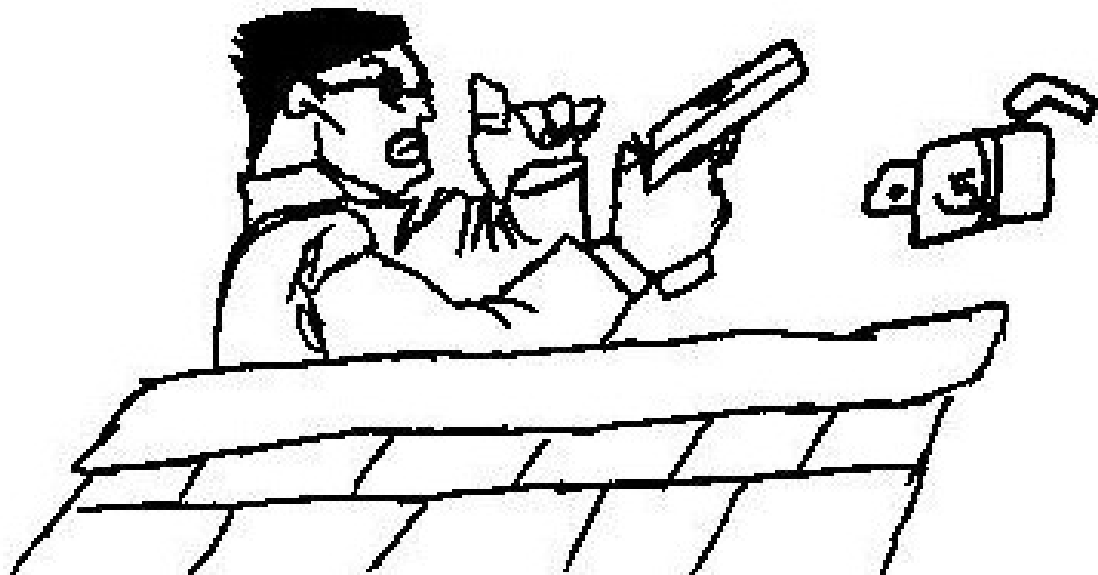




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INTRODUCTION

PCSIK is something unique in today's Roleplaying market. It is an incomplete game system, designed to wrap around your group's own style, allowing you to play as you want. Whether tactical or freeform, PCSIK helps both Player and Director alike think about their games in a different way, allowing them to build the system they want, which is as flexible as they need.

This core module is all you need to play using the PCSIK system. Your group provides the main content of the game, as you create your own abilities, items, and skills for the characters and locations in your game. Whether Sci-Fi, Fantasy, or Modern, PCSIK's simplistic approach makes the task of defining your game's environment easy.

The Core Module

The PCSIK Core Module defines the fundamental components of the PCSIK system. It details how characters are defined, without defining the characters for you. It explains the basic elements of game play, all the while allowing you to select which components of the system you want. It also includes a brief description of common genres, along with hints and suggestions of incorporating common themes into your games.

The Core Module does not contain any specific details beyond the examples. The actual content of the system is left to the group to define, as they need. Characters are created from the concept upwards, and theme overrides rules.

You can create a diabolical fire mage, a fearless space ace, or a cynical private eye, all with the same simple system. Once the concept is complete, players and directors can then add as much rules as they feel they need - they can define what powers the mage has, the weapons of the space ace, and the private eye's skills - along with just how they work. Scenes are created to define the hazards and obstacles the characters' face, and how they can be interacted with - using brief examples or adding simple rules. These definitions can be changed during play - to more faithfully reflect the actions of the group.

Even the mechanics of the system are flexible - the group can use as much or as little of the system as they wish. While full tactical rules are given for determining actions and success, the group can use only the parts they want, depending on their style. Even the reward system follows this approach - there are full rules for rewarding characters based on events, but the Director can ad-hoc rewards as they see fit.

Expansion Modules

Not everyone feels comfortable creating their own game from scratch, and with this in mind, the Core Module will be followed up by several Expansion Modules. These modules expand upon the basic PCSIK system, as well as providing concrete examples to add

to your games. However, they remain true to the philosophies of the PCSIK Core Module, and as such will be presented in a way that allows players to choose which expansions they wish to use for their games. They will often provide different methods of incorporating themes and ideas, which are not always mutually exclusive, along with templates and packages that speed up character creation and scene design.

Conversion Modules

Everybody has their favourite settings and universes, and they always want to play their favourite characters in their games. PCSIK will be supported extensively via the Internet, and one of the main areas will be Conversion Modules. Like Expansion Modules, Conversion Modules will revolve around incorporating some of the more popular settings to PCSIK, for use in your games. Whether it is a specific type of ability, character templates, or famous scenes, you will probably find something of interest on the PCSIK web site.

The Future

Fundamentally, PCSIK is your system, to help you create your game. Therefore, your feedback is highly valued. The sheer amount of Conversion Modules possible, means that the PCSIK team could go for years without covering what you, the fans, want to see. That is not including the Expansion Modules that can be covered as well.

Therefore, what do you want to see from PCSIK, and why? Do you have an idea that you want to share with other PCSIK players? Whether a simple character template, a home-brewed ability or three, or a custom scenario, we want to hear about it.

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CHARACTERS

Characters are an important part of any system, regardless of genre, game play, or even budget. Without characters, there is no game, and without a game, there is no system. Whether Player Characters, NPCs, Minions, or Extras, all characters are created the same way. All characters are created by spending story Points in four main areas - Statistics, Abilities, Skills and Items.

Before spending any Story Points, it is always good to have a concept. Such concepts can be simple Archetypes, such as the Reckless Space Jockey, or Diabolical Arch-Mage, or fully developed characters with their own persona, backgrounds, and mannerisms. It is important to note that

the PCSIK System is not just a role-playing game. It allows for a wide range of gaming styles. While free-form role-playing is on one end of the spectrum, it can also deal with Table-top Skirmish games, and even go on to handle war-games. Characters are created the same way regardless, but for strategic game play, less actual character detail is required. Therefore, the rules are simplistic enough so that player can handle up to 100+ characters.

Statistics

There are five Statistics - Power, Coordination, Speed, Intellect, and Karma. All Statistics are bought on a one for one basis, because they are the easiest to lose, and therefore the easiest to replace. This is because all damage is tied directly to statistics - different attacks damage different statistics. There is no upper limit to statistics, even after you have created your character. You can increase your statistics above your starting scores in scenes, by using "healing" abilities and similar statistic increasing effects. "Buffs" are treated slightly differently, and detailed later.

Since Statistics receive damage directly, the more damage you suffer, the harder it is to fight back. As you get weaker, you will miss more shots, miscast more spells, and generally run out



of luck. However, statistics are the easiest to replace between scenes, and only the most evil Director will rule that characters cannot replenish Statistics between scenes. In fact, if a Director does consider this, then they might be better staging the two scenes as a single scene instead.

Power

Power is a representation of the character's strength, constitution, health, muscle, physical power, and so on. The most important feature of Power is that directly relates to the character's health, and if it reaches zero, they die.

Coordination

Coordination is a measure of the characters agility, dexterity, and natural skill. It covers hand-eye coordination, and as such is used to determine whether the character hits in combat - ranged or melee. It is rare for Coordination to take damage, but it is possible. When it reaches zero, the character is incapacitated - unable to do anything more complex than breathing.

Speed

Speed is the character's speed, reflexes, and reaction. It is used to determine the character's initiative in combat, as well as ability to dodge. Unlike most games, characters do not have a set movement rate, because all action is encased within scenes. Instead, a Speed check is usually required to complete movement, depending upon the circumstances - such as enemy fire, long distances, or difficult ground. Speed can be damaged, usually by "stun" effects. When Speed reaches 0, the character is stunned and unable to move or act.

Intellect

Intellect covers the character's intelligence, wisdom, logic, willpower, and mental prowess. It is a direct relation to the character's inner energies, and is often spent when using "magical" abilities or effects. It can also be damaged by attacks that deal subdual or bashing damage. When Intellect reaches zero, the character is knocked unconscious.

Karma

Karma represents the character's luck, fate, divine essence, and so on. In addition, by extension, this ability covers the character's social graces, leadership ability, general charisma, and attractiveness. Karma has the unique trait that it can be spent to temporarily increase one of the other statistics. Unlike other statistics, there is no penalty for a Karma of zero - you just cannot spend points, and have minimal chance of passing Karma checks without any Skills.

