than pull it off the third page of an inventory list...

STORY STRUCTURE & REWARDS

Stories are about wants in conflict; the traditional story structure follows a "W" structure, most good movies and novels follow it.

In the first act, characters are presented with introductory scenes, and the initial problem (the source of conflict) is made clear.

They make progress, but setbacks occur. A cut scene (identifying the antagonist) shows the source of their troubles. Further actions by the antagonist cause the characters to slide down the first stroke of the "W". With things at their darkest, they take inspiration, and make renewed progress, climbing the second stroke.

With victory in the heroes grasp, the antagonist makes a desperate move, and they slide down the second trough of the "W", and start climbing their way to the climax and the end of the plot.

Most people recognize this structure subconsciously. Without a reward structure, players will try to avoid the down strokes. Bennies are rewards for bad things happening to characters. Look for ways for players to get bennie nominations in scenes with flaws.

THE RELATIONSHIP MAP

Once your players have defined their character relationships, put all the character sheets in the center of the table, and suggest links between characters. You want at least half the characters connected by like and dislike arrows and ties of affiliation or romance, either between each other, or between people they have relationships with.

Copy this social network around the outer edge of a sheet of paper, leaving the center clear, and writing the campaign theme in one corner. In the center of your sheet, write your antagonist's name, goals and relationships; you can also give characters in the antagonist's social network goals of their own. Try to have these goals conflict with some of the player's goals.

Now connect the antagonist's relationships into the player's social network; fill in the 'why' of likes and dislikes when they come up in play. This is a *relationship map*. Those links (and like and dislike arrows) are conduits that information and interactions will follow.

This relationship map drives your story. Any scene that doesn't change something on the map can be skipped. Like a classic "dungeon map", you should refer to it (and mark on it) during play, while players make their own version of it.

A sample relationship map is shown below.

Theme: Aaron Spelling Writes *Eddas* (Soap Opera. With Blood Feuds, Curses & Marauding Trolls)

Flaws To Use:

Bandar: Doomed Love
Kiril: Considered Weak. By Vikings.
Sigvhat: Unreasonable Optimism
Harald: Unlucky

Act I: Introductions All Around

Harald secretly meets Svana, lets her know he's in the area.

Bandar gets chilly welcome from brother, informed of father's death. Overly warm welcome from Greta

Vigdis (age 5) finds two goats - bitten in half! Tells her father (**Sigvhat**) about it.

Kiril is being bullied by Torfi, when Bjarne intervenes. Something's happened at Halfdan's farm. Torfi and Bjarne go to investigate.

Harald is hiding in the Gunderson's barn when Greta and Bandar have a talk. Misfortune happens.

Cut Scene: Eyvind gets news Bandar is back in town. Is trying to arrange a marriage between Egil and his younger daughter Svana, which she doesn't want. Filters through Svana to Auda and Sigvhat.

Trygvyygg is negotiating to buy bales of wool from **Sigvhat's** farm when they hear screaming from Halfdan's farm. Suggests getting Bandar to help with investigation; sees Harald while looking for Bandar at the Gunderson's place. Picks up Kiril en route.

End Of Session Cliffhanger:

