



RUNNING

A Game Master's Handbook of Table Management and Other Useful Advice

MESTEZIA

THE OVERPREPARED GM 

Mestezia is a tabletop roleplaying game. Like many RPGs, Mestezia requires someone to be the gamemaster (GM). If you're reading this, that's probably you. Playing Mestezia explains the rules and concepts needed to run the game. Running Mestezia doesn't delve further into the mechanics, but instead is an organized compilation of advice, from one GM to another, on how to handle various parts of being a GM as well as providing some insight into the design of the game. You don't need to read this in order to run the game, especially if you're an experienced GM who's confident in their table management and can deduce the GM's side of things from the player's handbook. However, if you like seeing how other people do things or want explicit guidance and checklists for the various parts of the system, this guides for you.

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Mestezia-style Gaming

One of the most important things you can do is to find a style of GMing that works for you and then communicate to your players what sort of game they can expect. The Mestezia system supports some styles better than others. Here's a few things to think about in terms of gameplay.

GNS Theory

Ron Edwards popularized Gamism-Narrativism-Simulation as the key axes with which to categorize RPGs. Within this framework, Mestezia is definitely a Gamist system, where players pit themselves against challenges and try to win. It can also strongly support Narrativist play, where players focus on developing their characters and telling a shared story. However, as the GM you can also choose to minimize the Narrativist aspect of the game. It can go either way. In contrast, Simulationist players will probably not enjoy this system because of its abstraction and asymmetry. So, play Mestezia if you want to run a GN or G style game. Don't expect it to support S, GS, or NS play well.

Player Motivations

Game designers Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, Robert Zubek published an influential paper, MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research in which they identified eight character motivations in games.

Challenge motivates players who want to overcome obstacles and defeat foes. They generally need a game to be fair and balanced in order to enjoy it and prefer the possibility of failure so that their successes have meaning. Mestezia is tailored to challenge-motivated players with details like having the players roll all the dice (so they know you're not fudging them to fit your story) and organizing powers into a carefully balanced structure.

Narrative motivates players who like experiencing a well-told story as it unfolds. I run a strongly narrative game and so wrote the GM guide with plenty of tools for plots and arcs and a distinct lack of randomized tables, but you can minimize this if this doesn't fit your playstyle. To support narrative-motivated players, develop strong storylines and make sure your NPCs and creatures have depth and motivation.

Fellowship motivates players who seek social interaction, cooperation, and camaraderie. Mestezia encourages tactical collaboration and player communication. However as a GM, you control the tone at the table and the mix of players, so you decide whether the game is relaxed and convivial, intensely focused, etc. which will affect the table camaraderie.

Discovery motivates players who enjoy exploring and learning new things, mostly about the world, but possibly about their character. Mestezia has rich settings as well as mechanical details (such as ephemeral loot and the skill challenge system) that can support a strong discovery component. However like narrative, it really depends on the GM to emphasize this or not in play.

Expression motivates players who want to express themselves creatively. They want to control the development of their character, the plot, and the world. The combinatorial approach to the character options allow a player a great deal of expression, but the amount of influence the player has over the world is greatly dependent on you as the GM.

Sensory motivates players who like things they can physically see, hear, and touch. Since Mestezia is designed with minis and battle grids in mind, there's certainly the potential to go full bore on the sensory experience. If you have players that crave this, use printed books with artwork, play music, use maps, etc. If they're not, feel free to use a dice roller and play the game on an erasable hex map with tokens as minis.

Fantasy motivates players who want to a fully immersive experience where they can pretend they're their character. Mestezia supports a moderate amount of immersion, but the abstracted tactical approach to encounters and the mode switching will tend to work against this sort of experience. If you are going for a fully in-character experience, Mestezia is not the best system for that sort of play.

Abnegation motivates players who want to turn off their brain and lose themselves in the flow. Mestezia's emphasis on tactics and the mechanics that push player engagement make this a bad system for players seeking abnegation.

Advice for New GMs

If you're a new GM, you may read through all the rules and still feel unready or wonder what the best way to GM is. If this is the case, let me give you a few pieces of advice.

