The Strings

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Roleplaying Game Basics

Prologue

Most Roleplaying games give a brief introduction about how to Gamemaster (GM) and what sort of additional rules one should consider when being a GM. A typical book would also give some examples of play and then explain a few campaign settings and some adventures. To shun convention, this section begins with a description of Roleplaying games in general. It then goes on to describe techniques that can improve the game for all. These two sections should give you a good grounding in what the author likes to call 'Game Theory'. The next section describes tools which Icar uses to weave and control the campaign setting. By this point, you will be familiar with all the game mechanics.

What is a Roleplaying Game?

It is important for any Gamesmaster to define exactly what a Roleplaying game is before beginning to design and play. It is quite easy to mistake a part of a game for the game itself. To try and avoid this, the next section will begin to describe a game by stating what a game is not. The following descriptions use 'A Game' in place of a 'Roleplaying Game' for easy of reading.

A Game is not a Puzzle

A game may have puzzle elements but it is not itself a puzzle. A puzzle is a static structure which can be solved either by clues, guessing or logic. A game is dynamic (the opposite of static) and changes with the actions of players. If the game's sole objective is solve a puzzle, then there is no roleplaying required, no resources to manage and not neccesarily any opposition. The game can simply be won by completing the puzzle. For a game to be interesting, it needs some element of puzzle solving, the players like to feel their own intelligence is aiding them along the course in some way.

A Game is not a Toy

A toy is device which may have many difference behaviours and may be used in a game but the game is not the toy itself. For example, a football can be seen as a toy where 22 men playing football is a game. The players impose their rules and objectives onto the toy to create a game. Therefore, a toy can be interactive but a game has goals, some end to which the players strive. In the same way, the game world (or game background) is the toy that players can interact with but to become a game the players need goals.

A Game is not a Story

The author has a pet hate about 'Storytelling' games and the use of the word Storyteller. A story is not a game at all. Stories are linear, no matter how many times you read a story, the outcome does not change. Stories score well in this way as the characters can be chosen to be interesting and to have interesting and the story guided in a direction that the reader would find interesting. Sometimes in roleplay games, the characters do something that might not be as interesting as one might have thought.

Games are non-linear, they do not follow a predetermined path. The players make decisions and the decisions affect the game world to alter the current situation. It is possible to think that a player might

make two different decisions in two similar situations on two different days. A decision, therfore must have some alternatives to choose from, otherwise the game becomes a story. The more linear you make the game, the less decisions the players have (or the less affect the decisions have) the more like a story the game becomes and less like a game.

A Game involves Participation

Many descriptions of roleplaying games begin 'It's like a film but...', this is an immediate fallacy as the audience watching the film is utterly passive. The audience may think of sub plots or reasons behind the story unfolding but you are just watching what the film company have made, you are passive. The same is for plays, reading books and TV, you have no affect on the story. The GM provides the theme behind the game and the players steer the story how they want, playing their parts to the full. This participation is vital, the GM is not there to tell a story but let the players play out the story.

The Essential Game Assets

It is easy to spot where the above areas fall down when compared to a game, but what is a Game? To try and define this, I use The Essential Game Assets. If your game does not include one of these, then it ceases to be a game. Harsh but fair. To take the standard game definition:

"A game is a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal." - G. Costikyan

Decision Making

Interactive is an overhyped and largely misued word. Games are interactive, without interaction, the game would be a puzzle. But a light switch is interactive, you turn it on, you turn it off. Interaction. Interaction must have a purpose. Decision making takes interaction a stage further, it uses goals, resources and a carful weighing up before the interaction is made. For example: do you you want the lights on? Will the bright light hurt your eyes? Do you dislike the dark? This is suddenly decision making, a form of interaction but so much more. Success should be mainly rooted in decision making. All decisions made within the game are dependent on Goals, Opposition, Resource management and information. The more complex each of these aspects are, the more complicated the decision will be.

Goals

The second vital aspect of any roleplaying game is to have goals. A game without goals is merely a toy. To keep both the GM and the players interested in the game for a prolonged period of time, goals or objectives need to be set. Although roleplaying games are without victory conditions (you very rarely win a RPG) they are packed full of goals, both long term and immediate. If the players don't have a goal and can not generate one by themselves, then the GM must provide one or the game will degenerate and eventually become pointless. Decision making require goals otherwise there will be no distinction between two choices. If in doubt, the goal should be character survival, the greatest goal of all.

Opposition

Victory is all the sweeter if the opposition made the fight more of a struggle. In most Games (RPGs in particular), the opposition arrives in the form of NPCs. However, opposition can also come in the form of weather, unhelpful council employees, old ladies and jamming weaponry. Whatever the goal that has

been set, a GM must make it difficult to acheive their goals or the feeling of richness and acheivement is diminished.

Managing Resources

Often choices are meaningless, there are many options but they differ little or the outcome will have much the same effect. These choices can be made meaningful by adding resources whether they be money, equipment, favours from a friend or boss, the goodwill of an NPC, food, sex, or information. Adding these resources makes the game more interesting "I'm sorry, monetarily speaking, I can't afford to shoot you to I'm going to hurt you a bit with this big stick". The resources must also have some part in the game world, otherwise the resource has nothing to contribute to the success or failure of the decision.

The Character

The actions you make in the game are made through your Character. The difference between a character and a resource is that the resources are items you can manage and the character the player's method of managing them. The Character is all important to the player as it controls the viewpoint the player has on the world. The Character allows the player the feeling that they control their own destiny, that she is playing the game rather than watching a story.

Information

The balance of information in roleplaying games is very much up to the style of the GM. However it must be noted that players can not be expected to arrive at a sensible decision without enough meaningful information. The players might have as much information at their disposal but without meaning, they can not put it to use. Given the decisions that the players need to make, the GM must make enough information available to make a reasonable decision. If the players lack information to begin with, the GM should advise them to look for more.

Summary

Before the game can begin, the GM must make sure that what is being played is actually a game and not just a story or puzzle. Absolute freedom must be restricted somewhat, otherwise they will stray from the plot however at no time should the players feel restricted. A Roleplaying game is a game where a group of players play the parts of characters, managing resources, collecting information and making decision that help them struggle toward goals. The GM is there to tell the players the outcome of the decisions and to provide them with enough information to make further decisions.

Strengthening The Game

Prologue
Roleplaying and GM in particular is an art. There are said to be good GMs and bad GMs. As Roleplaying is not a science, there are not sure fire ways and methods to go about running a good game, there are, however a few tools that can be used to make a GM better.

Diplomacy
Diplomacy is one way of dealing with opposition. Another way of dealing with opponents is to kill them. Rather than let the game degenerate into a set of running battles (to play these, you might as well be playing a board game), allowing players to talk their way out of problems can not only add intrigue to a story line but provide the players with the feeling that they have control of the game. Diplomacy can also be used to gain allies, maybe through doing favours. Having contacts of this kind is a very powerful resource but the players must be prepared to do something in good faith once in a while.

Variety
Everyone has a certain GMing style, things that they always take with them from one game to the next. However, variety is the differing encounters that the players can be faced with. How boring can D&D get with 'It's a band of angry orks', once you've spent three hours slashing them, the players get bored if it happens again. Randomness can provide a variety in itself, if the dice go against the players then it might take the game down a route you would not have expected. However, when creating a campaign, you need to make sure there is a variety of places to explore and fact to discover. Icar lends itself to huge variety but it up to the GM to inlcude it.

Identification
If a player identifies with their character, an emotional impact is added to the game. Players invest a lot of time in their characters as it shows their position and standing in the game. It can be difficult to get a player to identify with a character that is far removed from their own personality and experiences. By giving the player examples of the character's points of view (generated with the guidance of the player, of course!) on different subject matters, the player can understand the character better.

Roleplaying
Roleplaying is taking on the persona of yor character. When you do so, you are roleplaying. Roleplaying helps character identification and fuels socialisation within the group. When a player plays a role, they are effectively performing in front of their friends. From a selfish point of view, they are exploring their character's persona through their own character.

Gamesmaster Law

Prologue: How to be a GM

A game is an art form in which players manage resources by making decisions through a character in pursuit of a goal. So what is a Gamesmaster? This section runs through the basics of how to be a Gamesmaster (GM). All aspects are covered in a very general way, Icar specific GMing is quite a departure from the normal but there needs to be some groundwork before Icar GMing is described. Although this Chapter is called 'Gamesmaster Law', these laws are more guidelines. Following the next steps will take you through the principles of being a GM.