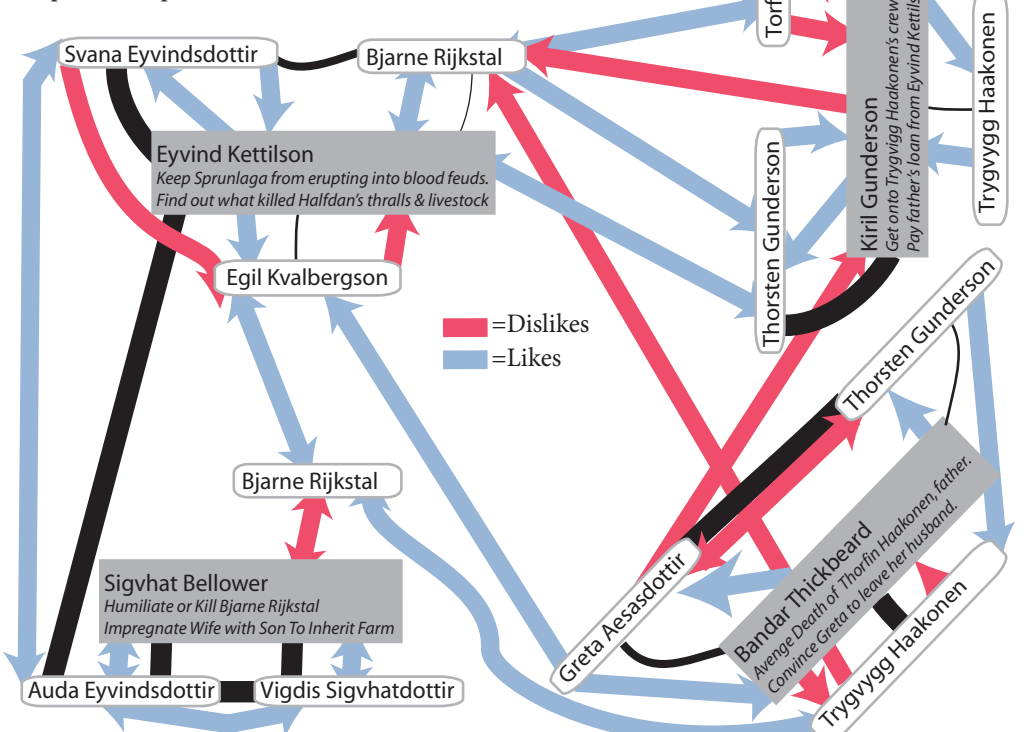
The Carnage of Halfdan's Farm: Dead farmer, hysterical (and injured) 10 year old son. Trail of blood leading to the hills. Bjarne and Torfi nowhere to be seen. Opportunity for **Harald** to redeem himself for breaking his oath-bond to Eyvind by rescuing Bjarne.

Immediate Problems:

Bandar: Every reason to raise old blood feuds again.
Kiril: Knows Bjarne and Svana are lovers, resents it
Sigvhat: Wants a legal way to humiliate or kill Bjarne
Harald: Trying to avoid being found.

Story So Far

Eyvind Kettilson is the local ruler, with two daughters, no sons. Right hand man is Bjarne, who is capable, but undiplomatic. Any choice he makes will make at least half of the player characters unhappy; most of the character's goals, if met, threaten to rip the town apart. He's grooming Thorsten Gunderson as his replacement, knowing Bjarne can't do the job. Regrets the bloodfeud that killed Bandar's father, but the past is the past and cannot be unmade.



SESSIONS & SCENES

Decide how many sessions the story will run; three to ten sessions is typical. Each session is broken down into scenes of 20 to 45 minutes each. You'll want three to four scenes ready per hour of playing time. For each scene, write the following on an index card.

An establishing shot. The locale, and the dramatic set up.

A protagonist. Who is the scene for, and what do they want? Roughly one scene in three should be devoted to the antagonist.

A problem. If there's no problem, there's no scene. For antagonist scenes; this is where minions report on the impact of player actions.

An immediate obstacle to overcome. This is what keeps the character from solving the problem effortlessly.

A map dynamic. How does the scene alter the relationship map?

A tensioner. A scene ends when its problem is resolved. Unless it's the end of the story, the answer to "did the character succeed in solving the problem" should be "No", "No, and furthermore...", or "Yes, but..." You'll want two "No, and furthermore..." and "Yes, but..." outcomes written ahead of time, so you can pick one on the fly. These connect the scene you ran to the next scene you pull, by involving the same characters or making a cut point to jump to the next scene.

Sort cards by player, with each player getting one per session. Try to end scenes on cliffhangers, and *always* end sessions on one.