There is no one right way to GM. Different things work for different groups. Focus on figuring out what works for you and your group. There are a wide variety of resources out there modelling and discussing different approaches to GMing. Maybe you're great at accents and acting and want a game where roleplaying takes center stage. Maybe you're terrible at acting in-character, but great at developing intricate plots or planning strategically interesting combats. Maybe you're horrible at advance planning and just want to wing it. Maybe you don't know what your strengths are yet, but you simply enjoy some things more than others. Figure out what you want your game to be and look for ways to help you achieve that vision. Jettison any advice that doesn't work for you, no matter how well it works in someone else's game.

Be the host. A GM fills a lot of different roles. You may be the referee, imagineer, director, opposing team, and so on. However, if you have to choose one role to focus on, I'd recommend focusing on being a good host. Invite a good mix of guests. Welcome them when they arrive. Set the tone. Get people interacting with each other. Move things along from activity to activity. Make sure no one is left out or having unmet needs. Don't let troublesome guests ruin the party for everyone else. Conclude gracefully. This is all Emily Post stuff, and books on being a party host will have great advice.

Focus on fun. Depending on your group, fun may mean social bonding over food, deeply immersive roleplaying, challenging tactics, groan-worthy puns, etc. The important point is that all of those things are means to an end. The goal is to have fun and the game is a way to do that. Don't get so caught up on playing correctly that you forget to have fun at the table. And always be on the lookout for ways to add more fun, whatever that means to you and your group.

Communicate with the players. Tell them about what you want out of a game. Listen to what they say they want. Try to understand your players, their personalities and what they're looking for in a game. If your players give you feedback, listen and try to learn from it. Even if you think they're wrong, don't reflexively argue; try to understand their perspective. Communicate about the small things, too. Remind them when a session is coming up and ask for replies to make sure they're still joining in.

Realize that everyone makes mistakes. You're not going to do a perfect job. Some sessions will be better than others, and even your best session will be imperfect. Accept this. Your goal is not perfection, but fun. Keep in mind that your players want to enjoy the game, so they want you to succeed. They're not eagerly waiting to grade you harshly for your mistakes. They're either your friends or want to be your friends and are rooting for you to succeed and will do what they can to help you.

Getting Players

One thing you will definitely need to do is find players. You can't GM without them. Unless you already have a group of friends who want to play, you'll need to focus on the following:

Recruiting RPG players

Some people are successful in using Looking for Game (LFG) channels on RPG discords or whatever the most convenient game match up might be online. However, you can also look at recruiting people who aren't looking for a game. Here's my recipe.

First, befriend people. They can be from work, in your neighborhood, wherever. Don't be pushy, and don't only talk about your game. Talk to them as people. Just be friendly and get to know them. At some point, you'll probably discuss what you do for fun. Mention RPGs. If they say they play, then you have a potential recruit. However even if they don't play RPGs, you can still discuss RPGs with them, just be aware of how interested they seem in your game. Don't push if they're not interested. Dispel any myths, but don't try to explain too much unless they indicate they're interested.

Now, let's say they they've never played RPGs but they're willing to listen to you talk about them and may be amenable to trying it out someday. You'll want to ease them into playing slowly; RPGs have a big learning curve. Start by inviting them over for a board/card game night where you play simpler games and socialize. If they like that, then broach the idea of them sitting in on an RPG night. If they say yes, then absolutely don't make them read all the rules and do homework before they can come over. Explain whatever they ask, but don't do the homework for them. Give them a pre-made character when they show up. Teach the rules through a tutorial one-shot rather than teaching the rules first and doing a regular one-shot. Then, if they like that, they're hooked. You've gained a player. Congratulations.

However, even if they don't like games or they like games but not RPGs, you still have a friend who likes you enough to try your nutty hobby. As consolation prizes go, that's not such a bad thing.

Assembling the party

Although you can play with just one player, this RPG is really made for a group. I prefer 4-5 players, but I could see anywhere from about 2-8 working for people who like small or large groups. Keep a couple things in mind. First, play with people you want to spend time with. If people are making you uncomfortable or if you find them annoying or boring, then you don't play with them. It's a game. Unless you do this professionally, you don't owe them a game, and if you play with people you secretly don't like, you probably won't do a perfect job of hiding that, making it uncomfortable for everyone. In particular, don't play with toxic players, even if they know all the rules and are your best friend's other best friend.