WARNING: GMing is not easy, it is hard work compared to being a player but the rewards are far higher. GMing is not something you can do by halves, you need to put effort in. The more effort you put in, the more the players will enjoy your game and the more of a kick you'll get out of it.

Preparation

The first thing any GM needs to do is to prepare the game properly. Many games fall flat quickly as little or no thought and effort has been put into the game before play. Putting effort into the game before takes pressure off during the game. A GM's preparation includes the following steps:

1. **Find Players**. You need players to play your game, not having enough or having too many can ultimately ruin the game. A good maximum is 5 players.
2. **Pick the Game System**. Choose a system you know the players will like. Also choose one that interests you, as the GM you need to enjoy it aswell.
3. **Learn the System**. You've got the game, now read it. Make sure you know all the background and have a good grounding in the rules. This will make the game flow better. This might seem daunting but the time will not be wasted.
4. **Devise a Scenario**. To give the game goals, you need to devise a scenario. This can be a campaign (a series of games) or a single game. Icar requires some special skills for creating Icar scenarios (explained later) but for other Roleplaying Games, there are plenty of resources on writing a good scenario. Make sure your scenario is broad, as you will never predict exactly what the players are going to do.
5. **Organise your information**. After creating the scenario, you are likely to have a lot of information. Organising the information by date, type or order of occurance can help dramatically in the game. It also allows you to...
6. **Revise the Scenario**. Have another look at the scenario and make sure you are not turning the game into a puzzle, toy, story or a trivial bore! This second look is very useful as there might be aspects of the plot that the characters will never interact with.

The First Session

Once you've planned everything you think you're going to need, you're ready for the first session. This invariably invlovles making characters, this is counted as the first session regardless if it is done in public or private. The reason for this is that it is the first game interaction with the players. At this early stage. you can begin moulding the characters to fit the scenario. No doubt you have created a method of

the characters meeting, either through family, corporate or friendship so give this as a basis of making the characters. Make sure the players add some colour to their characters by including background and listing friends and enemies.

How to Gamesmaster

You have your characters, you have all your information ready and scenario primed, you know the rules and you are ready to start. Where do you start? As a GM, your role includes these primary roles:

1. Describe the Environment

Tell your players what they can see, feel, touch, hear and smell. This sensory information, if correct will give the players emotion immediately (whether it is an emotion of comfort, fear, suspicion, etc. etc.) and put them into a setting.

2. Answer Questions about the Environment

You may have missed something the players deem important. You must answer questions by the players, sometimes the information is not available, tell them so and why. For Example: You can't see any doors because the room is dark.

3. Improvise

The most useful GM skill. As not everything can be written down and the player's actions can not be guessed during planning, you must improvise. The better your preparation, the easier this is to do.

4. Describe the results of actions

The players will interact with the game world, so tell them the results of their actions. This can come in the guise of applying the game rules (a player wants to shoot an NPC) or in describing more information (a player wants to switch a light on to see the exits of the room). The better the description, the more understanding the players will have and the better they will react to the game world.

5. Play Non-Player Characters (NPCs)

The players will soon get bored interacting with each other so Non-Player Characters are brought in. Non-Player Characters are 'everyone else' in the game world and can be broken down roughly into two categories; Plot NPCs and Innocent NPCs. These ideas are expanded later in Icarian Model. Normally it is fun to 'ham up' NPCs, that is play a distinct archetype that the players can identify with, they are also easy to play.

6. Keep the game moving

Most player groups can win awards for side tracking the discussion away from the game. Don't worry about butting in and steering the game back on track.

Example No. 1 Simple Game

This is an example of a simple Icar game that will appear a little generic to experienced Icar players. Throughout the example are small numbers (1) in brackets that refer to the techniques described in the

list on the previous page. The lines are numbered for the analysis on the next page.
The GM has two players, Simon and Yvonne. Simon is playing a policeman and Yvonne is playing a private eye. The GM has set up a scenario where both players are looking into a murder and have decided to work together. The GM has written a fair amount on the actual corpse but has very little information on the apartment except a few clues.

i. **GM**: You are both standing in a poorly lit, metal corridoor in front of the victim's apartment. The door has a police seal on it and around you are pot plants and advertsing holograms. The air is clean and fresh, and the corridoor is artificially warm.(1) What do you want to do? (6)

ii. **Yvonne**: Well, I can't get in. I need the police pass. Simon, are you going to let me in?

iii. **Simon**: GM: Is the door damaged? Any signs of the door being forced?

iv. **GM**: None that are visible.(2,3)

v. **Simon**: Use my police pass to open the door slowly, I don't want an evidence being disturbed.

vi. **GM**: The door hisses quietly as it slides to the side (4). A repulsive, stale smell of rotten eggs drifts out of the room (1,3). The apartment is completely dark inside. What are you going to do? (6)

vii. **Yvonne**: Ergh! Cover my nose and mouth with my hand and peer inside.

viii. **Simon**: Use my neck-scarf to cover my face and turn on the lights.

ix. **GM**: Yvonne, putting your hand over your mouth is not helping a great deal. Simon, you've deadened the smell a little. (3,4) The blue lights come on, getting brighter and whiter.(3) You can see the entire contents of the room, like any normal living room. The corpse is sitting in a large, leather backed chair to one side of the room. He is wearing a very expensive suit and is holding a glass filled with red liquid in one hand. (1) Some of the liquid has spilt onto the floor, leaving a red stain. (1)

x. **Yvonne**: Isn't there automated surface cleaning devices that would detect the spillage and clean it up?

xi. **GM**: They are disabled when someone is in the room.(2)

xii. **Simon**: Check his terminal, is there any information on it?

xiii. **GM**: The terminal has ben reset to factory settings, effectively removing all information that was stored on it. (2,3)

xiv. **Yvonne**: Simon, we should wait for the forensic report. There is nothing we can find that they can not.

xv. **Simon**: Forensics are good at detail, not the overall picture. GM, check his personal affects, anything

out of the ordinary.

xvi. **GM**: Personal grooming items, some ready meals, an ornamental Grav Bike, Planetball holograms, some holostories and 'The Compendium of Ancient Rites'.(2)

xvii. **Yvonne**: I'd say that was out of the ordinary.
and steering the game onto the right track.

Example No. 1 Analysis

The example demonstrates the Primary Roles of a GM except the NPC interaction (covered later in the Icarian Model section). In this section, the example will analysed, pulling out the finer points and showing how the example demonstrated the Primary Roles. The Roman Numeral numbers **(i)** refer to the lines on the previous page.

• **Begin with a description**.
To start off any section, you need to begin with a description **(i)**. This sets the scene for the players to then roleplay around the situations. The more detail you put into the description the better the players will understand their situation. Use at least three of the senses in your description and do not forget to include any extended sensor data that the team might be receiving.

• **It's their turn to speak.**
My favourite "What do you want to do?" prompts the players that it is their turn to speak and that they have the opportunity for action **(i)**. This helps keep the game moving.

• **Let them play**.
It is important that the players get a chance to interact with each other **(ii, iii)**. Don't be afraid to let them argue out situations by themselves. If they need your help, then they'll ask for it. If they start to wander off the subject into something irrelevant on non-game related, then pull them quickly back into line.

• **Add-Lib**
Add-Lib is the art of making things up as you go along and is a very difficult skill that needs practise. Too much add lib and the game becomes very difficult to play, random and without any kind of direction. This can be avoided by preparation but never irradicated, you will never predict what your players will do. Add Lib improves with practise.

• **Don't assume anything**.
In the case of **(vi)**, you could say:

'... the door slides open and you turn on the lights'.

This is putting the words in the mouths of the players and is an error made by many GMs. Don't do it. If the players want the lights on, they'll tell you. This may seem like a good way to move the game on, but it will just fustrate the players. Instead give them a pointer that will get them to automatically to put the light on for example:

'.... it is too dark to see.'