Skills

Skills are simply modifiers to specified checks - positive or negative. When a character makes an applicable check, the modifier is applied to the character's relevant statistic to determine

success or failure. For example, Rifles +3 would add 3 to the character's Coordination when using a Rifle. Running -2 would subtract 2 from the character's Speed when running. Skills themselves can be as broad or as specialised as the character wishes. For example, as well as normal skills - like Firearms, Computing, Archery, Swimming, and so on - you can take skills as broad as Combat, Magic, Power, Karma, or even Skill and Abilities. On the other hand, you can take skills as specialised as Shotguns, Longbows, Daedric Katanas, or AK47 Assault Rifles. This specialisation can even go down as far as named variants of skills - "Road-Kill" Stinger Missile Launcher, for example, would affect checks when using a Stinger Missile Launcher named "Road-Kill". As always, the Director may choose to disallow certain skills in order to promote the genre and game play of the scene. The rule is that if any skill is applicable to the check, it can be used. The Director gets to judge on what applicable means - Someone with skill in Axes means they can use Axes, not axe-like weapons that are not classified as axes - like heavy swords and similar items. There is no limit to how many skills can apply - in combat, or tense situations, you can easily be making checks for 4d10 or higher - that's a range of 4-40, so the total statistic and skill must be 41 or higher before you don't need to roll. Skills only apply to statistics for Checks, and therefore are not included for general statistic calculations for damage and similar. A character with Power +3 only makes Power Checks as if they had 3 more Power, but still die at the same time as a character with matching Power and no Power skill. Likewise, a character with Power -3 would make checks as if they were three power points lower, but would not die if they only have 3 points of Power left.

Buying Skills

Skills are bought with Story Points, like every other part of character creation. They start at zero, which represents no skill, and can be bought up or bought down, even below zero. Skills can only be bought up or down one rank at a time, but there is no limit to the maximum amount of ranks bought between scenes. Buying a skill up costs an amount of SP equal to the new modifier, while buying it down gives the character SP equal to the new modifier. For negative numbers, use the previous modifier, and treat it as if it was positive to work our SP costs and gains. For example, buying up from +2 to +3 costs 3 SP. Buying up from -2 to -1 costs 2 SP. Buying down from +3 to +2 gives 2 SP, and buying down from -1 to -2 gives 1 SP.

It is more cost effective to buy multiple low level skills, than a few high level skills. The offset to this is that not all of the low-level skills will be applicable in every situation. For example, Firearms +3 costs 6 SP, while Firearms +2 and Pistols +1 costs 6 SP. However, should the second character use a firearm other than a Pistol, he only gains the +2 bonus. Firearms +1, Pistol +1, Walther PPK (a type of pistol) +1 costs only 3 SP, but

only gains the +2 bonus if he uses a pistol other than a Walther PPK, and only +1 if he uses anything other than a Pistol. Generally, broader skills are more cost-effective than specialized ones.

While it is cheaper to buy statistics than skills (5 points of Power costs 5 Points, while Power +5 costs 15 SP), it is a lot easier to lose statistics than skills.

The Uber-Skill

The most valuable Skill is undoubtedly the broad Uber-Skill, also known as the Skills Skill. It is literally a bonus that is added any time you make a Check of any type. This is good for characters that are simply better or luckier than others are. It also helps create the Action Genre feel, since only Player Characters and special characters are likely to have this skill.

Abilities

An Ability is something special that the character can do. It does not matter if it is a special martial arts move, a spell, or the ability to fly. It can be an attack, a defence, a weakness, or anything. The only limit to an ability is that it should not be a Statistic or Skill, but it can modify Statistics and Skills. This flexible approach means characters can have a wide range of Abilities to suit their concept. Mages can have unique spells, martial artists can have unique attacks, and mutants can have a wide variety of physical adaptations and abilities.

Since every character is unique, every ability should also be treated as unique, although many will become routine for the setting you are playing in. Whether there is only one Birdman, with Wings that allow them to fly, or an entire species is something that is not down to the rules to decide. Each such Birdman might adjust their abilities, becoming better or worse flyers, or may even decide not to take the ability to fly at all.

The sheer range of abilities available means that even though many are similar, there can be no comprehensive list without losing the flexibility. If you want to fly, shoot metal fists, or summon ancient demons, you can - as long as you, the group, and the Director all agree such an ability is viable. The design of a character's abilities is an act of creativity in its own right - these will define your character more than anything else ever will.

Abilities cost Story Points to acquire. However, unlike Statistics or Skills, most Abilities also have a cost when used - a cost that equates, directly and indirectly to more Story Points. Such costs might be the loss of the Ability, a Statistic loss, or a reduction in Story Points gained during the Scene.

In all cases, the cost of such abilities should always exceed any benefit gained from using them. It should cost more to use a healing item or ability than the benefit of healing itself. The cost of using an attack item or ability should be more than the damage caused, in any form. This provides both protection from

abuse when using items and abilities, and provides yet another reason to try to achieve the objectives in each scene.

Types of Ability

Attacks

Without an Attack Ability, a character cannot make any form of attack, even unarmed attacks. This is because the balance provided by spells and weapons over unarmed attacks does not exist in the PCSIK System. If you are willing to pay for it, an unarmed punch can do exactly the same things as a Fireball Spell.

This is because the system does not concern itself with justifications - that is down to the character's creator. The PCSIK system is capable of running many different genres, and shooting giant fists, or fireballs, is entire dependant upon the genre.

Examples of such Abilities include: Adamantium Claws, Martial Arts Manoeuvres and Styles, and Direct Damage Spells.

Healing

There is no natural healing as such. Instead, each character can spend Story Points to top-up their damaged statistics at the end of each scene. Healing Abilities and Items bring this process forward, so you can top up damaged statistics during a scene. This allows the afflicted character to last longer and possibly not die. Some abilities may even bring the character back from the dead, healing such characters from scores of zero.

Due to the way the process works, healing effects are not just limited to health. They can top up and restore any of the character's Statistics - Speed, Intellect, or even Karma!

Examples include Healing Spells and Life-Stealing Attacks.

Defence

Third most common type of ability is the defence ability - anything that provides a defence against attacks. Such defence might be passive or active, and use either negation or damage reduction. They can be universal, or limited to one or more types of attack.

Another type of defence are damage reallocation effects - effects which turn one type of damage to another type of damage. For example, it might turn lethal damage, which damages Power, into Energy damage, which affects Intellect.

Examples include: Resistance Auras, Damage Reduction, and Spell Turning.

Bufs

This type of effect alters the target's ability to do stuff, most commonly by altering their Skills. Another option is to alter their Abilities. High-powered buff-like effects might even make such changes permanent.

Examples include Strength Spells, Weakness, and Power Stealing.

Utilities

The last type of effect is the utility, and covers any other type of effect that helps or hinders the user. They range from movement-based effects, such as flight and teleportation, to summoning spells that bring creatures and items into play. They might also include divination abilities, shape changing, illusions, or anything else the character can do. Examples include: Illusions, Levitation, Summon Creature, and Shape changing.

Designing Abilities

Here are the set of guidelines to Ability costs:

Stage 0 - Concept

Have a concept of how the ability will work. What effects you are using and what the limitations are.

Stage 1 - Effects

Work out the starting cost of each effect. To do this, take suitable starting number. Common bases are:

- **Percentages:** 1 SP per percentage.
- **Fractions:** Convert to Percentages.
- **Statistics:** 1 SP per Point.
- **Skills:** Work out total cost using rules for Skills.
- **+1 Base Dice:** 10 Points.
- **+1 Dice Difficulty:** 30 Points.
- **Variable Range:** (Minimum + Maximum Range) / 2 (so 1d4+2 = (3+6)/2 = 9/2 = 4.5).

Negative effects are allowed, and should be totalled as costing negative points. Negative effects are reductions and penalties to you, or bonuses and increases to your enemy. If an effect can target both you and your enemy, it counts as a positive effect.

For example - An effect that does 2 Dice Damage costs 20 Points if it affects your enemy and -20 Points if it affects you or your allies. It costs 20 SP if it can target anybody.

Alternative Costs, such as requiring Intellect or forgoing SP all count as negative effects, regardless of the Abilities target.