Judge a good fit

Different people are looking for different types of games. If you want to run a tactical game like Mestezia with a casual social vibe, but a player wants an immersive near-LARP experience, neither of you are going to be happy. This doesn't mean either of you is wrong or likes a bad thing, it just means you don't have RPG interests that mesh. That's fine. Take the time to understand your potential players as well as what you want to have in a game. Be willing to wait or have a very small group rather than a larger group where nobody is getting the experience they want.

Now, that said, my favorite groups have had player diversity. Ranging from newbies to experienced players. Different personalities and strengths. A mix of ages, genders and cultural backgrounds. I can't tell you who to invite into your home, but I can say that a mix like that is better suited to creative problem solving and avoiding the drama that sometimes can happen if everyone is an old friend that does everything else together.

Session 0

There are some things you need to do before embarking on an RPG campaign. For simplicity, many people call this Session 0. In real life, some people like to handle this all through one massive sit down session that is literally a Session 0, but others like to take care of all of this digitally or do a mix of lead-up stuff online and an intro session to kick things off. However you like to organize your activities, you need to cover the following before getting down to real sessions.

- **Introduce everyone.** RPGs are a social activity. The players should know you and each other. Make sure there's a little bit of time to chit chat among the practical details so that everyone gets a chance to become comfortable with one another.
- **Set expectations & boundaries.** An RPG is more a game framework than a game. Even if everyone involved has absorbed all the rule and setting information, they still need to know your play style and house rules. For example, how strict or relaxed are you about talking out-of-character? Do you have time limits on turns? Do you let people discuss strategy out of character before skill challenges and combat encounters? If so, how long do you give them? How are you handling food? What if someone can't make a session? Or arrives late? Are you planning to introduce elements that someone may feel uncomfortable with? What's your position on flirting and sexualized behavior in-character?
- **Discuss the style.** Make sure everyone has a feel for what sort of game you're going for before they pick characters. Are you going for a gritty post-disaster refugee story? A heroic epic amid gods and legends? An urban fantasy heist? Gothic horror? Steampunk revolutionaries? Pirate adventure? Silliness or serious? Virtuous or villainous? Not every character concept meshes well with every style, so establish the style first.
- **Discuss accessibility.** Not everyone is going to have the same access or abilities. Perhaps one of your players is colorblind so you'll need to use reexamine how you differentiate details on the battle grid. Maybe someone has mobility issues that limit the choice of venue. Perhaps someone's hearing issues complicate your plan for background music and dim lighting. All of these complications have easy solutions, but they're ones easier found if you discuss the issues first rather than discovering them in at the table.
- **Discuss safety.** As GMs, we're trying to affect the emotions of our players, we want them to immerse themselves in the world, empathize with their PCs, and feel threatened by the combatants. If we want it to be on the fun side of scary, thrilling, or outrageous, we need to know when we're in danger of stepping over that line, which means paying specific attention to where it is for the different people in your party. There are different ways to do this, but they mostly boil down to three ingredients.
 - Acknowledge that you're asking for your players to be vulnerable. Make it clear you want the game to be fun, which sometimes means making them frustrated, scared, outraged, etc. for their PCs, but you don't want to make them uncomfortable as players.
 - Invite them to tell you about any triggers or issues. Don't force them to say something in front of everyone, though.
 - Encourage them to let you know if something makes them uncomfortable at the table. Have a way for them to do so without talking about it in front of the group. X-Cards are popular for this.
 - If someone raises a flag to say their uncomfortable, change what you're doing. Call for a snack break if you need a moment to think of what to do instead. Discreetly ask if you're not sure what the trigger was. Don't ask why or for more background.
- **Create characters.** Especially if they're new players, you can help them sort through the options. At the end of the process, the players should not only know their own character, but also have an idea of what the other people in the table chose. Mestezia is built to encourage players to specialize in different roles. There can be overlap, but if you have big parts of the game that aren't covered, this can also be an opportunity for the players to start thinking about how they're going to compensate. For example, if they lack a character with healing ability, perhaps they can stock up on healing potions and stay close enough to a town with a healer to limp back for help if they get injured.
- **Form the party.** Here is the first opportunity for the players to start working as a group. Establish how the adventure starts and ask them how they got there and why they will be adventuring together. You may give them the plot hook right

now (e.g. “the local leader needs someone to investigate a rash of thefts”) or you may just detail the initial situation (e.g. “you’re part of a larger caravan traveling over the mountains”). The players don’t all have to have the same reasons or history, but they should all have a reason to be allies going forward. Feel free to make suggestions, especially with how things tie into the game world.