Practise Makes Perfect

An old English phrase but one that works. GMing is definitely something that can be improved by practise. Although the whole GMing prospect may seem daunting to being with, once you've tried it, most of the things listed in the last section become quite easy. If you talk to the players afterwards, using the pointers in 'How to Gamesmaster' to question them, you can improve for the future. After all, if there is anything glaringly wrong with your GMing style or preparation, then the players will spot it first.
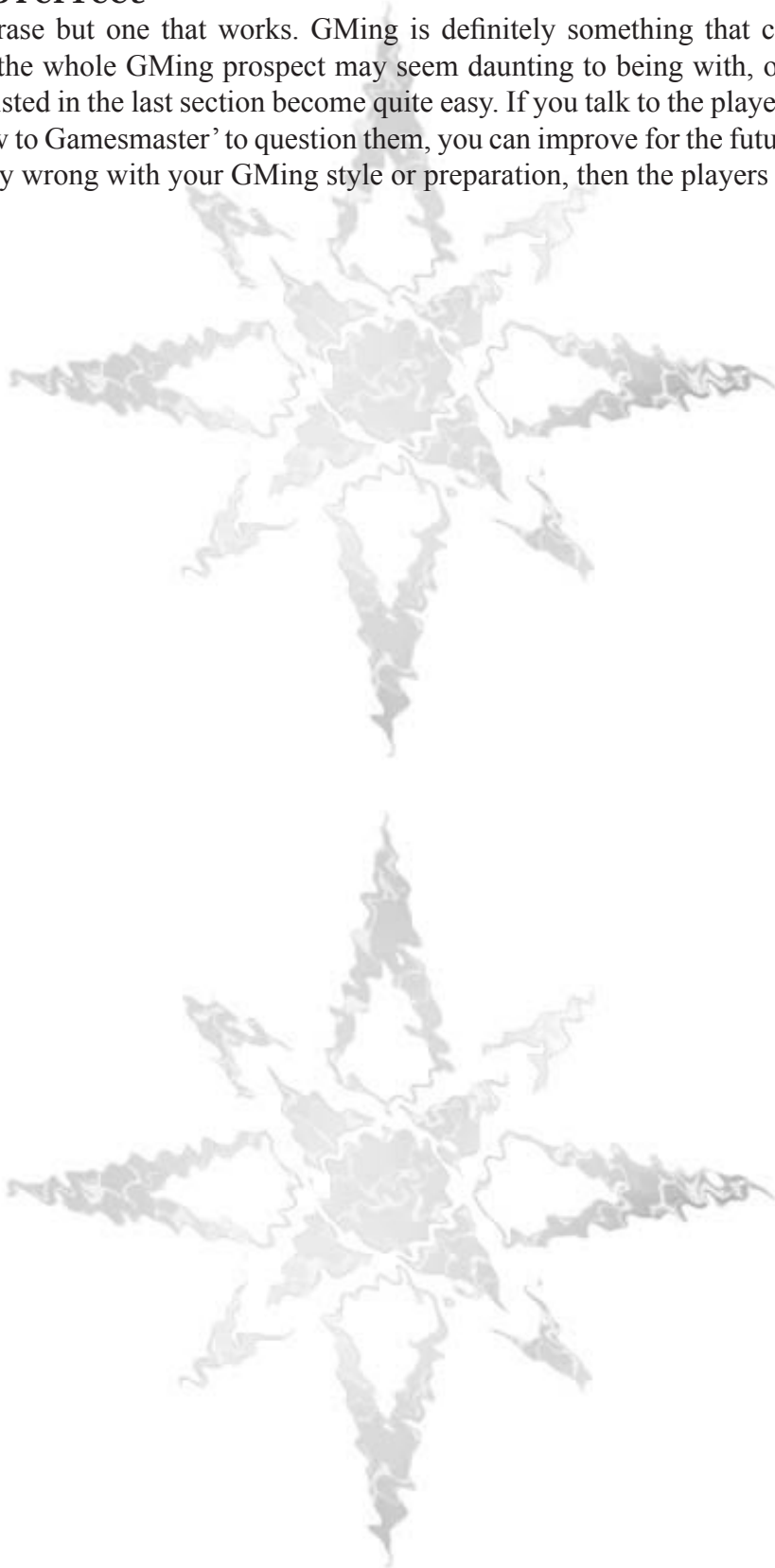
Advanced Gamesmaster Skills

Prologue
This Chapter details many additional facets you can bring to your game. Not all of these will work for particular GMing styles or for the particular part of the scenario you are trying to run.

Style
Every GM has their own style. Fact. Developing your own style is a matter of course and will happen over time. If you've played with another GM who was very good and ran a good game, you might feel that you shoud emulate his style. Ultimately, this is folly as you will be trying to take on their personality. Instead of emulating their style, try and incorporate the good things that the GM did. For example, you might try to increase the number of senses that you use in your description. This is not really changing your style, just adding to it.

Bending Dice
There are times in the game when the dice go against either you or the players. Sometimes, there is just a large amount of bad luck and the players get into a situation that realistically, they can not get out of. At this point, you might say that their bad luck killed the players. As a GM, you can normally spot when the dice have consistently gone against the players, regardless of their actions they are going to die. The sides of the argument, that you must realise at the time of the game are so:

Did the players put themselves into the situation?
Quite often the bad dice would not have mattered, the players were playing appaulingly anyway. They reacted badly to the dice and deserve to die. Kill one of them. Be merciless. Don't bend the dice. On the flip side, the players were trying to do the right thing but were entirely unfortunate, relying on a skill or attribute they were good at. At the critical time it failed. Continual failures put them in a bad way. This is a cause for dice bending.

Did you put them into this situation?
You ran a nice little plot line that you were sure they'd understand and they 'muffed it'. The whole things is tumbling out of control and at the point where you are sure they'd roll good dice a spate of bad luck ensues. So what do you do? Bend the dice. Put them into a situation that they then have to roleplay out of. If they continue to mess up, then it's their problem.

Bending dice is a very powerful technique and if used incorrectly may make the players feel like their whole game is utterly being controlled and there is no random element at all. This is a God - Like complex that must be avoided.

The Rules vs The Flow
The rules are provided by the game creator to provide strcuture to the game session, not to slow down roleplaying. Most roleplaying games state this as fact in the Gamesmaster section but totally throwing the rules out of the window can cause just as much of an issue as allowing the game to slow. Bold comments

to the affect of 'Ignore the rules if it slows down the game' are a fallacy and born of experienced players with experienced GMs who know enough of the rules to make a educated guess. But as a blanket statement it simply does not work. Such siutations are best illustrated by an example:

Take the case of the new GM, he knows most of the rules and will be pretty hot on the background. Most of the time, the new GM will make judgement calls on rules he's familiar with. However, at a particularly important point in the game, he needs to refer to the rule book. For a well designed rule book, with plenty of reference-type aids, this may take a matter of minutes. The new GM will then learn from the new rule and play will continue. If the GM made a 'judgement call' and was wrong, this would then set a precedent for the future. The GM would have to make the same call in the future or the system would become a mockery. Using the rulebook makes sure you use the same ruling each time. That's what it is there for.

The difficulty comes when assessing how much time to spend looking for a rule. A quick check might not break the flow. A long perusal of a minute rule in a complex book might annoy the players. The is no way to set a time for this as it is utterly case dependent. However, a good rule of thumb is five minutes, any more and you'll annoy. A good technique is to give the players a 'comfort break' while you look, this would then give a natural gap for you to hunt for the rule and the players will know they will not miss anything if they leave.

The Global Mis-rule

One pet hate of the author is when the above argument is joined and moulded with the 'incorrect rule' argument. They are two separate arguments and should be treated differently. When writing a game, there is no way for the creator to write for every possibility. Players are the most random bunch of people ever formed into a team and can arrive at some very strange ideas. These ideas may mean that a rule becomes incorrect, if in doubt, discard it for something more sensible, pencilling a note in the margin. As long as the mis-rule is treated the same way in the future, the players will not mind the alteration.

Mechanics

The last two examples show how a GM requires the mechanics of the game. Quite often, a GM will make a ruling different to that in the rules. The players, often better versed in the rules than you, may argue the ruling due to it being unfair or incorrect. Either set a precedent (a new ruling) or admit your mistake and change the way you do things. If you make a precedent then you must follow it in the future. The danger here is that if a precedent is set and you decide not to follow it in the future, the players will consider this as being unfair and will loose respect in you and your game.

Another issue on the subject of mechanics is balancing and unbalancing. Without a doubt, the system you run will have possiblities that make the character unbalanced. There are two ways out of this: Alter the mechanics at the start of the game, letting all the players know of its error and how you want to run it. Unfortunately, not all the mechanics make issues like this easy to spot, especially with add-ons, conversions and extra game books.

i. Make a deal with the player in mid-game saying you did not spot it before. This bout of honesty will go down well the with player.

ii. Do not, in any way, try to push the problem under the carpet, blaming it on the game creator, player or milkman. This will again loosen the respect the players have for and eventually weaken the game.