You may choose to link affects together, so that the scores for one affect the scores for another. For example, if you have life-draining attack ability, you may choose to have the healing effect linked to the damage affect, so that the character heals the same amount as the damage they cause. However, all linked abilities must have the same type of numerical value - all must be Dice, Percentages, Ranges of the same type, and of the same amount.

All effects only affect one target. If you wish to affect more targets, you must add multiple copies of the effects. For example, an ability that deals 1 dice damage to three targets requires three attack abilities that deal 1 dice damage to the target. With multiple copies of an ability, you may combine them into a single value when working out linking effects. For example, you could

have the above attack linked to a 3 dice healing effect; so all three dice of damage count to determine the healing. For area effects, you must take one copy for every 50 square feet (equivalent to one person) the effect covers, beyond the first target. All damage from area attacks is spread out against all affected characters.

Stage 2 - Base Cost

Having worked out the starting cost of each effect, take the highest costing effect as Primary, and the rest as secondary. You may choose in the case of ties. All secondary effects have their costs reduced by half.

This means that all negative affects only award half of their positive value, so you need two negative effects equivalent to the positive effect to reduce the cost to zero.

Once you have done this, you will have the abilities base cost.

Stage 3 - Limitations

Work out what Limitations apply to the ability. A limitation is anything that limits the effect in some way. For example, if it only works on a specific type of target, is limited to self or touch to work, has a duration, requires a check to work, only works in specific conditions, or has limited uses per scene. Each such limitation reduces the cost by 1/2.

These limitations assume the limit reduces the effect to the lowest possible - so a Duration Limitation lasts only 1 round, Usage Limitation has only 1 use per scene, Specific Condition usage as only one specific condition - like Fire only. If a limitation has a wider scope than this - for example, if a Duration lasts 4 rounds instead of 1, then the reduction must be divided by the number of on additional conditions, usages, or rounds. Therefore, the reduction of the above example would be 1/2 divided by 4 = 1/8.

Subtract each of these reductions from 1, to get the final reduction for that limitation. Thus $1 - (1/8) = 7/8$.

Once you have the limitations worked out, multiply them all together, to get a single fraction. This is your base reduction.

Stage 4 - Total Cost

Once you have worked out your base cost and your base fraction, multiply these together to get your Total Cost. Round that score up to the nearest SP, and your ability is good to go.

Items

Items are portable Abilities. Therefore, to design an item, use the same guidelines with Abilities. There are however, some important differences between the two. Items are portable, and can usually be used by any character that carries it. That means you can give them to your allies, or they can be stolen from enemies. They are usually far more common, and see far more usage. This portability is such that even if one character dies, the ability

can still be used. Because of this, all Items cost twice as much as an equivalent ability. This is balanced by the fact that Items can be limited in use to certain types of character - such as those with a specific ability or skill.

Ammunition and Disposable Items

Items with a limited number of uses can be given the limitation that they are lost and must be retaken, instead of not being available for the rest of the scene. This makes such disposable items cheaper, and thus more common - most characters are more likely to carry disposable items than permanent artefacts. This limitation may also be taken for Abilities, though this is extremely rare, and should be reserved for temporary blessings and curses.

A variant of this limitation is the requirement of Ammunition. Once the item is out of uses, the character must obtain Ammunition for the Item. Ammunition costs 1/2 of the SP cost of the Item that requires it, and allows that item a full set of uses. Abilities may also require Ammunition, just like Items can.

For example, a firearm with eight uses, at a total cost of 20 SP, can be used eight times. Then the character must obtain a unit of Ammunition at 10 SP. This allows the firearm 8 more uses.

Usually Ammunition has no other effects. However, if it does, then design the item as normal, but include the Ammunition as a positive effect. If Ammunition has other effects, then the item can be used either as Ammunition, or for its other effect - not both.

For example, A Grenade Launcher might cost 50 SP and have one use before requiring more Ammunition - Grenades - at a cost of 25 SP per unit. If the grenades can also be used on their own, as an attack item maybe, then the Ammunition Effect (costing 25 SP) is counted as a positive effect for working out the cost of the Grenade.

Besides statistics, the most common use of Story Points is the replacement of items and abilities. Characters will always need more medical Supplies, Ammunition, Spell Scrolls, and a host of other Items. They may need to replace spell components and perform a host of other maintenance tasks for their items and abilities.

An Item or Ability may be allowed both Ammunition and Disposable limitations, but only if they have more than a single use. Such items can be recharged, but only if they contain more than one use when they are recharged.

Standard Characters

The standard character is created from 100 Story Points. These Story Points are used to cover all four aspects of characters, but the standard ratio is 50% spent on Statistics, and the rest on Abilities, Skills and Equipment. Depending upon your character, you may wish to keep up to 15% for later use. NPCs have a similar ratio, though they tend to lack any SP for after use.

Using the average of 50% from the 100 SP all standard characters are created with, gives 50 SP on statistics alone, which works out to an average of 10 in each statistic. While you only need 1 point in each statistic, such a tactic would make your character extremely vulnerable. The minimum score for each statistic is 0 - and in most cases, any score reaching 0 means the character is incapacitated until that statistic is restored to at least one point.

Packages

A quick and easy way to create and advance characters is to use a package. A package is a collection of Statistics, Skills, Abilities, and Items that has been designed and calculated for quick use. Such packages usually revolve around a special theme for the character, such as a specific method of spell casting, a special race, or a specific archetype of character. These packages may be general in scope, or they may be specific to a campaign setting or genre.

Using Packages

To use a package, you simply pay the cost of the package and take all the relevant Statistics, Skills, Abilities, and Items, and apply them to your character. Packages should be taken first and used as a basis for your character. You can then add or remove individual components of the package using the standard rules for character generation and advancement.

Combining Packages

It is possible to combine two or more packages to create a character. In most cases, you can simply pay the cost of the second package, and add the components directly to your character. You may still add or remove components from the secondary package, using the standard rules, as if it was your first package. The different components of the packages combine as follows:

Statistic Packages

A Statistic Package is generally a collection of Statistics that determine the base values of characters using the Package. Although it is uncommon to combine multiple Statistics Packages, it is possible, and can be done quite easily. Since all Statistic Packages use a default value of 10 as the average value, it is recommended that you remove 10 Points from each Statistic, and remove 10 Points from the cost of the package for each Statistic (usually 50 if it only contains the 5 Core Statistics). It is possible to take secondary Statistics Packages that cost less than 0 SP. It is also possible to reduce Statistics to less than 0 Points through packages, though additional SP would have to be spent to increase these abilities above 0, in order to make the character playable.

Skill Packages

A Skill Package is generally a set of skills that help define what the character is good at doing. These packages can provide a range of skills, representing broad knowledge of character archetypes, or can represent more powerful specialist training. Due to the way the cost for Skills are calculated, the costs given in Skill Packages are given as if the skills are taken by a character who has 0 Points in those skills. If the character already has some of the Skills in the Package, then the cost for these Skills should be recalculated as if that character was acquiring them normally. Directors should take heed of what skills represent in packages, especially those from converted material. Some skills may have different names in various Skill Packages, yet essentially be the same skill. It may also be that Skills with the same name are different skills. While the Director is advised to use his judgement on this issue, he would be wise to consider the following point when making his decision: If the bonuses from the two skills stack in every situation, then they are likely to be the same skill.

Ability Packages

Ability Packages are collections of Abilities that combine to define the character in some way. Abilities in multiple packages can be stacked freely, since most Abilities are independent of others. The Director may allow certain Abilities to be combined or linked, though these should be recalculated to determine their new cost, which replaces that given in the package.

Item Packages

Item Packages are collections of Items, and often represent the default equipment or gear a character taking the package might have. Item Packages can be combined freely, since all Items are independent of each other. Items may be customised, and combined, and should be recalculated to determine their new cost, just as with Abilities above.

This section covers the various aspects of gameplay involved with PCSIK, including conflict resolution, experience awards, and scenes. A majority of the gameplay would have been designed at the time of character creation, however, and as long as the players agree on and remain consistent with their definitions and rulings, much of this section are merely guidelines.

GAMEPLAY

Checks

The actual mechanics of the PCSIK System are quite simple. Everything is based around the Check, a roll to see whether an action succeeds or fails. To make a successful check, the player must roll a number of D10 and get the result below the combined total of the relevant Statistic and applicable Skills.

