Twists

Twists are a new way of looking at an old "problem" in gaming — namely, setting difficulties, in a way that is comfortable, fast, and pan-applicable. When comparing Twists to the "old" way we've suggested for setting difficulties in Fate, keep in mind that what we're really angling for, here, is a zero sum. The *perspective* on how you've arrived at a difficulty is changed, but in general, the difficulty itself shouldn't see much drift at all.

Base Difficulty: The Simple Rule

Up front, the first thing you should be looking at when considering a task's difficulty is what the Base Difficulty of this general *kind* of task should be. And when we say "general", we mean really, very generalized. This may be easier than it sounds, since generalized task types sound an awful lot like very broad skills. Consider:

Specific Task	General Type
Punch Hans in the nose	Combat
Perform first aid on Hans' nose	Medicine
Fix Hans' car after someone's poured sand into the tank	Fix Machine

And so on. Once you know the general task that's being attempted, you've already got two questions that you're close to answering:

- What skill or skills can be used to accomplish this task?
- What's the *Base Difficulty* for tasks of this general type?

The first question is yours to answer, and depends largely on what kinds of skills you have in use in your game. In some cases, the skill and the general type will be one and the same (*e.g.,* Medicine). In other cases, the general type will be a summary of the skills that can be brought to bear (*e.g.,* First Aid, Surgery, Forensics).

The second question is the basis of our first, simple rule: *If the answer isn't obvious, the Base Difficulty is Average.*

Using the types from our table above, this simple rule tells us this:

General Type	Base Difficulty
Combat	Skill (modified by roll) of the opponent
Medicine	Average
Fix Machine	Average

When you're using this system to deal with purely imaginary tasks that don't have a real-world basis, such as casting a spell, part of the consideration that should be brought to bear here is how accessible you want the task to be, and what kind of returns can be had if the character succeeds at it. For example, if I were designing a world where spells can have very profound effects if they succeed, I may want to make success hard to come by even as a baseline, and put my Base Difficulty for casting a spell at Great, Superb, or higher. But if I don't have a strong reason to "damp down" the potency of spells, I'm probably fine just going with my simple rule and starting things out at Average.

Here's another perspective to bring to the party: Average is the rating someone gets when they make their first, minimum investment in a skill (a one point skill is Average). Given the way the dice work, that means they'll succeed more than half of the time at tasks that sit at the *Base Difficulty* (this is fine and intentional — players buy skills for their character to represent what the character's good at doing, after all). But we can take this perspective with us to the spellcasting question from above. If I'm setting the Base Difficulty for casting a spell to Great, I'm also saying that you have to be at least a Great spellcaster in order to succeed the majority of the time at your "average" baseline spell. Food for thought.

Twists: Complicating the Matter

Once you've taken the ten seconds or so necessary to determine the Base Difficulty (did you hesitate? Then it's Average!), you're ready to apply Twists to the situation. Simply put, Twists are the good news (or "edges") and bad news (or "complications") that the character encounters on this task. Put another way, they represent the circumstances surrounding the task. Twists should be stated only in a very broad sense, focusing on the major categories in which advantage and disadvantage can apply to the task at hand.

Another word for a "good news" Twist is "edge". Another word for a "bad news" Twist is "complication". With apologies for the metaphor, either way you look at it, an edge twists the dial one "click" in the character's favor, while a complication twists the dial one "click" against the character's favor. The final difficulty of a task is figured as follows:

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Final Difficulty = Base Difficulty + Complications - Edges

The player rolls their skill + 4dF, as usual, against this target, with margin of success calculated as usual. Alternately, if you prefer to apply the Twists to the player's roll rather than to the difficulty, then the player makes a roll of:

Skill + 4dF + Edges - Complications

Which is then compared against the Base Difficulty. You can even split where edges go and where complications go (edges add to the character's roll, but complications add to the difficulty) if that suits your taste.

So, given a character with a Great skill, a task with a Base Difficulty of Average, and with the character facing three complications, but bringing two edges, then either the player will roll Great + 4dF against a final difficulty of Fair (Average + 3 - 2), or the player will roll Great + 4dF - 2 + 3 (or, Good + 4dF) against the base difficulty of Average. For calculating the resulting margin of success, it's the same thing either way you look at it (Great + 4dF vs Fair, or Good + 4dF vs Average, a non-dice difference of 2 in either case), so which way you choose to it is mostly a matter of taste.

That said, it does mildly affect which adjectives you're likely to find yourself saying during play — rolling on a Great(+3) gets you anything from Mediocre(-1) to Legendary+1(+8), while Good(+2) gets you from Poor(-2) to Legendary(+7). And if you chose to split where edges and complications go, you'd be looking at a Epic (Great+2) + 4dF against a difficulty of Great (Average+3), which has an even more elevated adjective range.

Twists in Action

Combat is our easiest, or at least most common, task in a game, so let's look at that first.