Improvisation

Touched on earlier, improvisation or add-lib is what separates the good GM from the bad. If a player want to do something you haven't planned for, you could give a response that makes the action impossible. Doing this will only make the player less likely to try anything in the future. Make them roll dice or describe in detail what they want to do (it may go wrong halfway through) and then let them do it. This will also spur on the other players to do interesting things and the game will really run along.

Drama

Being overly dramatic in your descriptions can help build tension into the game. If a player falls into a hole. Don't just say 'You fall in the hole, it hurts.', give a description of the hole, how black and deep it is. Give them the chance to grab for the edge, increase the tension. Maybe a hand slips, or the character grabbed with the arm that has been injured somehow. Maybe the edge is treacherous, have them slip, roll another die and then make another grab for something before falling in. This may seem over dramatic, it would be if on film, but it helps the players' imaginations grasp the tension of the situation.

Applying Detail

Descriptional detail is the most powerful and subtle technique a GM has to guiding the players. In describing a scene, you can take emphasis away from, or add to, a certain object by removing or adding detail. This can be demostrated with two examples:

i. You are standing in a large silver room, it has one ornate and sturdy door. In the centre of the room, just metres from you is a low table with a goldern datacard and a rifle. The rifle is a matt-black machine gun with four notches on the barrel. Toward the butt of the rifle are more scratches, as if it has been stored standing up. There is a slightly curved magazine in its centre and a sight made from several cylinders on the top.

ii. You are standing in a large silver room, it has one ornate and sturdy door. In the centre of the room, just metres from you is a low table with a goldern datacard and a rifle. The gold card has a crest of an eagle on it, resessed into the metal but with minute detail. On close inspection you notice all the feathers are etched separately. The datacard has a few glyphs, which you don't recognise, in one corner and a notch in one end. There is no writing on it.

The emphasis from one to the other can be altered to distract the players or point them in the right direction. The players know that the GM will put effort into writing down descriptions of the important artifacts and not for the unimportant ones. A lot of fun can be had telling players more about useless stuff than the interesting nuggets. Tell them if they ask but otherwise play it down. One would like to think that the players get wise to this, but they never do.

Player Attachments

Many players like to become attached to an item within their inventories. This can happen to many different objects from a car to a gun. This attachment can be increased and played upon by the

Gamesmaster to great affect. For example, someone might park carelessly and dent the player's favourite car. If this is the pride and joy of the character, the player is likely to roleplay anger. Used correctly, this technique is a powerful way to get a player to bond with their character.

Killing Characters

At some point in the game, a Character is going to die. Whether you bend the dice or not, the character is still going to die. If you let the character live any further, chances are the player will not learn from the many mistakes that have been made to make the character die and thus you must go through with it. However, if a character does die, then make a big show of it, describe every last moment of the character's life for the player and string it out. If you are going to end the campaign there, then fine. The players will get a chance to make new characters. However, it is the author's opinion that if one character dies, then the player should be able to make a new character that slots neatly back into the campaign.

Missing Players

It is unavoidable that at some point there will be a player missing from the game. The problem is with what to do with the character when the player is gone. This is ultimately the choice of the GM. However there are a few options that the GM has before taking the task on.

i. **Give the character to another player**. If the character is well known and the GM has a experienced player to hand the character onto then another player can take charge. The pitfalls here are concerned with the player's original character being neglected and the player knowing secrets about the character.

ii. **The Character is out of the action**. Have the character play along with simple sections but is effectively out of the action. This is only really acceptable if the character is not pivotal (the other characters will die without their help) but means that no one has to worry about the actions of the character.

iii. **Played by proxy**. Have the player send the character's actions for the GM to play out. This can involve a lot of effort but if the player is away for an extended amount of time, then the character can still take an effective part of the game.

iv. **GM Plays the Character**. This should be the last resort as the GM has enough to deal with, without having to worry about another character in the story.

Game Style

This section is included to try to address an argument that is and has been fought over many years. It concerns the style of game the GM is running. Although, all these styles can be considered as Roleplaying, they are quite different when seen from the GM point of view and thus are often a bone of contention. The crux of the problem comes with assigning Experience points. Experience points are the only fiscal reward the players get for their hard efforts. Although one might argue that finding out information previously hidden is reward enough, Experience Points are a more tangible form of reward. The argument begins: 'What do you give expereince for?'. There appears to be three options available to the new GM:

i. **Award Experience Points based on how much they kill**. This is the standard Advanced Dungeons and Dragons (from TSR) technique. You get 100 points for killing one sort of monster,

200 for a more difficult one and so on. More points can be gained for having good ideas and for winning overall.

ii. **Award Experience Points based on how much they experience**. In other words, the more the characters do, the more experience is awarded. If the players experience a lot, go through a lot of hell and come out the other side, they experience a lot, the get a lot of XP. In this case, good ideas are automatically rewarded as to get in and out of situations (and thus experience a lot), you normally need to have good ideas.

iii. **Award Experience Points based on how they Roleplay**. The character gets rewarded for how they play their character. If they play a believable character then the character gets lots of points.

Game Style Critique

The styles of GMing on the previous page lead to three distinct styles of game. Different players and GMs wants to play different games at different times. Therefore, the new GM must tailor the game to suit the players and themselves. After all, fun is the object of the game. This section includes a description of how each method of assigning Experience Points leads into a style of game and a few justifications for doing so.

Firstly, a note on optimisation must be understood. A simple concept: The only real reward in a Roleplaying Game is Experience Points. To do well in a Roleplaying game, you need to accumulate a lot of Experience Points. The more Expereince Points, the better you are at the game. It is a measure of your worth in the game. Therefore, whatever you award Experience Points for is the very thing that the players are going to try and achieve. This affects our game styles thus:

i. **Award Experience points based on how much they kill**. If the players get rewarded for how much they kill, then they will kill more. There is no need for them to Roleplay, as long as they get through to the next part of the adventure. They are not rewarded for Roleplaying, so why bother? This leads to a 'Hack and Slash' type of game which is fun in short bursts but can quickly become boring. To be used with caution.

ii. **Award Experience Points based on how much they experience**. Here, the characters are pushed to have good ideas. This is a literalist view of Experience Points as the rewards are only for experiencing things. This is good when justifying skill raises, if you experienced a lot, chances are you've used a lot of skills and therefore you should be able to raise them. However, there is no way to reward Roleplaying. The character might have spent the entire session locked in a box and the player had Roleplayed the neurosis that the character began to experience. A real feat in Roleplaying but for no reward.

iii. **Award Experience Points based on how they Roleplay**. Normally difficult to gauge, to get Roleplayers to Roleplay well is to reward them for it. You could argue that the character should not be allowed to improve if they have not experienced anything. But the game is a Roleplay game and therefore Roleplaying should be rewarded. How this is then spent (probably through justifying why skill or stat raises occur) is a game specific matter.

This has been a general description of the methods you may like to consider when running a game. In essence, an experienced GM is likely to use a combination of the above not only one. However, it may be prudent to check with the players how they wish to be judged, giving the options above.