The number of D10 is dependant upon the difficulty of the action. A normal action, such as hitting someone in combat, or opening a locked or stuck door is 2D10. Easy actions, such as running across an open room, is 1D10, while Harder Actions, such as Jumping onto a moving train from a speeding car requires 3 or more D10.

Since you have to roll equal or under the relevant statistic to pass, a character with an average score of 10 and no skill or modifiers will pass the standard check for any normal action just under half of the time.

Checks can go only as low as 1d10, but can go infinitely high, some virtually impossible checks can require rolls for 10D10 or even higher. In combat against prepared foes, characters can routinely be rolling 3-5 dice for their check to hit their opponents.

There are no opposed rolls - if someone is actively dodging your attacks, or is wearing protective armour, or performing an opposing action, then the difficulty of the check increases by one dice. Circumstantial modifiers, such as good or bad conditions can also increase or decrease the difficulty of the check.

Checks determine whether the action succeeds or not, but does not determine how much. A successful attack hits, and deals applicable damage depending upon the attack, not on how well they passed the check. Likewise, successful checks for unlocking a door, or running across a room while under fire mean that they unlock the door, or reach their destination.

The reverse is not quite true however, depending upon the check. A failed check to open a door means the door remains closed. However, a failed check to jump over a table while under fire could have them succeed, but are injured, fail the jump, fall over or worse.

Critical Results

Any roll of a double counts as a Critical. However, whether it is a critical success or a critical failure is determined by whether the check is a success or failure. This means critical results are more likely when performing difficult actions, but they are more likely to be failures. Easy tasks with only a 1d10 roll have no chance to be a critical - when skill replaces luck; critical hits go out of the window.

Critical results are generally the best or worse outcome possible for the situation. A Critical Success for an attack could result in Maximum Damage, while a Critical Failure might result in damage

to the attacker, losing the attack, or attacking another, friendly target.

With checks and critical results, the Director determines what the results are, as defined by the situation and the scene.

Actions

Scenes are broken down into rounds. Each round, a character gets to take a single action, which is roughly a few seconds long. Longer actions, such as hacking into a computer or disabling a complex trap, take multiple rounds to complete. Sometimes a single check is required at the end of the action, others a check is required each round.

Rounds are generally only important in tense situations like combat, so are less rigidly enforced once such situations are over. However, if there is a time limit, rounds may still be enforced, even if the characters are the only active participants in the scene.

Actions consist of a single attack, or actions similar in length, like opening an unlocked door, ducking behind cover, drinking a potion, picking up a weapon, or pulling a tool kit out of a backpack.

Initiative

In tense situations, the order the character react in is important. Faster characters can react earlier, but do not get to see what others are doing. Initiative determined similar to a normal check, but the result is taken away from the character's Speed and applicable skills. The total then determines when they act in the turn. This means that naturally fast characters tend to go before slow characters, even if slow characters get really good rolls. When determining initiative, critical successes mean that the character doubles their total score, while critical failures mean that they halve it.

Reactions

All characters are assumed to be putting up as much resistance as they can while still being able to take their action. Combatants dodge attacks while they perform their actions and through the rest of the round, guards watch for threats while moving, and so on.

However, a character may actively dodge, resist, or watch, forgoing their action in a round to increase the difficulty of anyone performing resisted actions. Such resistance increases the difficulty of any check by +1 difficulty die. A character watching an area causes anyone sneaking through the area to make their check at one extra difficulty dice. Likewise, dodging characters do the same to incoming attacks, and characters can brace themselves against hostile effects such as knockdowns, mind control, or fire.

Movement and Range

Range is not an issue in scenes. If a character has a ranged attack, and can see their opponent, they can attempt to attack

them. However, such attacks often have penalties if the distance is extreme, or intervening cover is in the way. A failed range attack can mean that the target was missed, cover was hit, or that the attack failed to reach the target.

In a similar vein, movement distance is not an issue either. If a character wants to get across a room, they can run. If they want to get across a football field in a round, they simply run faster. However, movement counts as an action, and a check must be made when making a move of any sort. The difficulty depends upon the distance, and the situation the movement is made in - rough ground, obstacles, armour worn, enemy fire, and strong wind can all increase the difficulty for movement checks. Success means that the character made the movement unharmed, while failure means that the character could have been harmed by debris, trips over, or simply not reach the required destination (they simply didn't run fast enough).

This is particularly important in chase scenes, where the pursuer wishes to move across the scene to catch up with a fleeing target - the difficulty for this action would be dependant upon the distance, the terrain, obstacles, and the fleeing pursuer's actions.

Since Movement counts as an action, usually a character just moves to his destination and ends his round. This is particularly the case if the character wishes to do something to a non-moving target, like open a locked door, or revive a fallen comrade. The character is still assumed to be dodging and taking cover from attacks, but not actively doing so.

Talking and Conversations

Like moving, talking also counts as an action. In extremely tense conversations, it may be important to measure the amount of time an order or conversation takes, or whether someone understands an order correctly in time.

When speaking, a character must make a check to see if they are successful - if they fail, they are not understood, the background noise is too loud, or they confuse their words. If the character is speaking normally, then this is usually an easy (1d10) check.

Normal speech allows the character to say a single sentence per round. If the character speaks faster, the difficulty is increased by one die for every additional sentence spoken.

Multiple Actions

However, particularly in chase scenes, characters may want to perform another second action. They might want to attack or tackle someone they pass or reach, or they might want to actively get behind cover, or press a button. This is particularly the case in high-action games, and in chase scenes - scenes where time is critical, and or the target is likely to move out of reach on their turn.

In these situations, characters must make all the required checks at a +1 die difficulty. Any combined actions must be stated

beforehand - the character cannot declare the movement, and then declare a second action after moving.

The Director may allow other actions to be combined if they deem them suitable for the situation - tripping and tying an attacker up,

driving and shooting, and so on. No more than two actions should be allowed per round, and the actions must be able to logically follow each other without interruption.

For example, a character might set up an explosive device and sprint away before it detonates at the end of the round. Alternatively, the character might be able to sprint to an explosive device and attempt to defuse it before it explodes.

However, the character must have the required tools to hand - diving to a door, fishing out a lock pick, and unlocking the door counts as three actions. Likewise, Drawing a sword, moving towards an enemy and attacking, counts as three actions.



Story Point Awards

After a scene, the characters involved are awarded Story Points depending upon what occurred during the scene. The characters have this opportunity to spend these SP on restoring / increasing their current statistics, replacing / adding new items, or gaining new skills and abilities. These options are handled exactly the same way as character creation. As always, the Director has the option of restricting certain options depending upon the story.

Story Points are gained in one of three ways, as described below.

Loss Awards

The first type of Story Point Award is the Loss Award. Every time a character loses a portion of their resources, they gain Story Points to compensate.

Resources include statistic taken through damage or as costs for abilities and items. They also include Items that are used, lost, destroyed, or stolen. In the rare event that an Ability or Skill is lost, these too gain SP.

Loss Awards are only awarded if the specific resource is lost permanently, and are equal to 25% of the cost of the resource lost.

For example, if a character takes 8 lethal damage (a Statistic Loss) then they gain 2 SP. If a character uses a healing Item that costs 20 SP (an Item Loss) then they gain 5 SP.

If you remember the Morrowind Conversion demonstrations, you may recall that we created several resistances and Weaknesses for those races as part of their abilities, each with a modifier to SP gained.

These modifiers apply directly to the total SP gained. For example, if a character with a Weakness to Fire ability, that causes all fire attacks to cause 25% extra damage, but the character gains 25% extra SP, takes 20 points of fire damage it works out as follows:

- a) 20×1.25 (additional 25% damage) = 25 Damage.
- b) 25×0.25 (25% Loss Award) = 6.25 Story Points.
- c) 6.25×1.25 (additional 25% Story Point Award) = 7.8125 SP = 8 SP.

This is 3 SP more than the 5 (20×0.25) SP that would have been gained without this ability.

Likewise, with the alternative ability (Only takes 75% Fire Damage for 75% of the total SP) the character would have received.

- a) 20×0.75 (only suffers 75% damage) = 15 Damage.
- b) 15×0.25 (25% Loss Award) = 3.75 SP.
- c) 3.75×0.75 (Only receives 75% SP) = 2.8125 SP = 3 SP.