Pacing

Starting a session

In the beginning of the session, people need a bit of time to settle in. They might need to set their favorite dice to the lucky sides, spread out their character sheets, sharpen their pencils, or just catch up with other players they haven't seen in a while. Particularly if they're fellowship-motivated players, they'll treasure that camaraderie and interaction. You might want to set aside some time before the session itself starts where the space is available and everyone can hang out with snacks to socialize and slowly set up.

The important thing is to have a clear indication of when the session begins so that the focus of the get together changes and people can get into the role playing mood. Maybe you like playing atmospheric music or donning a fancy hat or simply asking everyone to give you their attention. After you've indicated that the session has officially begun, recap the last session or ask the players to recap it for you. Then set the scene for play to begin. This can be short, but it should include the current situation, a bit of atmosphere, and a hook to get them moving forward plot-wise. If you ended the last session on a cliff-hanger or with the players having a clear objective, include that. If not, insert some other hook. For example:

You: It's the afternoon of the third day of the expedition, and you just saved the caravan from a dire wolf attack. The caravan leader has stopped for the day, and they're planning to cook a feast for you tonight in celebration of your bravery and victory. A couple giggling children hand you flowers they picked in thanks. One of the merchants has asked to talk to you about something. He seems nervous.

Switching Modes

One of the hallmarks of the Mestezia RPG is mode switching—changing the mode of play between narrative roleplay, skills challenges, and combat encounters. If you have short sessions—an hour of two at a time—then you should be careful not to switch too much. Two modes, maybe three total, is about what you'll be able to fit in well. On the other hand, if you have sessions that last more than two hours, especially if they're a lot longer than that, switching modes allows you to reinvigorate the play in the middle of a session. In particular, switching modes can help relieve concentration fatigue as well as give you a convenient point to pause for a snack break.

Narrative role playing mode is unstructured and can allow for a more in-character experience. You'll want to alternate that with skill challenges and combat encounters, which are more like board or card games. They can also feel immersive, but the type of immersion feels different than narrative mode.

Fluid time

The passage of time can feel very fluid in Mestezia. Sometimes days or weeks pass in the game with a casual "you traveled to the city uneventfully." On the other hand, sometimes the players will strategize out of character to carefully conduct an interrogation or plot an infiltration.

Keep the players grounded in the passage of time by referencing elements of daily or seasonal rhythms, calendar days, etc. When opening a new scene or session, mention things like weather, holidays, or time elapsed since a previous memorable scene.

Ending a Session

When practical, I like to end with a cliffhanger that gives them something to chew over between sessions. A bit of description that sets up the next scene without letting them fully play it out. That way they can obsess and plan between sessions, and when I start the next game, they can hit the ground running.

Narrative Roleplaying

You'll want to start a roleplaying mode by setting the scene for the players. You always want to start by establishing the context of the scene, whether that means physical description of an area, the NPCs who are nearby, or the date/time of day/geopolitical location. You'll want to be brief, focusing on evocative details to give them an impression and practical info on things they can interact with (people, objects, etc.).

During the roleplaying

Once you've set the stage, you'll enter into a back and forth with the players. There are four major patterns you can take.

- **Exploration.** You describe whatever the players indicate an interest in and then the players describe what they do. The next description you give will be based on whatever happened, and the players will either follow that up or switch to asking you to describe the next thing.
- **Prompted Action.** You describe a scene, then prompt the players with a question, usually something along the lines of "what do you do now?" although you can guide players through a plot pretty tightly by loading the question, e.g. "do you go through the door?" or "is there anything you want to take before you leave?" Use that enough to keep momentum, but don't make the players feel railroaded or patronized.
- **Social interaction.** You're playing an NPC with whom the players talk.
- **Check.** Within any of the patterns, the player may attempt something that isn't guaranteed.