This way, they will feel like their hard work each evening is actually improving them in some way. Whatever the guide the GM uses to assign Experience Points, it must be consistent between games otherwise the players will not be able to gauge how to play better. The Icarian Model for Experience Points is given later.
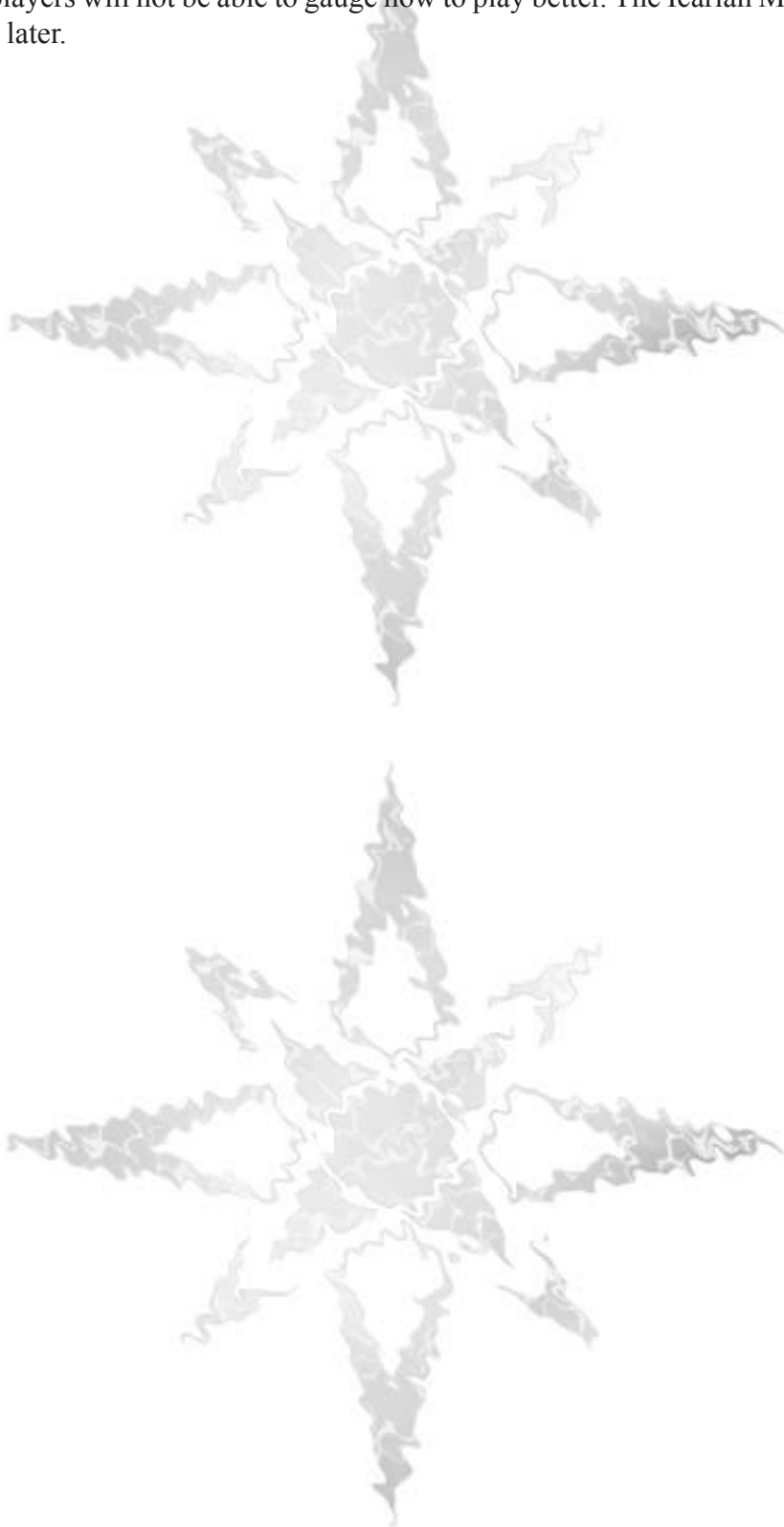
The Icarian Model

Prologue

The Icarian model is a set of tools and rulings to allow a GM run Icar in its full manner. Regardless of your GMing experience, Icar is utterly different from anything else you have run. This is not a selling point, it is a fact. The Icarian model initially makes more work for the GM but allows far more depth and colour to any campaign setting. If you really like to GM but have trouble creating in deep, meaningful, different, vast and consistent campaigns that allow the players to do just about anything then this is the system for you. Of course, not all the tools will be useful for every GM but to play Icar to the full, all the assets below must be used. You can run Icar in a more linear manner, but experienced players may baulk at being forced into a linear setting. Most of the Icar non-specific rules can be ported to other game systems with little effort and this is encouraged for the GM with too much time on their hands!

The Icarian Model consists of the following aspects:

i. **GM Mechanics**. Rulings and tips on how to run the Icar Elements quickly and cleanly and methods to make your sessions runs more smoothly.

ii. **Connection Diagrams**. These are diagrams that show the present state of the Galaxy. They are fully scalable to allow Galactic alliances as well as local alliances to be represented. This is an invaluable way to work out who hates who.

iii. **Timelines**. An invaluable resource, the Timeline shows how the connection diagram changes over time and also illustrated aspects of the connection diagram.

iv. **Tracking**. Tracking is a system by which everything that the characters have affected can be traced, plotted and fitted into the connection diagram. A useful tool for creating recurring NPCs and events.

GM Mechanics

Introduction

This section gives some information about how to run the Icar system mechanics. Scenario information is given later. Icar is a cinematic system (also known as Narrative) where the exact figures do not really matter, but the game flow does. This help section is to be used in addition to the Elements and it is assumed that they have been read and understood.

Doing Things

For most actions, skills are used to see if the character can achieve them. The player must roll under the skill number and then give you the difference between what they roll and their skill. You can then add and subtract difficulties (%). Once this is done, if the number is still positive then they have passed. Rolls of 1% and 100% should be taken as automatic passed and failures respectively. A list of typical skill uses is given below.

Typical Action	Skill Required	Modifier (if any)
Searching for information on Gaia	Computer Know	None
Trying to start a Grav car without the owner's Gaiacard.	Hacking	None

For statistics, it is much the same case but a D10 is rolled. 1 and 10 should be considered as automatic passes and failures. When there is no skill appropraite for the action or when the character is trying something physical beyond what is normal (such as feats of running / jumping), then statistics are to be used. The table below gives some example where Statistic are to be used.

Statistic	Types of Action
Battle	Pretty much only used when fighting
Meat	Lifting things Carrying things
Shift	Running Dodging Jumping
Soul	When facing scarey situations When doing something inhuman
Wit	When noticing things When trying to remember something When the GM wants them to spot the obvious in a situation but the players have not quite managed to spot it!

Combat Description

The Icar mechanics system is a cinematic one, it is not the intention of the author to create something numerically realistic to the point of pedantry! Combat should be a descriptive process, using the numbers

as almost an afterthought. This puts more emphasis on the narrative nature of the game.

For Example

   i. The thug kicks you for 8 Stun.
   ii. The thug swings his leg round to slam with a thud into your side, knocking you sideways (8 stun).

In the above example, the first method is quicker but much less interesting than the second. The second is a much preferred method as it builds up a better image of what is going on. This will spur the players into more descriptive actions of their own. The same goes for both Fire Fighting and Dog Fighting. In a fire fight, the players can see if the dice they have rolled has got under their skill score, but they do not know wether they have actually hit anything (because of modifiers). Describe what happens instead of stating what has happend and then let them make their own mind up.

For Example

   i. You fire into the crates area, you miss.
   ii. You fire into the crates, rounds bounce of crates sending sparks up into the air.

In the second example, it is less obvious whether a stray round caught the target than the first. This provides more intrigue and interest for the players.

Combat Mechanics

The combat in Icar is inteded to be quite quick and deadly. There are a few pointer that can help speed up the mechanic part of the game. This section will grow as more ideas are added.

   i. **Ammo Recording**
   When firefighting, the players should record their ammunition by magazine on the weapon sheet (see right). This allows them to see quickly and easily how many rounds are left in the magazine left in the weapon.
   ii. **Getting the players to do some maths**
   Players tend to fire in either full bursts (at the maximum rounds per turn) or at a single round. Get used to asking them how many rounds and how much damage the weapon does. Do not worry about trying to memorise all the different amounts of damage different weapons do. If you have trouble with this multiplication, then ask them how much damage they want to do. The players will not notivce this subtlety but it will speed up the game.

   iii. **Passing players by**
   If you have entered combat and you ask the player what they want to do and they stall by asking questions, give them one question and then say "that's your turn taken up with questions" and move on. A good situation description can avoid the players asking many questions.

Giving Roleplaying Points

As stated before, what you give RP for will determine much how the game is played by the players.

In Icar, RP is given for playing a believable and for taking part in the game. It is largely subjective, but the players should feel that they are rewarded for doing well and not rewarded when they achieve nothing. Do not be afraid to give maximum points or minimum points, quite often it will help the player try harder and enjoy the game more. The following table is to be used as a guide on how much RP that should be given in a session.

RP Given	Description
0	Player did not turn up
1	Player rarely did or said anything and when they did, did not do so in character.
2	Player rarely speaks but does so in character, most of the time.
3	Player plays their character believably and consistently most of the time.
4	Player plays a believable and consistent character all evening and adds flavour and depth to the game.
5	Player is indestinguishable from the character.

