Playtest in Death in Space

Will

Each character has a fund of Will points, arbitrarily set to start at 9 (pending playtest). The main (possibly only) use of Will is to activate Descriptors. If a character ever has 0 Will points, they are out of the scene and must have a Refreshment Scene to restore their Will fund before they can participate in other future scenes.

Descriptors

Descriptors are free-form traits - a word or phrase tagged with an associated die rating. Die ratings are number of dice, not type/sides. All dice in the game have the same number of sides (for now, the default is d10). There might be different categories of Descriptors (Abilities, Relationships, Connections, Values, Equipment, etc.) to aide / help focus decisions about character creation, but mechanically all Descriptors work the same way: spend one point of Will to activate a Descriptor and add its dice to your pool.

Resolution

Roll dice pools to resolve opposed actions. Before rolling, spend one point of your Will for each Descriptor that contributes dice to your pool. Your Descriptors can contribute dice to your opponent's pool if it makes sense that those Descriptors would work against you. When one of your Descriptors is used against you in this way, add one to your Will.

Determining Outcomes

You and your opponent both roll; whoever rolls the highest number on a single die wins. The number of successes is the number of dice that beat the loser's highest die. (In other words, the loser's high die sets the TN for the winner.)

If both sides have the same highest die, ignore that pair and look at the next two dice. If all the dice are tied, the side who rolled more dice wins, with one success.

If both sides have the same size pools and rolled exactly the same roll then it's a real stalemate, and the GM shifts the situation.

Success

What does success do?

First, the roll decides the fiction. Does Abigail convince Christopher to not attack Bob? Does OB1 get the high ground? Does precious favorite NPC get croaked?

Scene Descriptors

Second, the winner can turn the number of successes they rolled into a Scene Descriptor. To create a Scene Descriptor just say (or write down) what it's called and how many dice it has. These can be invoked (at the cost of 1 Will point) to contribute dice to a pool. A Scene Descriptor disappears when the scene ends, unless someone wants to pay a Will point to make it stick to a character. The idea here is that, if Christopher ties up Bob with 3 successes, Christopher can say “Bob is tied up, 3D,” meaning *in this scene* Bob is tied up. When the scene ends, the Scene Descriptor will evaporate, and Bob will no longer be tied up, assumed to have gotten free in the Background somehow. However, if Christopher (or Abigail, or even Bob himself!) pays a Will point to make the Descriptor stick, then it becomes part of Bob's character, and Bob stays tied up until someone does something to set him loose.

Effect on Power Track

Third, the loser crosses off the box on their Power track equal to the number of successes that the winner rolled. If the loser would rather not cross off a box, they can create an Injury for their character instead. If the box is already crossed off, cross off the next highest available box AND create an Injury equal to the box that was crossed off! If the last (highest) box of the Power track is crossed off, the character is out of the scene.

Recovery From Injury

An Injury works just like a Scene Descriptor that's stuck to a character. An Injury lasts until it goes away naturally as a result of the fiction, or until someone does something to get rid of it. You make a Recovery roll against an Injury to get rid of it; just reduce the Injury by the number of successes you roll. (Injuries don't have Power tracks.) Other characters can make Recovery rolls to help you. This can be actual doctoring / first aid (for physical injuries), pep talks / encouragement for “social injuries,” and so on. Successes reduce the severity of the Injury die for die.

[I need a rule for temporary Descriptors becoming permanent]

Refreshment Scenes

Players call for refreshment scenes between scenes. You can get one whenever you want, between scenes, but you can't get one in the middle of a scene.

The Power track is fully restored by having a Refreshment scene with another character.

Refreshment scenes also restore your Will if it has fallen below its starting value. If you have more Will than the starting value, you don't lose the extra Will.

I like Eero's rule that when you have a refreshment scene you're letting your guard down. So you get to heal up whenever you want, but when you do the GM gets to escalate the situation.

XP

XP comes from Keys, and is used to buy Advances.

Keys

There are two kinds of Keys:

Dramatic Key Framework:
(Keys of this type describe dramatic motifs)

1 XP - The dramatic issue is involved in a scene
2 XP - The character encounters significant challenges related to the theme.
5 XP - The motif progresses.
Buyoff (10XP) - The theme is discarded from the game.

Motivation Key Framework:
(Keys of this type describe psychology)

1 XP - The character expresses the motivation
3 XP - The character follows the motivation despite risk, personal cost, or other considerations
Buyoff (10XP) - The character opts to let go of the trait represented by the Key

Advances

Every 5 XP is an Advance.

You can spend your Advances right away, or save them.

In general, it costs 1 Advance per die to change your character.

So, 1 Advance can move a 1D Descriptor to your Background (or promote a Background to a 1D Descriptor), or promote a 1D Descriptor to 2D, or create a new 1D Descriptor out of thin air (well, out of fictional positioning). A new Key also costs 1 Advance.

It costs 2 Advances to raise or lower a 2D Descriptor one die, 3 Advances to raise or lower a 3D Descriptor one die, and so on.

You can spend an advance to move a 1D Descriptor to your Background.