Edges: You are in a Superior Position, have Superior Numbers, have Superior Armament, have Superior Protection. Your opponent is wounded in some fashion, or using an inappropriate skill against you (*e.g.,* using his Juggling skill instead of his Throw Knives).

Complications: Your opponent is in a Superior Position, has Superior Numbers, has Superior Armament, has Superior Protection. You are wounded in some fashion, or using an inappropriate skill against your opponent (*e.g.,* using your Dancing skill instead of Dodge).

Since we're talking Combat, the *Base Difficulty* being brought to bear here is determined by the skill of the opposition. In an exchange with a foe, a character's roll is improved by his edges, and reduced by the complications (which, from the opponent's perspective, may be his edges).

Note, if both sides are judged to have the same superiority for different reasons (you're in an elevated position giving Superior Position, but they're surrounding you, giving them Superior Position), then you can either leave them both in, or just drop that Twist from consideration (a zero sum in either case).

Example. Cyrus is fighting a trio of bandits. He's a better fighter, but they have him outnumbered (a Superior Numbers complication) and flanked (a Superior Position complication). He's wearing a suit of armor, however (a Superior Protection edge). Cyrus is at a -1 (2 complications, 1 edge) to his rolls against the bandits.

From combat, we'll move on to lockpicking, another mainstay of RPGs.

Edges: You may have Superior Tools, Extensive Time (you may pick the lock at a leisurely pace), or Privileged Knowledge (a detailed diagram of the lock to refer to, or knowledge of a "trick" that's especially effective against the lock). The lock may be Poorly Constructed.

Complications: You may have Poor Tools, Time Pressure, or a Bad Environment (such as darkness, or having to be in an unusual position to get at the lock). The lock may be Exceptionally Constructed, or may require Specialized Knowledge which you don't have.

Example. Finn needs to pick a lock to get into the back door of the Pegasus Club. The door is in a back alley, so the light is poor (Bad Environment), but it means that it's out of sight from the street (no Time Pressure complication). The Club hasn't skimped on their security, so the lock is Exceptionally Constructed. Starting out, Finn faces two complications, which would become three if he only has the piece of wire (Poor Tools) he keeps up his sleeve for quick lockpicking.

Thankfully, Finn came prepared. He can't light a torch for fear of being seen, so he can't do anything about the Bad Environment. He did bring a set of lockpicks, however, so he eliminates the Poor Tools complication. That leaves him with two complications (Bad Environment, Exceptional Construction), setting the difficulty at Good

(Average + 2).

That's still a little tougher than Finn likes, so he made a point of buying a lock of similar complexity by the same locksmith on the previous night, and has spent several hours getting to know its workings. This gives him an edge (Privileged Knowledge), which reduces the Good difficulty to Fair. If he had an accomplice arrange for a distraction so he could safely light a torch, the loss of Bad Environment would take that to Average, but getting it to Fair is as good as Finn's got, going at this solo.

Twisting Things In Your Favor

By splitting Twists out as their own, separate things in the game rather than having them internalized in difficulty, we've done something pretty powerful: it's a lot clearer what sorts of things can be done to counteract complications or gain edges. This makes them manipulable, and given a manipulable method, players are liable to go to town (as Finn's player did in our lockpicking example).

Let them.

Here are some thoughts on how to Twist things to their fullest extent.

Supplementary actions. Allow players to make rolls against non-related skills which could "help" the main task (*e.g.,* an Intimidation roll made to supplement a Haggling task). If they succeed, they get an extra edge. If they fail (or fail especially badly), they might garner a complication, too. This gets particularly potent when you're looking for a way to account for team efforts on a single roll.

Reward preparation. Some players approach the game with a strong strategic mindset, constructing elaborate plans in advance of taking on a task in order to minimize risk. Rate the quality of their plan in terms of the number of edges it gives them (probably zero, one, or two — in rare cases, the plan may be genuinely bad, so some plans may even introduce complications to the mix).

Extras, Stunts, and Aspects. You could use the Edge idea as one of the things that can be provided by checking off an appropriate Extra, Stunt, or Aspect box (alternately, checking off such things may simply eliminate complications, rather than provide additional edges, which could help prevent this from running away with itself).

A new approach for bonuses. What a lot of the above gets at is the idea that you can start

phrasing traditional "bonuses" and "penalties" in the game as edges and complications, which the players can then assail with their wits and gambits. At times it may look like this makes it too easy for the players to get what they want, but at its best, it should give them a solid sense of achievement, such as when they work together to eliminate three complications before finally succeeding at a crucial task.

Other Implications for Combat

This has several implications for the way we "traditionally" present combat in Fate.