Time Guide

Once all the players are gathered together in one spot, how does a session start? Often, the players will chat about non-game related things for a while before the GM is ready. Socially this is fine, but it is also a waste of precious game time. Here is an order of doing things that allows the players to get into the game quicker.

i. **Arrive**. This is sort of prerequisite, included here for completeness.

ii. **Arrange Seating**. People normally sit in the same places.

iii. **Issue Character Sheets**. All sensible Gamesmasters keep the character sheets with them so that they can roleplay a character if a player is missing.

iv. **The Recap**. At this point, a volunteer is chosen to recap what happened last session. Up to 3 Roleplaying Points should be issued for the accuracy and style of the recap. This is to refresh everyone on where they stand.

vi. **Issue Roleplaying Points**. At this point, the RP are given out. It is normally a good idea to suggest where the player can improve or where they did particularly well in a session.

vii. **Players spend RP**. Any spending of RP must be justified, if they fought in a session, they should be allowed to increase a fighting aspect of their character.

viii. **Set the scene**. Following on from the end of the recap, set the scene. Where the characters are and what they are experiencing individually normally works quite well.

ix. **Begin**. Ask the players what they want to do now.

This Icarian way of doing things will not suit everyone but can be used as a guideline for a good way to run a session. The author has certainly seen better use made of the start of the session when this method is used.

Connection Diagrams

Introduction

A Connection Diagram describes the state of play at any particular point in time. Connection diagrams are the heart of Icar. It normally takes many diagrams to show the whole state of play at any one time, but only one really needs to be referred to at a time. A Connection Diagram shows each group of people as a box and uses lines to join these boxes up. The type of line shows how the groups are connected, normally as either friends or foes. From this diagram, timelines can be created and updated, and complex stories created (more of this later).

What you need

Connection diagrams can be as rough or as neat as you like. Simply, you need a pencil and some paper (most of the author's start this way). If you are making Connection Diagrams for Icar, you will also need a copy of the GM Connection Diagrams that display various states around the Galaxy and the Galaxy as a whole.

Building an Example

This section will create an example from scratch using generic situations. A more Icar specific Icar example is included later. It must be kept in mind that a Connection Diagram is there to show the relationships between groups, so you need to start by creating the groups. Each group shown on the Connection Diagram should be important in some way. Uninteresting groups should be left off.

The Megacorp example (right) shows a 'Large Manufacturer specialising in large scale automated production'. The Name is clearly displayed on the top and a small description (the more succint the better) is included. These two features are the most important. Below this are three numbers, each relating to the company's standing. All values are local values, showing their operation in comparison with the local operation of other groups on the diagram. Each figure's relevance will now be discussed.
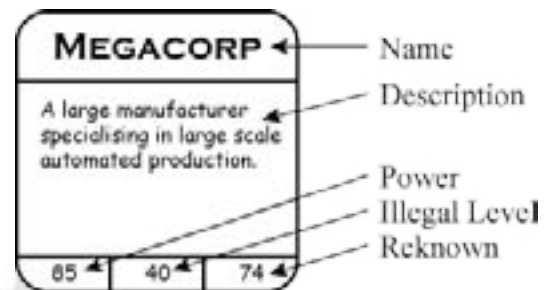
Power

This is the measure of the group's ability to bring to bear resources in a manner that affects many people. The larger the number, the more people would be affected by the group and the more resources they have to use. All values are compared against the table (right) and can be taken to read approximately the percentage of the population's lives can be influenced and by how much. For example, 90% could read that you can almost completely change the lives of 90% of the population.

Power Table	
Value	**Example**
0-25	Can influence 25% of population's jobs or make their lives difficult.
26-50	Can influence about 50% of population and has contacts in other areas.
51-75	Can influence 75% of population.
76-100	Can influence 90% of population and event kill people.

Illegal Level

This is the gauge of how much the group depends on illegal activities. The figure is often a gauge on how many illegal connections the group has. The figure also gauges how the police forces will react upon finding out about the activities. The higher the figure, the more venom the police forces will put into hunting them down. Illegal level will never be 0, any company with employees have some connection (no matter how weak) with crime. This value should be used carefully, most corporations fit a score around 10, where syndicates should start at 50.

Reknown

Reknown is a measure of how well known in the area, the group is. A high reknown shows that many people know about the group. A low reknown shows that very few know of the group and that they are quite obscure. A reknown of less than 25 tend to be classed as 'secret'. Reknown can be quite specific, people within a certain field may have heard of others that the general public would be oblivious to. It is best to keep these numbers in relation to the general public or the diagram can be confusing.

Diagrams that Grow

No one can create a good, well connected diagram straight off, they require time to grow and mature. This also means that diagrams should not remain static (Timelines organise changes to the Connection Diagram), do not be afraid of adding new Syndicates or removing ones that you think are not important to the game at that time. You diagram should stay true to the Galactic Diagram. This will stop inconsistency later on, when the teams might meet the similar siutations in a year or so.

Building Your Own Diagrams

Now you know what the diagrams looks like and what they are for, now it is time to build one from scratch. The best way of doing this is to write down the main protagonists in your campaign and then build around them. In this example, two fictional syndicates will be used. The Munters are a technology based syndicated who are hard line automaton builders. The Munters have aid from MuntTech who are a legal company that builds spare parts for Automatons. The Argiebargies are a humanist syndicate whose fears are based around robots taking over the human race. Now we have our protagonists, we can start building the connection diagram.

Start with Friendly Groups

It seems the best way to start a diagram is to note all of the friendly groups first. Once all the friendlies

Illegal level Table	
Value	**Example**
0-25	Small time industrial espionage, biribng for information.
26-50	Undeclared profits, hiring known felons. Also covers extorsion and widespread bribery. Small scale theft.
51-75	Grand Theft Astro, Extorsion, Trading
76-100	Murder.

Reknown Table	
Value	**Example**
0-25	Small local syndicates or secret organisations with a carful recruiting scheme.
26-50	A small, priviledged group or company with little or no publicity, although known within their field.
51-75	National club or organisation.
76-100	Massively popular, widely known across the area.

are done, you should have all the groups on the chart (but without any foe links). Friendly links are shown by an Arrow head on each end of the line.
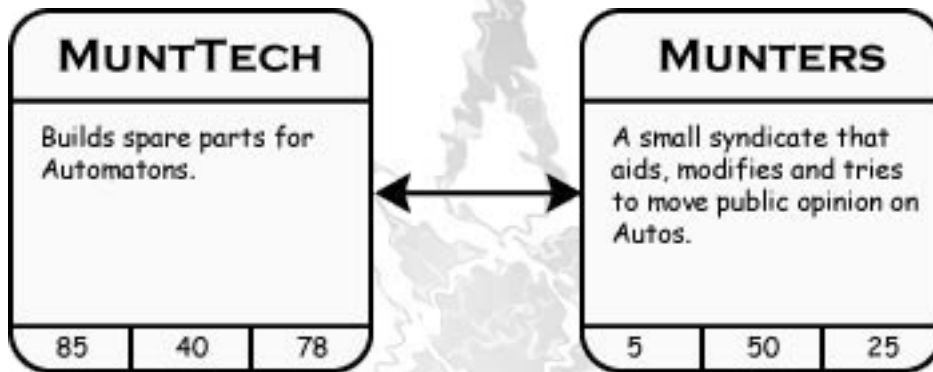
Two arrow heads denote aid or friendship between the two groups.

The other group that needs to be added is The Argiebargies. Although they have no friends as such, they should be listed anyway.

All groups should be added, regardless of how many connections that they have.