Ending the Roleplaying

Try to end narrative mode with a conclusion or results. It could be a summary of information gleaned or area explored or the start of a combat or skill challenge. Challenge-motivated players in particular will likely value role play more if they can feel like they accomplished something during it.

Narrative Pitfalls

As useful as narrative mode is, the flexibility of it trends toward the following problems. Being aware of these will help you avoid falling prey to them.

- **GM Spotlight.** A lot of the functions of narrative mode depend on the GM talking, either to describe things or to play NPCs. It's easy to inadvertently hog the spotlight, leaving your players as a passive audience to your performance. Some GMs lean into this style and run their games as a performance. If you'd rather focus on the players, you can counter this tendency to put the GM in the spotlight by keeping descriptions concise and using NPC interactions to prompt your players.
- **Quieter players get left out.** In other modes, players take turns, but in narrative mode, vocal, experienced, opinionated, or outgoing players tend to put themselves forward and new, reserved, slower-thinking or quiet players often become more passive. Some players enjoy sitting back and letting others lead, but if it happens repeatedly, you'll want to check in with the quiet player and make sure they're not feeling uncomfortable or shut out. If they want to be more involved in narrative scenes and aren't sure how, try prompting them with in-character questions or addressing descriptions directly to them.
- **Roleplaying the PCs.** It can be easy to slide from describing what players perceive to describing how they react to it emotionally or physically. You need to do such a good job at the former that the players take care of the latter themselves. If you don't leave the reaction to the players to decide, you're taking over some of their ownership of the characters. An exception to this rule of thumb is if they're affected by a magical effect that forces them to react in a particular way.
- **Getting Stuck.** In other modes, the PCs are working towards a clear objective, but in narrative mode, they may get stuck. The players not know what next steps they can take, or they may confuse "what they can do" with "what may just spend time doing things they know they can do instead of things that will help them move forward. I recommend stepping in when the players (not the PCs) act lost or their discussions lose momentum. When this happens, jump in with something happening in game that they need

can immediately react to.

- **Grinding.** Perhaps your players repeat a check until they get a sufficiently high grade result, although sometimes this sort of “pull on the slot machine lever until I get the desired result” takes place in pure narrative scenes. Regardless, the problem is that this can make for boring gameplay and can often be unrealistic. If players realize the mechanics reward a certain behavior, they will often want to do that behavior. Don’t forbid it, but instead make sure that interactions always have a result, cost, or consequence. For example, if they want to search for hidden doors, have each attempt “cost” a certain amount of time and make them less effective (raise the threshold) as it gets later and later. If they keep asking for favors, give them a penalty until they do some favors for the people they’re relying on.

Checks

Checks are a way to adjudicate outside the game what is happening in-game, but you have a different relationship with checks than the players do. You don't roll anything. Instead you...

1. **Decide which savvies** are appropriate for the action the player has said they'd take. I recommend using 2 savvys whenever applicable. It tends to []
2. **Decide the Threshold** for what they're attempting. A good rule of thumb is

Threshold = (# of savvys)x(PC level) + 10. Raise the threshold to make the check harder, lower it to make it easier. The grade should depend on the difficulty of the result for their tier. Here's a table of success probability pier, per grade

[Table]

1. **Translate the results** into in-game descriptions of consequences.

Why use Checks

As the GM, you could theoretically just decide all consequences in a sort of pure storytelling mode. Some RPGs are built around this approach, and it can be fun although a different sort of experience. However, in Mestezia, we use Checks to do the following.

- **Provide dramatic tension.** If you rely solely on roleplaying to determine success or failure, then you'll be likely to have things work out according to your intended plot. With checks neither you nor the players know what the outcome will be, and there's a lot more bated breath.
- **Minimize bias.** If you decide how successful players are by storytelling, then it tends to be influenced by your mood and the player's persuasiveness. Using checks provides consistency to how often players succeed.
- **Give character creation choices meaning.** When players create characters, they have to make hard choices about what skills and combat savvys to train. Checks allow these choices to have in-game consequences.