First off, it reframes the whole Outnumbered/Flanked/Surrounded gig, replacing that instead with one or two complications at most — Superior Numbers (replacing Outnumbered) and Superior Position (replacing both Flanked and Surrounded, making them essentially the same thing, though one could argue that it's harder to eliminate Superior Position based on Surrounded than it is to eliminate Superior Position based on Flanked). This is a relatively small adjustment, though it does have the end effect of making it *somewhat* less lethal to fight a roomful of angry magic ninjas. Surprise and "the Drop" are also easily placed into the realm of twists, with a "Caught Off-Guard" edge or complication covering most cases, and in extreme cases a "Totally Unaware" one adding a second boost.

Somewhat more profoundly, Twists move the wound track from the land of bonuses and penalties, into the land of edges and complications. Thus, when you succeed against your opponents, the wounds you inflict on them means you gain an edge against them (from their perspective, they have a complication), replacing the "-1"s that you see on the wound track presently. When put this way, it's clearer, too, that you can skip the wounds in favor of gaining other edges (or removing other complications).

Example. Let's go back to Cyrus and his bandit problem. He's fighting a trio of them, and they have him outnumbered and surrounded, for two complications. He wins an exchange, with enough of a margin to get a Hurt result. As a wound, a Hurt result would give him a persistent edge for the scene (Hurt Opponent), but if he so desired he could instead:

• Change his position, so they can't flank him (removing the Position complication)

• Pick up a flaming brand in his other hand and

use it to keep them at bay (adding a Morale edge, perhaps, or a Superior Armament, depending on your perspective)

• *Dodge and weave around their horses, doing damage to their saddles. While this provides him no edge now, it sets up an edge for the future — when he makes a break for it and they try to pursue, he'll have added a complication (Damaged Gear) to their Ride rolls. Never hurts to think ahead.*

Too Twisted

There's a temptation to do this to extremes, introducing an absolutely appalling number of twists on both sides of a task. Resist this urge. As a rule of thumb, there should be no more than three to six Twists available on either side (make exceptions if necessary, but strive against it otherwise).

The reasoning behind this is based in the granularity at which Fate operates. Consider, there is only a difference of six between Average and Legendary, and the dice, with enough Aspect english put on them, can make up for four of that. A simple +1 is deeply potent in Fate, and represents a significant shift in someone's favor when applied to a roll. The minor stuff shakes out to inconsequentiality, and once something becomes major, it's almost always worth just a +1, even if you might go to greater and more superlative lengths to describe its power. If a player disagrees that their sword is worth more than just a +1 for Superior Armament, you should welcome them to spend skill points (to make it an Extra) or aspect points (to allow them to alter the dice when using the sword) to represent this extra potency.

Again, generalization is a powerful tool to be used here. Let's say someone comes to you, as a GM, wanting to use a sniper rifle to hit a target at extreme range. You start thinking about distance to the target, which is pretty significant in your mind, so you start listing stuff like this:

• Target is far away
• Target is very far away
• Target is *extremely* far away

Take a step back, here, and realize that "far away" is the thing you're representing. Using a generalization principle, we should conclude that Far Away is a twist. We're talking a sniper rifle here, though, so the first thing is probably too small of a

detail to apply. Very far and extremely far are both significant, but are they so significant as to justify two Twists — a total of -2 — for "extremely" far away? Probably not, since a -1 shift is already very potent in Fate. By applying this logic to the range equation, you've reduced what could be a -3 to a -1, which is exactly right. (In fact, I would go even further to say that this is all about the target having an advantage of position — extreme distance from his assailant — which is one of our categories from above.) The same sort of thinking should be applied to the Twists players are coming up with to tilt things in their favor. You should be ready for this, and use your vast powers of generalization without mercy.

If runaway Twists still seem to be happening more than you're comfortable with, cap them so that they can never provide more of an adjustment than a roll of the dice could — so even if someone has six twists in their favor, instead of providing a +6, it will provide, at most, +4.

As a final note, beware double-dipping when combining this with the Tests and Challenges notions from the core Fate book. Fate does not always operate in a simple success-or-failure fashion — margin of success, the degree by which success was achieved, comes to bear as well. Tossing many "bad news" Twists at your players is likely to make it difficult for them to succeed by more than a couple points of margin, if they succeed at all. If you're looking for them to succeed by more than just a little, throttle back on the complications, and allow there to be a wider range of possible successes. The most common example of this is in combat: if there's got to be a chance for your players to score a Taken Out result on their opposition, you should make sure you don't Twist that degree of success out of their hands.

A Final Reminder

Twists are meant to simplify the task of setting difficulties, so remember, if they don't "click" for you — don't use them. We provide plenty of options in Fate for a reason.

How Official Is This?

Well, I'm an author of Fate, but I haven't had a chance to lab-test all of these things here. Plus, I know that the way I've written this up diverges

from Rob's initial take on it, as his offers (I think) the possibility of a larger collection of Twists being brought to a situation. We have a tendency to change each other's mind, but we haven't had enough lunches together since the one that kicked this idea off. So it's about as official as that.

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