Add Foe Links

Once all the groups who are to take part in the campaign are added to the diagram, it is time to add the foe (or enemy) links. These links should only be added with direct enemies. For example, MuntTech and The Argiebargies are only enemies by association. So, by adding a link here would only serve as to add confusion to what was really going on. Foe links are shown by circles on the end of the links.
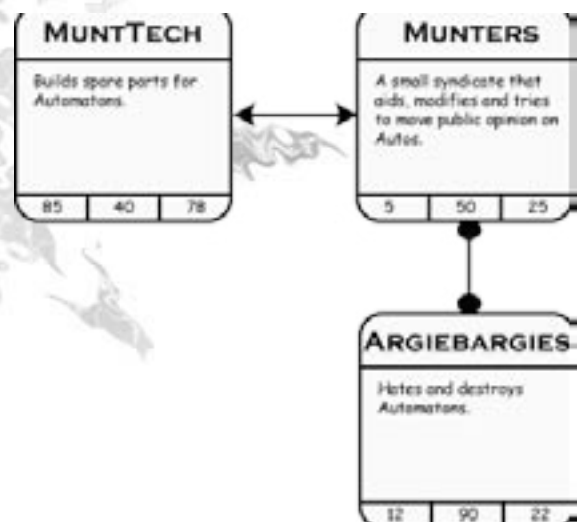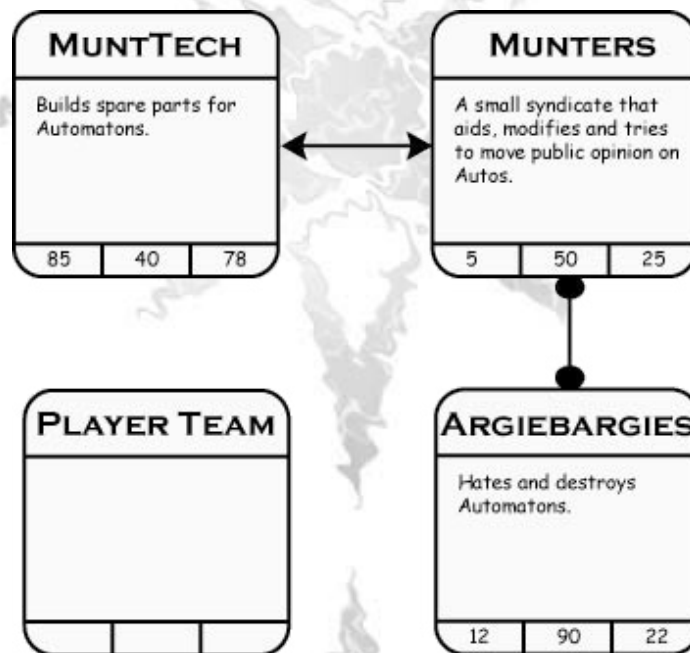
And Finally, the Player Team

Always the last thing to go on is the player team. They should begin unlinked and then add and remove links as applicable. This is so that the GM can see exactly who the players are working for at any particular time and who are out to get them. The player team can be added just as a box on the page with the team name in it.

NOTE: If you are printing out the connection diagrams, it is best to leav the links off and draw them in with a pencil as they do tend to change.

MUNTTECH	MUNTERS
Builds spare parts for Automatons.	A small syndicate that aids, modifies and tries to move public opinion on Autos.
85 | 40 | 78	5 | 50 | 25

PLAYER TEAM	ARGIEBARGIES
	Hates and destroys Automatons.
	12 | 90 | 22

What the Connection Diagram Shows you

What's the point in using something like this? Isn't it easier just to write it out in paragraphs, a more descriptive way of really showing what is going on. Clearly not, as the diagram is showing a great deal more than just 'who hates who'. The Connection Diagram also shows how long a siutation is likely to last. If you have two very powerful syndicates who hate each other, they may go to war. This would be a very public thing to do so thier Reknown would increase. This increase in Reknown may then lead to unwanted Star Enforcer involvement and so on. However, if a powerful syndicate hated a not-so powerful one, the smaller of the two could quite easily be destroyed by the larger. Given the following situation:

The player team could swing the balance, either making The Argiebargies the stronger, defeating the Munters or by giving MuntTech strife so that they would have to withdraw their funding. A good Connection Diagram can show you places where the players do and do not want to tread. It also gives an unbiased view of where everyone stands. This is important as the players will normally get a biased view from Non Player Characters, so it can be difficult, even for the GM to work out what is what.

However, the Connection Diagram is most useful in making Timelines...

Timelines

Timelines (see picture) list events in a chronological order, a representation of how the game world would continue if the player characters had not effected it. A Timeline should be distinguished from a plot line, a plot line is a number of events connected in some way. A Timeline can contain many plot lines. Galactal Timelines are supplied with Icar and show the overall working of the Galaxy through time. Local timelines are created by the GM running the game to show the events in the plots. Before any discussion on Timelines can begin, it important for the reader to understand the background of the Icarian model and why it exists the way it does.

Dynamics

The Icarian model really differs from classical gaming when considering plot line creation. The classical method for creating an adventure is thus:

> i. Have an idea for a plot.
> ii. Split up this plot into a beginning, middle and end.
> iii. Go through each section and break it up into scenes, chapters, encounters or sections.
> iv. For each scene, break down the scene and create detail for that scene (including maps, NPC and so on).
> v. Check that no scene's information conflicts with any other.
> vi. Create a set of random encounters.

This creates what is essentially a linear plot. Although the direction the players take from beginning to end might be different and the outcome is likely to be different, as long as each section has been predecided to occur at some point by the GM, it remains linear. This is the manner in which most GMs go about planning and creating a scenario. However, the Icarian model uses dynamics rather than linearity. The Icarian method for creating an adventure is thus:

> i. Have several ideas for plot lines (either taken from Galactic Timelines or Connection Diagrams).
> ii. Write down a set of events that would happen along these plot lines for the first 10 days, irrespective of the player characters.
> iii. For each plot line, plan how each major event would occur if the player characters did not attend.
> iv. Write all the events onto a local Timeline.

The main difference here is that plot lines will work quite happily if the player characters did not interfere. The player characters will inevitably interfere thus changing the timelines. Events that occur later in the Timelines may not happen in the same way after the player characters interfere with earlier, but this is the joy of dynamics.

Removing Character Dependency

The thinking that the player characters are not the centre of the events in the game world is a counter-intuitive step for a GM to make. If you are not making things for the player characters benefit, then who

are you making them for? An added element of realism is achieved by making NPCs the centre of the story. Of course, if the player characters become important in themselves, then plot lines may be written around them (such as enemeies hunting them down), but there will always be plot lines that do not centre around the player characters. This is effectively removing the dependancy on the characters for the game to work.

Linking

If the Timelines move along without any player character intervening, why should they bother playing at all? Is it not just a story? This is where linking comes in. Linking connects the player characters to the Timeline and thus the plots within it. A link (much like a plot hook, except they can choose to ignore it) can be provided from public news broadcasts, a friend or maybe something they unwittingly get invovled in. Links should occur in batches, giving the players a chance to choose their routes through the timelines. As each day passes, the player characters will see some events (and may even be involved in them) and miss others, only to hear about them in the future. The events are not always labelled for a particular plot line and the players might find themselves running down a dead end chasing an event that had nothing to do with what they are interested in. The personalities of the character should outline the route that they take, not the pre-determined decision of a GM.

Event Skipping

One troubling upshot of this dynamic system is the problem of event skipping. There is a possibility that a carefully planned event that a GM has spent time preparing might be totally missed by the player characters. However, if the event is really monumental, then they will hear about it through rumour or news reports. This can add depth and atmosphere almost to the level of them being there and the GM does not loose the descriptive narrative that had been prepared. This is indeed, a drawback of using dynamics in a game system but it does reinforce to the players that the game world does not revolve around them.

Dynamic Timelines

The timelines are, of course, dynamic. This means that the timelines change over time. A the end of every session, the GM must look through the timelines and make any alterations that may have occured through the actions of the players. For example, if an event involved a Councillor making plans to expand a colony and the player team accidentally murder him before hand then either the event may not occur or the plans may be given out by some other person. The players may not always see the effect they have on the timelines, it is not necessary for them to see what effects they are having.

Introducing the Timeline

You've heard all about these timeline things, but what do they look like? Click here for an example that this page will run through. Below you can see the first day of the timeline. The day number is written

in the middle column (here, appears as a white 1). In the left hand column are listed all the Galactal or Local events. Galactal events are listed with a 'G:'. All local events are listed with an 'L' and then a number. This number represents the plotline that the event belongs to. Each event is listed as a note, normally this is enough for the timeline and more information can be written in a traditional way. In the right-hand column should be written what the players did and any effects they did. This should only be in note form as too much information can confuse.

G: Empress takes a tour of the Lone Systems. L1: Syndicate starts killing council members.	**1**	Character get drunk. Again.
Galactic and local events	The date	All the actions the players did

Dissecting the Example

In the example, there are two plotlines; L1 and L2. L1 involves a syndicate killing off the ruling council of a system. L2 involves a vigilante syndicate trying to stop the council being murdered. These plotlines are linked to each other and can be seen as one, but for ease of use in example, they will be kept separate. Without any player interference, the plotline concludes with the whole council being murdered and the vigilantes either dead or in jail. The Galactic issues just add flavour to the game.