This is 2 SP less than the 5 that would have been gained from this attack.

Gains Awards

The second type of Story Point Award is the Gains Award. Whenever a character gains something, and keeps it intact until the end of the scene, they may opt to exchange the Item, Ability, or whatever for its full value in Story Points.

This is strictly an either/or award - the character may wither keep whatever they gained for future scenes, or they may gain its full value in SP.

The Director determines what counts as a gain, and what can be carried over to future scenes, dependant upon the story, setting, and genre.

Objective Awards

Objective Awards are discretionary awards given out whenever the character achieves and objective in the scene. These objectives can be anything, and depend almost entirely upon the context of the scene within the current story, setting, and genre.

There are few guidelines for objective awards, except that they should be relevant to the difficulty in obtaining that objective. The total Objective Awards for a single scene should be no more than 125% of the entire loss to the party in accomplishing those objectives. This is independent of the relevant Loss Awards.

Awarding Story Points

Loss and Gain Awards should be awarded to the character that suffers the loss or the gain. Objective Awards should be awarded to every character that assisted in achieving the objective, and should be split amongst the party equally.

Calculating SP awards can be tricky, especially at first, and should not be done in game, but at the end of each scene. The Director should note down which characters received which awards, along with relevant details needed for the calculations.

It is important to note that characters do not gain SP from attacking or causing damage, unless the attack uses resources or attacking the target is an objective, though SP awards for suffering damage in combat occur as normal.

Scenes

The fundamental building blocks of any PCSIK adventure are Scenes. They are little chunks of plot, which tell the story of the adventure, and the character's within it.

A Scene is hard to describe, since it can literally be anything: A single Location, a single Encounter, or a single Event. It can be combinations of these, like multiple locations in a single area, a group of encounters, or a single encounter combined with a single event.

One thing defines a Scene - it is a chunk of action, at the end of which, the character receives their Story Points for interaction, and can spend them to recuperate and advance.

Very clinical, I know, but like the rest of the system, the Scene's power is more the potential it contains: It can be:

- A fight in a smoky pool hall.
- A motorcycle chase through Manhattan.
- A demon prince's planar abode.
- A city that 'just happens' to be the next target of a misfiring orbital Earthquake device.

These all contain varying amounts of adventure potential - an empty planar habitat is about as exciting as watching paint dry, unless there are other hazards to contend with.

The importance of the Scene cannot be emphasised enough though. Where character creation is the process of defining the characters in the world, Scene Design is the process of defining the environment within which the characters interact.

A fight with an Ice Dragon Queen might be exciting, but it is more so if it is set in a cavern complex set in an ancient glacier. Swashbuckling with pirates might be fun, but it is even better if set upon the deck of a sinking ship.

However, the Scene is more than just the atmosphere of the environment. It can, and should, contain elements with which the characters can directly interact. A glacial cavern might be atmospherically appropriate for a fight with an Ice Dragon, but it would be more appropriate if there were numerous sharp icicles, threatening to impale characters thrown onto them, or to drop in the event of powerful explosive magic.

No B-rated Zombie-Flick would complete without a fight in an abandoned shopping mall. But if the character's can break into that tool shop, and crank up that chainsaw, or raid the gun store for a shotgun and shells, then the action becomes all that much

more fun. Remember that not just player character's should benefit from the scene though - the Zombies can throw characters through the plate glass windows of the store fronts, and a few might even blindly pick up a hockey stick, or tire iron to fight with. Scenes are not just static locations however. At its core, a Scene is a chunk of plot, and as such can revolve around an event or situation, like a Car Chase or a Hostage Situation. There is very little difference between different types of Scenes however, and should be handled the same way.

Pacing

Scenes also control the flow of the story and the action, as well as providing a powerful interactive environment. They dictate when the characters gain Story Points, and thus when they can recuperate and improve. In Zombie-flicks, finding a place to rest and recuperate is hard, and often a vital objective, which leads to a group of bedraggled fugitives fighting a last stand, giving everything they have.

Alternatively, the modus operandi for most RPG games, especially of the sword and sorcery genre, is that characters should be able to rest after every few encounters, so that they may face new challenges refreshed. This allows the module designers to throw powerful challenges at the party all the way through the adventure, which in turn promotes a tactical approach to the challenges - the party usually has all their resources at their disposal.

Both of these two extremes can be covered by PCSIK, sometimes even in the same Adventure, mostly by the way the Scenes are designed.

It is possible to mix and match the Scene structure of your adventures, to create a mixture of game play styles, and emphasise the relative importance of each, as well as provide subtle hints for each. You might decide to start with a long scene through a winding set of caverns, before switching to a small scene where the characters encounter the main boss. This implies that simply beating the opponents is important, where as tactics will be required to defeat the main villain of the piece. Likewise, breaking the pace to have the characters face an obstacle implies that thought rather than daring is the best way to tackle it.

Basic Scene Design

There is very little a scene must contain, and even then, these are very broad and general. At the very least, a Scene should contain a problem, conflict, or other event, to solution of which should act as the scene's Objective. This is vague, but very easy to fulfil, since every Scene has a purpose, and thus an objective. The idea is to extrapolate this objective into a problem or series of problems.

Therefore, if the purpose of a Scene is to escape the Shopping Mall, you should aim to figure out what is stopping the characters from waltzing out - possibly the horde of Zombies, or the killer Computer AI controlling the Automatic Doors. This may of course

lead you to further extrapolation - Why are the Zombies there? How do the party defeat the AI?

Once you have the purpose and the objective of the Scene, you should then look at the environment of the scene, trying to work in one or more ways that characters can interact with the scene directly. This interaction does not have to be beneficial, and does not necessarily have to be initiated directly by the characters either. A warehouse might have crates to smash, which can contain all sorts of improvised weapons. An industrial plant might have laser cutting machines, and conveyor belts. Volcanic lairs might have rumbling tar pits, and deadly rock falls. The most important part of this stage is that you decide how each interaction works - how much damage a tire iron does, what happens to characters splashed with the strange green liquid, and so on.

Once that is done, you should then look towards the characters in the Scene. Even if the purpose of the scene does not involve killing anything, you should consider adding characters to interact with, as appropriate to the Scene. For example, adding Bouncers to Scenes where the characters brawl in a nightclub or adding a few police cars to add confusion during interstate car chase Scenes. Even including a dwarven archaeological team can add a little fun to a Scene in an old Dwarven Tomb.

The scene structure adds a lot of flexibility to the style of play with PCSIK. Scenes can be designed beforehand, and the objectives announced before play starts, for a more tactical, skirmish-style game. On the other hand, the scene may have few inherent objectives beyond survive, and the PCs can do what they want - with the Director improvising objectives, and even improvising the results of interaction with the scene. This leads to a more free-form style of play.

Adventures

Plots that are more intricate can be built up, by combining multiple Scenes into an adventure. Such scenes could be events that occur because of the earlier scenes, or may simply be different challenges and opponents in the same area.

Likewise, these adventures can be pre-defined, allowing a party to recreate famous stories - will they fare better than Batman, James Bond, and Conan the Barbarian? Alternatively, they can be determined after the previous scene, and allow the characters to forge their own stories.

The ultimate aim of PCSIK is to be a flexible system, and it hopes to achieve this by allowing the players to create their own system to play with - a system that suits their style, and their tastes.

GENRE CONSIDERATIONS

Modern and Pulp Horror Genres

One of the good things about Modern and Pulp Horror is that the characters tend not to have much in the way of Abilities, so it is easier to create characters. The abilities are usually reserved for the supernatural foes.

Likewise, Items are simple, based only on modern technology. This means that they are generally easy to design, so characters can be made quicker for this genre than almost any other.

Here are some general methods incorporated into systems that emphasise the Modern or Pulp Horror Genre, though these adaptations have spread into adjoining genres as well.

HARDCORE: Bravery and Sanity

There is often a score to represent sanity or bravery in such games. Sometimes this is points-based, and sometimes this is merely a check, but the events tend to be the same either way - once a test is failed, or a value reached, the character tends to freak out.

The freaking is sometimes represented by growing penalties, or by the acquisition of mental disorders, or even both. While mental disorders can be fun to play, they ultimately amount to the same thing as penalties - they reduce the survivability of the character in the circumstances that trigger their disorders.