When to use Checks

When the consequences make a difference. If success and failure have the same result, then you don't need a check.

When the task is not guaranteed. If it's something that the PCs should be able to do very easily, don't bother making them make a check. As they gain in level, the sorts of things requiring checks will change.

When the task involves a single person and few skills. If it involves a lot of different skills and the whole group, consider using a challenge instead.

To prevent metagaming. If skipping a check tells something to the players, then do the check, even if it doesn't matter.

Check Pitfalls

Conflating in-game and metagame. It's common for a player to say something like, "I'm going to try to use Influence+Nature to get the dire bison to move aside." But this conflates a metagame mechanic (Influence+Nature check) with an in-game effect (move the bison). Mestezia already tends to lean towards the game-ish side of RPGs. Conflating in-game and metagame makes it less immersive, more like a puzzle that the players solve rather than one for the PCs to experience. To prevent this erosion of immersion, require players to declare what their characters do, not just jump to the skills used. It focuses the player on what their PC is doing in the game instead of just jumping to the metagame.

Stretching definitions. Players with a high bonus will want to apply that bonus to as many situations as possible. They will try to expand the definition of that skill or combat savvy until it covers a great deal of ground. When players try this, one way to minimize the problem is to reply with a choice. They can either use the correct savvys or they can use the stretched definition skills at a penalty (i.e. with one fewer dice in their pool or with a higher threshold).

Judgement calls. Which savvies and Thresholds apply is very subjective. There is no clear right answer, so you and the players can easily disagree. But someone has to make the call, and it's your job to do so in a way that makes for the best game. My advice in situations where players act confused about your decision is to explain why you made the call you did and to be as consistent as you can in how you

make calls. But! Don't let the game get derailed into an argument about a single check. If a player feels strongly, table it until after the game and address it afterwards. If the players trust that you're trying to make the game good for them, then they'll put aside the knowledge that you make different subjective calls then they do. If they don't trust you, then you have a bigger problem of trust at the table that you need to address before the incidental one of the check can be handled.

PC vs PC checks

If two PCs use skills against one another, then have the both roll the check, with the winner being the higher. Use your judgement about the threshold. If they have the same check result, then it's a tie.

Advice on NPC Checks

- **Use the plot to resolve NPC actions.** NPCs and creatures don't need checks to resolve actions. Mestezia is an asymmetric system where the GM uses different mechanics than the players. PC checks give players agency, remove bias, and give the character creation choices meanings. However, none of those issues apply to NPCs. NPCs don't need agency, don't care about bias, and aren't searching for meaning, and you (as the person playing them) already have all of that by virtue of being GM. When the PCs are not around, the NPCs' storylines continue however you choose to plot them. Having the PCs be in the room to witness their interactions doesn't change the underlying dynamics. The NPCs and creatures still act as an outgrowth of the story you want to tell. Resolve their actions with storytelling that best serves the plot instead of through checks. It saves time.
- **Roll dice to help you.** There's a caveat to the "GM doesn't roll dice" rule. Sometimes the story may go in a direction you didn't plan for, where you don't know which NPC consequence would be most likely or best serve the plot. If, like me, you sometimes freeze when faced with unexpected choices, then feel free to use a roll of the dice to hurry your decision making. Just realize that you're using it to help you quickly decide what happens, not that it's the way Mestezia works on a mechanical level.
- **Make NPC vs NPC abilities into PC checks.** A special case of NPC-NPC interaction is having multiple NPCs using their abilities against each

other. In some systems, this is done using "opposing" checks, but in Mestezia, NPCs don't roll dice, they only have thresholds.

Of course, I recommend avoiding this situation when possible. If the consequence of the check affects the PCs, try to reframe the check in terms of a PC check. Otherwise, you're taking away the players' agency and putting them at the mercy of the plot (which you control) and luck (which you somewhat control).

For example, let's say a PC convinced an NPC to turn against his fellow guard in a chase. The fellow guard ran away and the first NPC is trying to chase him down before he gets away. You could frame this as the guard's Athletics+Kinesthetics check. However, you can reframe this as the PC's Athletics+Influence check to exhort the guard to greater speed and effectiveness in chasing down the other NPC. If the PC makes the check, the first NPC puts on a burst of speed and catches the other. If not, he looks back with doubt, allowing the quarry to barely escape.