Once the timeline is written, the player characters must be linked to it. This should be done with the Connection Diagrams but can be done (in simple cases like this one) by just placing them on one side of the story. Do the players play as vigilantes or another syndicate? Depending on how they are linked to the story, they may either help the syndicate killing off the council (and thus the end result is probably the same) or help the vigilantes (at which point they are likely to drastically change the timeline). If the players manage to stop one killing and kill off a few of the murdering synidcate, the murdering syndicate may not have enough resources to continue. The repocussions are great and require a little thought.

Building Timelines

So, how are Timelines made? There are several distinct steps to making a Timeline that will be detailed here. Not all steps are necessary, so feel free to avoid any step that appears to be superfluous.

 i. **Research.** This is the simplest step. Read the Galactic Timelines provided and have a look a the Connection Diagrams. Anywhere that looks interesting to you might be a good place to start with plotlines.

 ii. **Brainstorming**. This is where you should write down as many ideas for plotlines as possible. Note which areas of the connection diagram you are using and how they are affected by the plotlines. You might even want to create your own, local, syndicates and link them in with the main plotline.

 iii. **Selection**. Choose between 3 and 8 plotlines that you are going to use. They do not need to be connected in any way.

 iv. **Refinement**. For the plotlines you have chosen, write them out in simple form, a short paragraph about what happens in the story.

 v. **Event Listing**. List all the events in each Timeline. Keep the Timelines separate if you can as it

will make constructing the Timeline easier.

vi. **Stagger Events**. The events do not need to follow each other day by day. Write down how many days gap you want next to each event.

vii. **Add Galactic Events**. The Galactic events tend to be more important than your events, so add them first.

viii. **Add to Timeline**. Take your Timeline sheets and add one of the plotlines to it. Then add another. This should be done in an iterative manner. Any plotlines that interfere with each other should be added together.

ix. **Add Flavour**. Take some random news stories (by looking at a news program) that lead no-where or are inconsequential and add them to the Timeline. This way the players will not know if the event is interesting to them or not.

Each step is quite simple in itself, but becomes more complex with more plotlines. The more plotlines you use, the more complicated the game will be to run. For a beginner, it is wise to start with only three and add more as time and skill allows. ssions are great and require a little thought.

Timelines Hints and Tips

Building Timelines can be quite distressing process if a GM is used to creating just the one plotline. Brainstorming can be a very difficult thing to do under pressure. Here are a few hints and tips that you might find useful when creating timelines.

i. **Keep plotlines simple**. A standard linear plotline normally needs to be as complicated as the players can handle. However, with multiple plotlines, each plotline should be kept relatively simple. The players are following the timeline which is made from many different plotlines. It is unlikely that the players will split up the plotlines how you have done. What tends to happen is that the players will find out a little part of a plotline and then attribute every event to it! So each plotline should be kept simple. This will also allow you to make alterations quicker in the future.

ii. **Space Events Out**. It does take time for players to move about and do actions. Make sure you leave time for them to move about between events. Also, plotlines last longer.

iii. **Recurring Characters**. Often, players remember events more by the people they meet, rather than what happens. The more memorable the character you make, the more chance you'll include the character again.

iv. **Scale the Campaign**. Work out a level you want the characters to work at and try to stick to or near it. If low power characters are involved in a high-power campaign, this can seem daunting when continually faced with seemingly impossible tasks.

v. **Leak Information**. There is not point having a plotline that is completely unfollowable. Leak information to the characters to keep them going. Just because the timelines are written, it doesn't mean they shouldn't be added to.

vii. **Make plotlines by altering real world events**. If there is something you see in the media that interests you, warp it to fit Icar and include it as a plotline in a later timeline. Although your story might be a carbon-copy of the news broadcast, it is very rare that the players make the link between the real world and the roleplaying game.

Tracking

You have the current state of the Galaxy written in Connection Diagrams. You have a description of how the Galaxy changes over time in you Timelines. How is the status of the team detailed? What about the people they meet and the enemies they are likely to make? Tracking takes care of the player side.

Tracking is by far the easiest part of the Icarian model. To track a team, you just need to write down the enemies and the contacts the team makes. In Icar, tracking is done using the Icar Tracking sheet (see right). The Tracking sheet consists of two columns, the Contacts half (on the left) and the enemies half (on the right). Each section is a list of people who are either contacts (and thus, friend) and enemies. The headings of the columns break down thus:

Name
The name of the NPC. This should also include any aliases or nicknames the players know of.

Speciality
For Contacts, this should be the style of information that this contact can provide. The style of information is often related to their job. For example, a Star Enforcer contact might give either syndicate information or Enforcer information. For enemies, this column should be used for which group the enemy belong, either Imperial, corporate or syndicate.

From
This is the location that the Enemy or Contact resides in. There is more chance that an enemy or contact would act if the team are in the same locale as them.

3D
3D is short for The 3 Dice Rule. Here, you write how strong a contact or enemy they are. This value can take on either D12 for strong, D10 for average or D8 for weak. A strong contact would be happy to help the team. A weak contact might require extra persuasion. A strong enemy would stop at nothing to see the death of a team where a weak enemy might just let it pass. When rolling the three dice for an enemy or contact and the dice written in this column is the nearest dice to you, then the enemy or contact will always act. For more information about the three dice rule, see the next section.

The Three Dice Rule

Dice provide randomness within the game. But how can a GM create randomness off-the-cuff. The classical method for creating randomness within a game it by the use of carefully prepared tables with random encounters. However, these often do not provide the depth that a GM requires. When meeting an Non Player Character (NPC), it can be difficult for a GM to repeatedly choose the helpfulness of the NPC. Humans are not, essentially, random creatures, so it would be difficult for a GM to decide upon the stance of NPCs entirely randonly. It is a situations like this where the three dice rule comes in.

The three dice rule uses three dice. The author prefers to use the following:

D8	D18	D12

Baron Method

A notable GM, called James 'Baron' Neesom has devised another method using three D10, one red, one yellow and one green. For the Baron method, the red dice represents the D8, the Yellow the D10 and the green as the D12.

Rolling Dice

The GM rolls a lot of dice during the session. However, it is good technique to keep all rolls secret from the players. This is so that they will not be able to work out anything by what you have rolled. The three dice rule requires the random positioning of the dice, as well as the random values. The dice should be shook in cupped hands before opening the hands down onto the table. The dice should be allowed to land within an area. This is because the three dice rule uses which dice is nearer.

Using the Rule

The rule works like this:

    i. GM privately asks herself a question, such as "Will this NPC is helpful?".
    ii. The GM then rolls the dice, allowing them to land randomly.

iii. The GM then checks to see which is the nearest dice to her. The nearest dice is the result.

iv. The GM then decides on the result based on this, the bigger the nearest dice is, the better the outcome for the players. A D12 is good, A D8 is bad and a D10 can go either way.

This is a quicker system than checking tables as it is easy to see which dice is nearest. If more clarification is required, then the GM may take the number on the nearest dice as a hint.

Three Dice Rule Examples

Assume for all these examples that the top of the page is nearest the GM.

Situation: Players are confronted with an unknown NPC. The GM is unsure about how the NPC will react. The GM asks herself "How will the NPC react?". The GM then rolls the three dice, the outcome is:

D12

D8

D10

Therefore, the D12 is nearest the GM. And the NPC is kind to the players.

Situation: The players have bought some suspicious ammo and they are not sure whether it will work. Upon testing the ammo, the GM asks herself "Is the ammo any good?". The GM then rolls the dice, the outcome is:

D8

D10

D12

In this case, the D8 is closest to the GM, so the ammo is unlikely to be any good. If the GM needed a neasure of how bad the ammo is, she could take the number on the D8. High numbers are always better for the players.

Epilogue

Icar in its entirity is not an easy game to run or play. Plots are rarely linear or easily predicted, tracking allows villains and contacts to reccur later in the game, even if the part they played was very small. The Strings gives the budding Icar GM all the tools required for running a complex game for mature players. I would have included a section on 'How to Run a Maximum Death Session', but it requires little talent to run one of these as the task is often linear and the enemies predictable.

There is no right or wrong way to GM a game, there are just many different styles for different players. This preference keeps the hobby alive. If you have tried running a game in this manner and the players get horribly lost, then try another style, of which there are many across the internet.

For the new GM, perseverance is the watch word. Quite often, the players will miss the point or not do as you might guess they will. In this case, rejoice in the non-linearity of the game and continue to weave the tale around the team within a huge Galaxy. They will enjoy the game more and you will get a sense of satisfaction from being able to apply ad-lib while remaining consistent for future games.