

How to Play FATE



This section will introduce you to how the rules of this game work and what all the number-bits in this book represent. You can read the rules in detail in *Chapter 5: Playing the Game* and in *Chapter 7: Running the Game*.

The Basics

First and foremost, if you're asking yourself, "What is a roleplaying game, anyway?" go to www.arcdream.com for an introduction. Back? Good!

In the *FATE* RPG, characters, vehicles, equipment, and even scenes and locations that are important to the story are defined by three key terms: aspects, skills, and Gifts.

Rolling Dice

Many events in *FATE*—particularly the challenges that face the Strangers of the Kerberos Club—are resolved by rolling a few (usually four) special dice called Fudge dice. Each Fudge die gives you a \oplus , \ominus , or \blacksquare result. Add one for each \oplus and subtract one for each \ominus . (The \blacksquare are worth zero.) Get a high enough result and you rise to the challenge. Important characters and objects use skills to boost their rolls—and just about everything in the game can use aspects.

Since Fudge dice can roll negative or positive, it's possible to get a result below zero. Therefore we always put either a plus sign or a minus sign in front of a roll's result to make clear whether it's above zero or below zero. A roll that's 6 above zero would be written as +6, not just as 6.

Aspects

Aspects are one of the most important parts of *FATE*. They are short, descriptive phrases that describe characters, scenes, objects, places, or even the game world as a whole. The ones you'll probably use most often, though, are your character's personal aspects: they express your character's personality, background, appearance, beliefs, possessions, connections, and other parts of what makes him or her unique.

Aspects can be simple statements, nicknames, catchphrases, the names of associates or enemies, and so forth. When you see a character write-up in this book, the listed aspects give you a sense of who the character is. When you make your character, you decide what his or her aspects are.

If there's an aspect at hand—on your character, the scene, your opponent, whatever—and it's relevant to the task at hand in a positive way, you can use it to improve your result. This usually means spending a **Fate Point** (see the next page) for each aspect you use and adding a +2 bonus to your roll for each one—although no aspect can be used more than once on a single roll. Your opponent can do the same.

Of course, this aspect business isn't limited to turning failure into success. If you've *already* succeeded without calling on an aspect, but you want to succeed by even *more*, you can use aspects to do that.

Unimportant characters, locations, events and objects can be handled just

with aspects—leaving out skills and Gifts entirely—to speed things up.

You can find more information about aspects on page 184.

Skills

Most things that player characters do in the game are done with skills (and of course if the skill isn't enough, you can augment it with an aspect). Skills are areas of training, experience, or sheer talent. When you want your character to do something risky or that has the potential to add to the story—something with an interesting consequence for failure—you'll use one of your character's skills.

Unlike aspects, skills are concrete and quantifiable—each skill has a numeric skill rating that measures how effective the character will be with it in play and how likely you are to succeed. Skills tell you what a character can do.

Every skill also has a Power Tier that indicates how effective it is in comparison with the efforts of an ordinary human being. Most skills are in the Mundane Tier, but supernatural powers, such as super-strength or telepathy, will frequently be in higher Power Tiers.

To see if you do well, roll Fudge dice and add your skill rating. That's your **skill roll**.

Compare the skill roll to a difficulty number set by the GM. If you beat the **difficulty number**, you succeed.

For more on skills see page 198.

How Well Did I Do?

How well you succeed at a challenge is determined by three results of a skill or aspect roll: effort, shifts, and effect.

Add together your skill roll plus any aspect bonuses to get your **effort**.

(Other modifiers caused by the circumstances at hand may affect your effort, such as when trying to climb a particularly slippery wall or find a dropped earring in an especially cluttered room. That's up to the GM to determine, though. If she doesn't bring it up, don't worry about it.)

How well you succeed is measured in **shifts**. If your effort beats the difficulty number, you get a number of shifts equal to the margin of success. If the difficulty rating is +3 and your effort is +6, the margin is 3 so you get three shifts.

The number of shifts you get is called your **effect**. The higher your effect, the better you did.

Sometimes you'll want to spend some of these shifts to accomplish something special. In that case, reduce your effect by the number of shifts that you're spending. See page 320 for details. But usually you just use them to say how well you succeeded at the thing you were trying to do.

And if you're competing against an opponent, it's easy. Best effect wins.

Stress

When bad things happen to characters—such as injury, embarrassment, or fright—they take **stress**. If your objective is harming someone else (physically or otherwise), stress is how we represent it in the game.

Stress comes in three varieties: Health, Composure, and Reputation. The more points of stress you take, the

worse off you are.

For example, let's say you're in a fistfight with a couple of goons. Your effort (the total of your roll, your skill rating, and any modifiers) is +6, while theirs is only +3. The GM tells you that you can spend a shift to knock one of them down a short flight of stairs and out of the immediate area. You decide to do that, and put the other two shifts toward dealing damage. The goon takes 2 points of Health stress and is knocked down the stairs.

If something has a Weapon rating (like "Weapon 1"), it does additional stress. If something has an Armor rating (like "Armor 1"), it absorbs stress.

Taking stress is bad. If you take enough of it, you're **Taken Out**, or removed from the story for at least a while. You could be dead, unconscious, disgraced, fleeing in panic, or whatever's appropriate for the attack that took you out. Within that context, the attacker gets to choose your fate.

Given a few minutes of respite, stress goes away on its own. When you don't have that luxury, there is another way to reduce stress: by taking consequences.

Consequences

Consequences are longer-lasting effects that can be as insignificant as being winded or off-balance or as life-changing as losing a limb or being ostracized from polite society.

You can reduce incoming stress by taking a consequence. A Trifling consequence reduces stress by 2, a Middling consequence reduces stress by 4, and a Grievous consequence reduces stress by 6.

Consequences are like aspects that are negative (see the **Aspects** section

for more on aspects). You don't *want* consequences, but sometimes they're your only chance to stay on your feet. But you can take only so many consequences.

You can also choose to make a **concession** instead of taking a consequence. This is essentially you taking yourself out, but according to your terms instead of your enemy's.

When you see a write-up for a person, animal, or vehicle in this book, the more stress boxes and consequences are listed, the more resilient that person, animal, or vehicle is.

Gifts and Fate Points

Gifts bend the rules a little where your character is concerned. You might have a Gift that gives you a special piece of equipment or that makes one of your aspects more powerful or that provides a little boost to some of your skills in the right circumstances. They're sort of a halfway point between aspects and skills, in that they have concrete mechanical effects, but it's up to you to define the specifics within the guidelines provided. Every character has at least one Gift. We'll discuss them in the Gifts section on page 244.

Every player also has a store of Fate Points—sometimes a lot, sometimes a few, sometimes none! Spend Fate Points to affect the events of the story in your favor; earn Fate Points by acting in accordance with one of your character's aspects in a way that puts you at a disadvantage. This back and forth of Fate Points—the "Fate Point economy"—is, like aspects, central to *FATE*. More information on how this works is in the Aspects section, page 184.

And that's how you play the game.