Characters have been given an extra Statistic, known as their HARDCORE value. This value represents how brave the characters are in the face of terrifying opponents and events.

As a statistic, this means it can be damaged, and like Intellect, when it reaches zero, the character is incapacitated for that scene. It represents the character freaking out, and doing the Horror Screaming Fit so often seen with those dumb blonde-haired women in such movies.

Hardcore also has a secondary purpose. As a Statistic, it means that it can be used for checks, for fear and such. This is particularly important if you wish to promote a sense of realism in Modern or Pulp games.

Normal characters do not attempt to carve up oozing zombies with a Chainsaw, or use a 12-gauge Sawn-off Shotgun on one at close range. They do not attempt to batter mutants to death with their own severed limbs.

Yet, this is a staple in many Pulp Horror movies, and thus many players want to play characters that can do exactly this sort of thing. Here is where Hardcore comes into play. It can be used to rate the mentality of the character, concerning their sanity. A character with a high Hardcore statistic is more likely to use the more gory attacks than those that are squeamish. To represent this, you can require Hardcore checks when performing or considering such actions.

The results of failure of such tests can be described in many ways - the character might gag at the thought of picking up a severed limb as a weapon. Alternatively, they simply might not consider the Chainsaw an effective weapon compared to firearms and swords. This genre staple is very migratory however, and tends to appear in any genre or setting where Horror is a significant feature of the game. This can be Gothic Horror, which is usually more fantasy-orientated, or might be used in Science Fiction settings where the primary threats are gory Bug Monsters or Alien Psychics that attack with frightening Hallucinations.

Expanded Equipment Details

Since character's tend not to have too many abilities, Modern or Pulp Horror games tend to go heavily into detail with weapons, such as firearms, as well as other equipment highly pertinent to the setting.

This is something that some players enjoy, and is easily incorporated into PCSIK, since the item creation system is designed to be flexible. You can create weapons that cause different amounts and types of damage, that are easier or harder to use in combat, that are faster or slower, with different ammunition capacities, or even with different effects. You can create different types of armour, to cover different areas of the body, or deal with different types of attack.

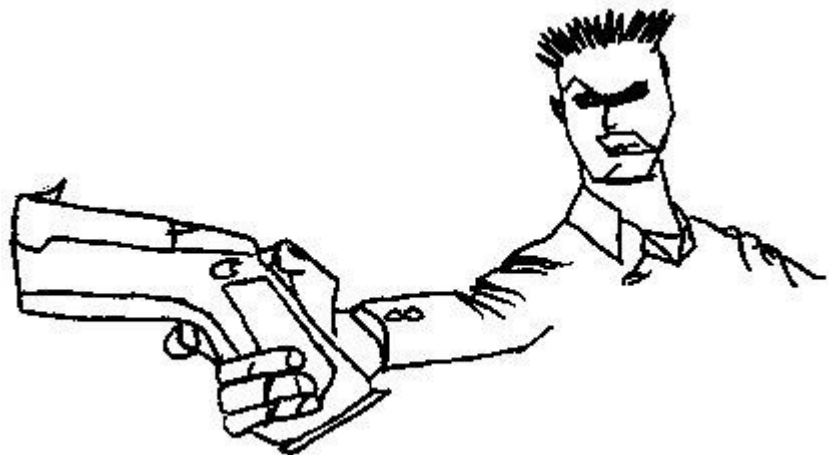
Even mundane equipment can receive this type of treatment.

While a staple of most Modern genres, it sometimes sees use in other genres as well. Science Fiction is the most common secondary genre, since Magic is often removed from that setting as well. However, even magic-heavy settings, such as Fantasy, sometimes have such expanded details to give the non-magic using characters something to froth about.

Expanded Combat and Critical Charts

Similarly, especially with Pulp Horror games, combat often becomes increasingly complex, with the inclusion of comprehensive critical hit and critical failure tables. This allows Pulp Horror Authors to describe numerous descriptions of gory demises and mishaps with various types of attacks, such as fire and acid weapons, as well as conventional slashing, stabbing, and bashing weapons. These tables are somewhat harder to convert into PCSIK, and would definitely slow down combat in an extreme way, but some players enjoy this style of gaming.

This isn't the place to list numerous



Critical Charts, but for a group wishing to progress in this direction, it is recommended that you use the existing Critical rules to determine the chance of a critical, and then refer to whatever charts you feel like using based on the situation. Such charts could be designed to incorporate the score of the critical, as well as how many dice are involved in the critical (a 3 dice critical means that 3 dice match, a 2-2 critical means that there are two sets of two dice matching up, and so on). They can also incorporate the type of attack, the location of the attack, and other situational modifiers.

Magic: the Newcomer

With the popularity of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Magic has been increasingly popular in Modern and Pulp Horror settings. While not as potent as its Fantasy Brethren, it has still managed to significantly alter the genre, and such systems tend to emphasize Magic to the point where it begins to detract from the original Modern or Pulp Horror aspects of the genre.

For those wishing to remain pure to the Modern or Pulp Horror Genre, characters should not be allowed access to magic - it is merely some plot hook or device for villains and supernatural foes.

For those wishing to use magic in their games, it is probably best to stick with allowing characters to design a few abilities to represent minor magical powers that the characters possess, rather than use a full-magic system.

Science Fiction Genres

Science Fiction shares many of the same traits as Modern and Pulp Horror, so much so that there is often confusion between the two genres. The two main features of Modern Horror are also very pertinent to Science Fiction settings, adding to this confusion.

Dark Future

A common tone with Sci-Fi settings is that the future is grim horrifying. The future holds the most corrupt aspects of human nature, with a few bright sparks of humanity attempting to survive and bring hope to the subjugated people of the world.

This usually manifests one or more of a couple of prime fears of the world today. The most common is the dark future situation, where humanity continues much as it is today. However, everything is bigger, nastier, and darker. Powerful corporations control fast global empires that delve into markets and technologies considered taboo by the society. These technologies include cybernetics, mind control, genetic mutation, biochemical or radioactive experiments, and alien technologies. These corporations often rival superpowers and national governments, which have become equally corrupt. They deal with rich crime lords and drug barons, plunder their nations treasuries, and generally oppress society with the harshest of tyrannical regimes. Propaganda is rife, and information is a powerful weapon.

Other fears that serve as a basis for Dark Future settings often include secret weapons and technologies that have the most disastrous consequences for humanity. These technologies include cybernetics, Artificial Intelligence, mind control, genetic mutation, biochemical or radioactive experiments, and alien technologies. Many of these fears are thrown in together, each with their own effect on the setting.

In Dark Future settings, you may wish to incorporate the Hardcore option from the Modern and Pulp Horror genre (see above) into your games, to rate the empathy and Humanity of the character. This is recommended if the world is very dark, and promotes a sense of despair, or if you wish to portray the man-machine emphasis while using Cyberware. You may also wish to combine it with the Sanity and Courage-based attributes covered before.

Post-Apocalypse

An alternative approach is often that of a post-apocalyptic world. Nations have become more belligerent and terrorist organizations more threatening, until one final climactic war broke out. This war usually destroys much of civilization, and alters much of the landscape. Survivors are often reduced to the status of primitives, forced to fight for survival in an environment that is totally alien to them.

Depending upon when the war occurred, survivors may have managed to rebuild some semblance of civilization, which usually represents one or more of the major eras of history. Sometimes different groups of survivors will recreate different types of civilization - one might form a tribe of barbarian raiders, while others might resemble the Wild West.

As with most Science Fiction settings, technology is a vital part of the Post Apocalypse setting. However, while technology can still be advanced as anything from other Sci-Fi, usually the facilities that created them have been destroyed, and such advanced technology is treated like some ancient artefact. In fact, the Post Apocalypse setting often feels like a second Dark Age, concerning technology.

In Post-Apocalypse settings, it would be best if you required characters to keep an accurate record of what they discover, even the slightest bauble. A packet of cigarettes or a bottle of beer can be a valuable commodity for trading for supplies. It is also recommended that you prevent the character from spending SP on items between scenes, so that the quest for ammunition and vital medical supplies becomes an important objective.

