Obscurity

From: JasonP - Under Directory: Game Design

This system is a low crunch, narrative driven set of rules designed particularly for The Game of Shadows.

Goals

Obscurity is a system with multiple, overlapping goals. It is meant to engage the player's mind in the realms of imagination and drama, while helping create an unfolding story full of secrets and mystery. Above all though, the rules provide a simple but robust resolution system for the conflicts that arise during play, which focuses on the setting and imagination of the players just as much as it does dice.

Creating Characters

Each player is going to need a character to play in this pulpy, dark, and somewhat twisted setting. In order to make one, they will need to start with a general **Role**, which gives us an idea of who they are in the fiction. Pick one of: **Detective**, **Adventurer**, **Hoodlum**, **Mad Scientist**, **Criminal**, **Mechanic**, **Doctor**, **Royalty**, **Soldier**, **Cursed**. You may also elect to append 'Extraordinaire' to your role, in which case your character will play against the type suggested by the role. Here is a summary of the ten roles, and their discovery ability:

- 1, **Adventurer**: The swashbuckling, battling, laugh in the face of danger type. *The adventurer's power of discovery brings action to the story.*
- 2, **Criminal**: While the hoodlum rebukes the law with little success, the Criminal has achieved a place in their society. These are the types that extort and racketeer, murder and plot, still evading the scrutiny of the law. *The criminal's power of discovery brings underhanded deals to the story.*
- 3, **Cursed**: The cursed have no place in proper company, each has been given foul demonic power at a price from some occult or mythical source. They are wonders of the world, the vampires and werewolves - oh my. *The cursed's power of discovery brings occult and myth to the story.*
- 4, **Detective**: These are the people that can leave no mystery unsolved. They walk the shadows in an attempt to illuminate the mysteries of the world. *The detective's power of discovery brings reason and logic to the story.*
- 5, **Doctor**: In a time where people still live under the impression of a world supported by magic, the doctor stands for science. Doctors may be of the medical kind, or just experts in a given field. *The doctor's power of discovery brings science and understanding to the story.*
- 6, **Hoodlum**: While perhaps not a criminal per say, the hoodlum is a lowlife without an upstanding profession or position. Though it is indeed likely that they will take from your home. *The hoodlum's power of discovery brings elements of wild chance to the story.*
- 7, **Mad Scientist**: These people have been moved by science, moved right out of normal sense. They are the ones with daft inventions and wild world changing ideas. *The mad scientist's power of discovery brings fancy technology to the story.*
- 8, **Mechanic**: The world is changing and steam machines are taking center stage. The

mechanic lives and breathes mechanical work, building, designing, and repairing. *The mechanic's power of discovery brings durable simple elements to the story.*
- 9, **Royalty**: The politics of the world might have moved on from simple feudalism, but that doesn't mean old money has vanished. The royalty of the time still pack the power of traditional station and carry a large purse. *The royalty's power of discovery brings historic events to the story.*
- 0, **Soldier**: Even in these enlightened times, skirmish wars break out all over the old world. Soldiers don't always stay in the military though, and those that come out are hardened men of brass with flint hearts. *The soldier's power of discovery brings brutality to the story.*

Each character begins the game with a full two hands of **Fortune**, where a hand of fortune means six coins worth. Fortune is the currency of the game, you'll be tracking it a lot across play. During character creation, you spend fortune to create keywords for your character. You must spend at least one fortune, and can spend up to five, a full hand's worth. There are three things that you can buy with fortune now: **Merits**, **Motifs**, and **Tales**.

You pay one fortune for each merit you'd like to buy for your character. A **Merit** is a special keyword in the game that gives them advantages in specific situations. These are always something the character is born with, abilities and talents. When you can apply a merit logically, it will be free to use. If you get creative though, and think of a way to apply your merit to something it would not logically assist, you will spend one fortune to do so. You can't choose your merits for your character though, so while they are unique and powerful they are random and all suffer the **Concept** Hap.

Basic Ideas

The system is baed on the ideas of probability and power, which are often exchangeable in the system. Power and probability are measured in **Ranks**. **Keywords** and **Concepts** are at the root of it all, with each keyword giving the character both benefit and restriction on its application. For example, your adventurer may have the keyword *Heroic* with the concept *Selfless*. Heroic provides the benefit as you the player sees fit, when the concept selfless allows that to happen. Actions may be backed by multiple keywords, giving them more ranks. Keywords may have bangs, denoted by exclamation marks, which allow a player to invoke more ranks in it when **Fortune** (the game currency) is spent.

Keywords always come from stories, little glimpses into who the character was and will be. The other thing about keywords is that they are evolving and highly mutable, and each time they are used in the rules they earn a rank of **bloom**. Eventually they succumb to bloom and become a new keyword, or turn back into fortune.

Ranks & Dice

The game uses only ten-sided dice, and **every roll of each die uses these simple rules: 6 or more and the die is worthless, discarded and worth no outcome; 5 or less and the die is worth its shown value in Outcome**. How many dice you roll, and which one matters is based on the final ranks earned for any roll. If you have one rank, the roll is Likely and you take the best result of two dice. If you have two ranks, the roll is Sure and you take the best of three dice. If you have no ranks, you roll one die and hope for the best. One rank behind (-1 ranks) and the roll is Unlikely and you take the worst of two dice. Two ranks behind (-2) and the roll is Slight, in which case you had

better pray, taking the worst result of three dice.

Outcome

Rolls either fail terribly when they generate no outcome, or earn some amount of success when they do earn outcome. The situation determines how outcome applies, as outcome is measured as the character reaching a goal or achieving something in particular. In order to make this clearer we simply call the goal: an **Achievement**. Something simple may require three outcome and have no drag, while something difficult may require seven outcome and have two drag. The outcome requirement is how much outcome is needed to reach a given achievement, and drag is a penalty on each attempt to earn outcome towards it. A drag of two means that the outcome of each roll counts as two less, so drags are rarely over 3 unless there are ways to circumvent them.

Achievement

Once you have earned enough outcome to reach the achievement, its rules are called into play. This means achievements are rarely known, automatic things. An achievement in combat may be a “Death Stroke on Foe” but you still need to roll for the outcome of it, nothing is guaranteed. Instead, the only thing you are assured, is that even if the achievement resolves terribly, the rules of the situation will change (usually in your favor).

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