Character Creation

Game Design Wibble

One of my “best practices / favorite techniques” is that the natural language (fictional) description of

a character and the mechanical description of that character should be mirrors of each other. I first learned how to do this from playing The Pool, where character creation is a little writing exercise (describe your character in exactly 50 words - not one word more or less) followed by underlining the important bits, extracting them, and rating them with dice, effectively rendering them what we nowadays call “freeform traits.” The text of the Pool itself does not give you a lot of help in terms of effective use of this tool; beginning Pool players coming from a background of That Game or Vampire tend to produce characters that resemble lists of equipment and powerz. These days I find the exactly 50 words restriction to be overly fussy, but the underlying concept of creative constraint is really important. You do not want to write 5 pages of play-killing backstory (the way RISUS suggests you should), but you do need enough contextualizing information to clearly visualize the character and get them moving in the first scene. I also think it works better if you evolve the character by creating the backstory fiction and the mechanical description organically. Don't just write a backstory then translate it into numbers, or fill out a character sheet and then try to write a story to justify it. Go back and forth.

Abilities

In this game, you have “Abilities,” which are Descriptors. An Ability is not something super broad (“Strength” or “Intelligence”), nor is it something super specific (“Drawing with Crayons”). An Ability is about like a character class, or an AW playbook. Abilities are not chosen from a menu, but are invented by the player at character creation. Abilities define the arenas of conflict that the character will operate in. Think in terms of opposed actions - the character is, right now, acting at cross purposes with some other character. What sort of situation is it that makes you reach for the dice and roll this Ability?

Your first ability is rated at 3 dice (Expert). Write a couple three sentences that demonstrate, justify, or explain the ability by depicting a Significant Event in the character's life. Think of it like a teaser trailer for the character - we get to see them in motion, doing their thing, for the first time.

Every character also has a Personal History, which describes their general lifestyle, place in the setting, and important life events. The Personal History provides context for the Significant Event that we saw a flash of earlier. How did the character get into that situation?

In mechanical terms, the Personal History provides three abilities each rated at 2 dice (Competent).

Next, the character's Cultural Identity is rated at 1 die (Mediocre). The Significant Event and Personal History are all about deeds. The Cultural Identity is about origin. Where did the character come from, in terms of family, tribe, class, religion, or whatever.

Eero says: characters are not fatherless pawns, but beings “with values, beliefs, social ties and a whole range of peculiarities drawn from the particulars of the setting.”

The Cultural Identity is used in play whenever the character wants to enter an arena of conflict that their other abilities seem unsuited for. If it makes sense that the character's Cultural Identity would give them at least a passing familiarity with whatever it is they're trying to do, they can roll 1 die, indicating a reliance on luck to get good results (unless they want to use other interesting parts of the system to improve their odds! □). Otherwise, they're simply unable to compete in that contest.

If the player wants, specific Cultural Identity abilities may be enumerated (each rated at 1 die) before play begins.

Also, during play, when Cultural Identity abilities come up as previously described, the player can add them to the character sheet, rated at 1 die. This is how you can add new abilities during play that can then be improved.

Background is the last Ability-related category. Backgrounds do not have ratings. They define arenas that the character is good at, but that the player specifically does not want to see in the game. They are activities that the character may in fact do at times, but this always happens offscreen (in the background!) and is unconnected from the emergent story. They are, therefore, sort of the opposite of Abilities.

In addition to abilities, each character has one general-purpose Descriptor (an “Aspect” in FATE terms) that can be anything the player wants. This is rated 2D.

They also have three Connections. A Connection is an NPC that the character knows and is more or less friendly with. Each Connection owes the character a favor, or the character owes the Connection one.

Connections are what connect the PCs to the emergent story; when you create a Connection, you're creating an NPC relationship that will be important and might be featured right away in play.

Even though they have a special application, Connections are still Descriptors, and therefore can contribute dice to pools if it seems appropriate. (Basically, whenever the Connection is either present in the scene, or if the Connection is the focus of the conflict.)

I'm also importing Keys whole cloth from TSOY/SolarSystem. Literary characters are always a bit monomaniacal. A Key is something that the character just can't let go of, an attachment that requires them to act. In psychology speak, they are “captured” by it. Every Key has 2 or 3 specific actions that, when performed, net XP for the character. Each Key also has a “buyoff” condition, which nets a one-time jackpot of XP and removes the Key from the character. In this way characters can change and grow (and overcome their obsessions).

A beginning character starts with one Key, but characters can have more than one Key at a time.

Each character has a Will pool (which starts at 9 for everyone, I think) and a Power track (which has 9 boxes on it for everyone, I think).

In summary, when play begins, each PC should have a backstory of at least 50, but not more than 100 words, which reflects their Abilities (One Expert (3d), three Competent (2d), and any number of Cultural Identity Abilities (1d)), one player-authored aspect and three Connections, one Key, a Pool of 9 Will points, and a 9-step Power track.

Each character also starts with a number of Advancements (5 by default), which the player can immediately use to flesh out the character, or which can be saved to develop the character during play as the game unfolds.

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