Space Opera

One other common genre for Science Fiction is that of the Space Opera. This setting assumes that humanity (or some other major colonizing species) has managed to get off their home world and instigated common space travel. This travel can vary in scope - it can be interplanetary, and limited to only a few planets and a few colonies. Alternately, it can become advanced enough for

intergalactic travel, and humanity may have forged a huge empire covering hundreds of planets and star systems.

This tends to have a profound effect on Science Fiction games, since it shifts the entire focus of humanity into a completely new scale. Nations are no longer important, so racism and other similar discriminations are often removed, only to be replaced with other forms of discrimination. Planets fight against planets, and groups fight against groups. Humanity more or less acts exactly like today, though on a bigger scale.

One thing Space Operas include, that other Science Fiction settings do not, is that the different planets often have different societies and cultures, if not entire new species. This allows many varied environments to come into play, and many new interesting situations. One planet might have discovered travel and become a citywide planet, and serve as a centre of business and government for a galactic empire. Another could not have reached this technological pinnacle, and either be subjugated by other space-capable societies, or be oblivious to events outside their local area of space, and deal more with local, planetary politics and concerns.

For Space Operas, the most important change would be Space Travel, which can be handled abstractly. Scenes may take place on abandoned spacecraft, and even the player's ship might be boarded.

Technology

Technology features a lot more in Science Fiction settings, and serves a variety of roles. At its simplest, technology serves as tools, and is expanded and extrapolated beyond what is plausible in a modern setting. All sorts of items are enhanced with current or future technologies, both possible and implausible.

Modern firearms are outfitted with target acquisition software and auto-guidance systems. Armour is boosted with hydraulic enhancements and smart-linked cyberware. Gravity engines and warp-drives power vehicles that can achieve amazing feats, from superspeed to teleportation.

In Science Fiction, technology can become more than just a tool. Instead, it can become antagonistic in its own right, turning the entire man-machine relationship on its head, and reliving the fears of every technophobe on the planet.

Technology can perform this in one of two main ways in Science Fiction. A common theme is the inclusion of cybernetics - computer hardware that is often surgically implanted to augment the body and mind of the being. However, with the advent of computer-based neural enhancers, cortex inhibitors, and reaction probability matrices, the question comes up how much cybernetics can a character take before they become less than a man?

Some systems have cyberware diminish a statistic known as humanity, empathy, or similar. This statistic represents their connection with humanity and the world around them, and sometimes with nature as well. It operates similarly to the Hardcore statistic, especially since the two genres are closely related.

Cyberware is not the only technology to use this technique however. Genetic Engineering uses a similar theme, and works in the same way, through modifying the character's genetic structure to make the super-human. With such mutants and messed up operations, similar questions ensue - how much tinkering can a human being take, before they stop being human?

This passive antagonism with technology is quite prevalent in Science Fiction settings. However, with the advancement of computer technology in such environments, the reverse questions are true - how much sentience can a machine take, before they become alive?

Such Artificial Intelligence Systems are usually portrayed as starting out as friendly computerized assistants, but at some point they often become malevolent and antagonistic. Automated security Systems can mistake corporate executives as intruders, or a computer hacker can provide malicious code, and remove or alter the AI's behaviour.

Xenophobia and Alien Invasion

An important aspect covered in most Science Fiction settings is that of Xenophobia, the fear of outsiders. The prejudice inherent in human nature is often tinkered with, exploring new hypothetical situations.

With Space Operas, it is often assumed that Humanity bands together to explore new worlds and for their great space colonies, but have to deal with other indigenous species of the planets they colonise. The reactions of such encounters depend on what role the animal plays in their environment. Some might be domesticated, for use as pets or beasts of burden. Others might be considered threats, and continually be hunted down.

In addition, Space Operas, as well as many other Science Fiction settings, usually incorporate some other species from outside Humanities sphere of influence. In space operators, this might be a species from galaxy, or even another dimension. In other Science Fiction settings, this may be off world, or outside the system.

The reaction of humanity to such incursions depends mostly upon the setting and the actions of the species. Generally, the reaction ranges from general caution to discrimination. Hostility can arise over any little trivial matter, and negotiations are often tense and delicate.

Sometimes, such an encounter is peaceful, but secretive. Technologies might be swapped, and corporations and governments alike may gain power over the other, and add an element of surprise to the delicate political power balance.

Other times, the species is openly hostile, seeking to conquer and colonise, or destroy, Humanity and it's own world. In this case, Humanity usually drops all of its discriminations between itself, and focus entirely on defeating this common enemy, though distrust within the various Human factions can often slowdown, or even defeat the entire effort.

The motives behind such invasions may vary. The race may be benevolent dictators that may bring along an advanced, utopian civilisation. More often, they are merely looking for slaves and resources. Usually those seeking to destroy Humanity do so not out of any sense of revenge, but because the species and Humanity can never totally co-exist. Such species are often exceptionally alien and mysterious, often requiring the natural conditions of the planet to become totally inhospitable and hazardous to human life. Besides peaceful negotiation and alien invasion, there is another common reason for extraterrestrial contact - immigration. Some settings have alien species as immigrants within human society. Such settings tend to be either modern or dark future, where Humanity is portrayed similar to what it is like today. The motives of such immigrants are varied, and such settings tend to revolve around the more personal side of human nature, often re-enacting the many injustices immigrant cultures have faced in the past - prejudice, persecution, civil liberties, slavery, genocide, and worse.

Space Combat

For space combat, use the same system as for characters, but remember that it is an entirely different scale. Therefore, a score of 10 for a ship is average Power for a ship, not for a character. Also, try reducing the base damage die depending upon the scale of the craft, during Space Combat. This will make such ships more durable, because opponents will do less damage with each attack. A spacecraft with a Power of 10 would therefore be killed in three or four hits, instead of the normal one or two.

Objects of different scale should not be able to attack each other in normal combat. Instead, the characters would have to go to extraordinary lengths to destroy such huge objects, usually involving a new scene with the sabotage of the vulnerable target as an objective.

If a spacecraft can conceivably be destroyed in normal combat by a character and his weaponry, then it is not on a different scale. This means vehicles are on the same scale as characters. This also mean a capital class starship is unable to attack a star fighter in direct combat.

Virtual Reality

A theme sometimes seen is a Science Fiction game is the presence of cyberspace and virtual reality, especially if cyberware is especially prevalent, or AI and computer technology is a common theme.

The main feature of such virtual reality is that it is deeply immersive, and the character can enter either mentally or physically into this virtual environment.

Because of this, it is probably best to play out encounters in any sort of virtual reality as if it was a normal scene. The type of scene, as well as any optional rules that apply, depend upon the programming of the virtual reality environment.

Fantasy Genre

Fantasy is one of those genres that most players would have probably played, and even those that have not would have at least heard something about it. This is due to the massive popularity of Dungeons and Dragons since the beginning of the RPG industry, and the vast majority of clones it has produced.

This is quite ironic, because while Fantasy is the biggest genre for RPGs, and possibly novels, it is the smallest genre for comparable mediums, such as films and computer games. This is probably because there is really only one genre of Fantasy - "Sword and Sorcery".

The title of Sword and Sorcery explains the two most common aspects of the genre, which defines fantasy today.



The Sword: Combat and Heroism

The sword refers to the pervasion of swords, and similar force of arms, in fantasy today. It represents the clash of steel, and the feel and attitude of combat.

Combat is indeed the modus operandi of conflict resolution in fantasy settings. From battles between the vast armies of two kingdoms, to the small-scale skirmishes between ambusher and victim, combat is seen as a fact.

Beyond this, combat itself is usually seen as heroic and valorous. Combat is a test of strength, skill, and bravery, between two worthy opponents. Anybody can pick up a weapon and engage in glorious combat with their enemies - fighting for what they believe in. Many tales revolve around commoners and peasants who have done just that after seeing their family massacred and their homes burnt to the ground.

Combat is also seen as above mindless violence. Marauders may rage around the countryside, destroying everything in their wake to slake their thirst for wanton destruction. Villains slaughter children and hapless innocents, without batting an eyelid.

Assassins kill their targets without even being seen. The forces of evil use every insidious killing technique they know to achieve their ends, many of which are decidedly less honourable and heroic.

This duality of the arts of combat brings the aspect of conflict and heroism into focus in the fantasy genre.

This is why many heroes show off their valour, daring, and courage by handing their foes a weapon when they are disarmed, and allowing them to recuperate and get back into the fight. It is to prove to everyone around him or her that they are heroes, and that they are heroic. That is why villains indulge them rather than killing them outright - it is to prove that the villains can also be heroic, yet ultimately the grand gesture of theirs is always the last.

The Sorcery: Power of Magic

Sorcery also refers to a vastly important, in not more critical, part of the genre - the presence of magic. Without magic, the setting is merely historical, not fantastic, and as such, it has found its way into almost every aspect of the fantasy milieu.

The most obvious implication of magic is the ability to change the world around the caster. Magic-users can do literally anything, becoming like gods amongst men. Many of the most famous fantasy novels of our time have revolved around the epic uses of magic and its casters.

However, while the idea of magic is appealing, and its very scope is epic, the use of magic in fantasy is always in danger of overshadowing the other non-magical aspects of the fantasy genre.

This brings magic into significant conflict with the concept of heroism through combat. Why fight your opponents, when you can remove them from existence? Why conquer kingdoms when you can simply subvert entire nations to your will? Such thinking is ultimately the realm of the villain.

That is not to say that there are not any heroic magic users. Indeed there are quite a few that use magic like they use a sword, and engaging in powerful spell duels with other magic-users.

However, the heroic use of magic has limited its potential. It has now become consigned to combat spells, utilities, and defences against the more villainous aspects of magic use.

With the advent of fantasy games, magic has become weaker and more controlled. Many cunning methods of rituals, spellcasting, and consorting with otherworldly agents have limited the ability for characters to use magic. This was mainly to prevent magic-using characters from dominating the entire game, so that obstacles still provide a challenge and that non-magic-users would still be able to take an active role in the game.

Magic is not just limited to the character's themselves, or their villains. Almost every other aspect of fantasy settings has been enhanced with magic and the variance between settings is often based upon which of these changes have been incorporated into that setting.

Fantasy settings are no longer limited to real-world flora and fauna. While Earth has a remarkable range of exotic, and often deadly, life forms, Fantasy settings can contain anything that can be imagined. Everything from mythology, religion, and nightmare can be made "flesh" in fantasy settings.

Elves, Trolls, Orcs, Goblins, and other Faeriekin haunt the deepest groves of the oldest woodland. Angels, Demons, and Devils all plot in their magical realms, conspiring how to change the fate of humanity. Creatures from the deepest oceans plague aquatic life forms and marine explorers alike. The darkest caverns hold some of the more ancient terrors of the world, ready to be awakened. Even the dead can return to plague the living once again. Add creatures borne or animated using magic and you have endless range of creatures at which to use in your games, as friend or foe.

Another main area of magic intrusion is that of magical items and artefacts. These devices often overshadow the benefits of the real-world devices they are based on. What is a sword made of the sharpest Damascus steel, compared to a blade of flames or frost? What use is the sturdiest suit of plate armour, when it can easily be made out of magic instead?

The easiest method for handling magic is not to handle magic. It is so varied, and so powerful, that any set of rules to cover it will not do it justice.

Instead, use the existing PCSIK material as is, defining the characters magical abilities using the rules for Abilities and Items.

For a generic magic user, it is wise to provide a cost of Intellect points for their magical Abilities. This can easily be changed to another ability - Power for a Blood Mage type character that uses his own life force to power his abilities, or Karma for a character that takes their power from a Divine link.

Superhero Genre

The first of these is the Superhero genre - so called because it focuses entirely on Superhero characters of varying power. They can be the indestructible titans like Superman, the dashing daredevils like Batman, or teams of lesser-powered mutants like the X-Men.

While often in a Modern setting, the Superhero genre has a few traits that distinguish it from mainstream Modern games.

Most importantly, the characters are all beyond humanity. Even characters who are still human - like Batman - are outstanding characters, capable of more than any normal human being can do. This in turn promotes a special view towards humanity by the Superhero characters, and makes Alignment extremely clear-cut - Evil Superheroes see humanity as a lesser race, while Good Superheroes sees them as their charges to protect. Neutral superheroes simply ignore humanity while fulfilling their aims - usually revenge against one or more other Supervillians.

However, Humanity does have one advantage over Superheroes - Numerical Superiority. This advantage means that in most games, no matter how many human casualties there are, there will always be more Humans. This is also a significant threat where the Superhero characters are only slightly more powerful than Humanity anyway, and tends to shift the focus of Superhero games towards stealth, subterfuge, and survival.

This is a rather clean-cut description of Superhero games, and comic books have gotten more complicated over the ages - something that also has an influence on the style of the game. Early comic books, like Superman, Captain America, Dan Dare, and Dick Tracy were always clean cut - they derived almost directly from the Pulp Fiction prevalent in the 1920's and 1930's. This approach also carried on with the early 1950's and 1960's B-Movie flicks.

Later on, comic book heroes got more complicated. While still defined as good, they were often reviled and hated by the populace, and began to operate with secret identities and powerful subterfuge - as emphasised by The Shadow and Darkman. To a lesser extent, Batman was also one of these shadow heroes - though he still maintained clean-cut enough to make it as an early pulp character in some versions.

After 'shadow heroes' came the 'Dark Hero' - an evil hero that does good deeds through either choice or circumstance. Dark heroes also included clearly good heroes, with clearly evil abilities or conditions - such as good Vampires or Demonologists.

In the latest twist, the Superhero genre has become more personally involved in the humanity of the characters themselves, making them three-dimensional characters than classic hero stereotypes. Heroes have more complications though twisted love lives, persecution by humanity, and one of many interesting back-stories.

One of the main features of Superhero games is that characters are tougher, stronger, and better than ordinary characters. They can do things ordinary humans would find impossible, such as being able to withstand more damage.

There are two things you can do to simulate the Superhero genre in PCSIK.

Firstly, you can adjust the Base Damage Dice down, so that characters deal and suffer less damage in combat. A slight reduction, such as D8, would be suitable for characters just above Human scale, such as the X-Men. Powerful characters, such as superman, would require a more drastic adjustment - perhaps to D6 or D4.

In the Superhero genre, it is possible to mix Base Damage Die types, because there are often many different power levels of Superhero. Generally, the Base Damage Die refers to the damage a character takes from attacks - so a 1 Dice Attack could cause 1d10 damage a normal being with a BDT of 1d10, while it would only cause 1d8 damage to a X-Man with a BDT of 1d8, and 1d4 damage to a character like Superman.

Depending upon the scale of the setting, you might also consider raising the Base Damage Die for human characters to represent how much of a threat they are to the characters. A BDT of 1d12 means they are quite fragile; while a BDT of 1d20 means they are very insignificant, yet still a threat, perfect for a Giant Monster or Mecha-based game. If Humanity is truly insignificant and incapable of harming the characters, then count them only as scenery. The second thing is reducing the Difficulty of actions quite significantly. It might be very difficult for a human to lift a car above their head (6d10) but Superheroes would probably only find that difficult (3d10). Reducing all difficulties by half might be reasonable, especially if the characters are much more powerful than normal Humans.

Animé Genre

The above briefly described the Superhero genre from a western perspective. However, of late, over the past few decades, a new form of comic book experience had been introduced to the west - Animé.

Animé is the term coined for comic books hailing from Japan and the east, and for the ensuing cartoons. Unlike the west, Japanese Animé caters towards adults rather than children, and their plots and storylines are subsequently more complex. In tune with their, the quality of animation - with regards to expression and realism - is often superior, and very much emphasises the story, theme and setting, often more so than the characters themselves.

Animé has been going for a lot longer than the west has known, and has a collection of sub-genres and classifications of its own - more so than the Superhero Genre. Where the Superhero genre is classified by the type of Heroes involved, Animé is classed by the type of story - is it a drama, comedy, or tragedy, or whether it focuses on Mecha (giant robots) or schoolchildren. Because of this, Animé is more suited to set stories, rather than the ongoing tales favoured by western comic books.

Alternative History Genre

The other main Genre is the Alternative History Genre. These settings are 'what if' scenarios based on Earth history. For example, 'What if' the Hindenburg did not explode, or 'what if' Germany won World War 2. Other periods of history also apply - 'What if' America lost the war of Independence, or 'What if' the Roman Empire never collapsed.

These genres usually revolve around a simple premise. As such, they are best represented through imaginative settings and characters, than through rules.

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