If you can't think of a way to reframe it so that the PCs have an impact, then just

Using NPCs

Mestezia is teeming with people, any of whom could be an NPC. You'll produce NPCs for your players based on player impetus (e.g. *Player*: "I'd like to find a witness and talk to him") or your own (e.g. *You*: "A tall, scrawny man approaches you and says, ...")

NPC Purpose

Since you can't play every person in the world, you'll need to be deliberate about who you choose to play. Choosing the NPCs you bring to life will be one of the most significant choices you make in bringing your world to life for your players. Make sure you're choosing someone that fulfills at least one of the following criteria:

- **Motivation.** They may be a victim who pleads for help, a friend whose absence troubles the party, or a rich merchant who pays for their services. Regardless, they entice the PCs to follow your plot or to create their own. The key to using NPCs as motivations is to understand what motivates the PCs. This is different than what motivates the players. The PC may be a refugee have lost his family and have sympathy for others in a similar situation, or may be paying off a debt and be eager to earn money. If your players roleplay their characters, and you know your player's characters, you'll be able to predict how the PCs will act. It lets you plan ahead without railroading the party.
- **Obstacles.** NPC obstacles may range from the well-intended busybody who gets in the way to the big bad evil villain. When the obstacle is an NPC that the party knows and interacts with, they become more personally engaged. Don't settle for making combat the only time NPCs act as obstacles.
- **Information.** The PCs can gain information directly through their skill checks, but sometimes it's a lot more fun to roleplay them getting the information from a particular person. It may be a scholar they consult, a prisoner they interrogate, or a gossip bystander who fills them in.
- **Worldbuilding.** Silly or somber, country folk or courtiers, the sort of NPCs you select, the things they do, the way they talk, and the values they hold define your world. They set the standard for how people in the world act, which informs and influences your players. In particular, keep in mind that the NPCs are the only people your players perceive. If you imagine a realistic world,

but the NPCs you choose are predominantly selfish or male or gullible or stereotypical or any one quality, it won't feel realistic.

Overpreparing NPCs

Every GM has their own style, but it's extremely popular to warn against overpreparing. If you want to join me in bucking that trend, here's what I recommend doing to properly prepare for your NPCs. For each NPC you anticipate roleplaying, you should plan out the following:

- **Name.** e.g. Elia Longnose
- **Intro/description.** preferably no more than a sentence or two so that the players are better able to remember it and you all can get on with the game. e.g. A muscular young woman with tousled brown hair, her eyes are red and puffy, and her clothes are stained with mud and vomit.
- **Memorable quality.** This may be the intro description or something about the way you play them. Exaggerate it, and don't make it too complicated. The NPCs won't be getting huge amounts of roleplay, so they don't have the story space to be subtle. E.g. Drunk and grieving
- **Motivation(s).** The PC don't need to know what makes them tick, but you should. This will help guide you when the players E.g. Survivor's guilt and fear of the Beast.
- **Actions.** Think about what someone like the NPC would really do. E.g. She'll eagerly agree to help the adventurers, but won't lead them to the lair in person without a high check.

Have this info on a sheet with space to write notes in case you add to her lore or the party thinks of something interesting. Feel free to script some specific speeches if you want, but be prepared to modify them in play if the situation calls for it.

Also, it's useful to be prepared with:

- **A list of unused names** that work in the region/culture the PCs are currently in. I like to separate the list by gender, (male, female, and androgynous), but you may also want to separate by ethnicity or social class if that seems more practical to you.
- **A scratch sheet** where you can quickly note the name of any newly improvised NPC and their purpose or what you told the party about them in

case you decide afterwards to make this a recurring NPC.

Languages

They party can speak the language of the nation in which they start. As characters advance in level, they may travel to places where intelligent species speak very different languages. The setting guides provide information about what languages are commonly spoken in various places, and players will have access to features and items that help cross the language barrier. However, the GM should feel free to ignore all of this; it's not an intrinsic part of the game and can be excised without unbalancing the system.

Playing NPCs

If you're GMing an RPG, you'll need to role play NPCs. Everybody has their own style, so decide for yourself how much you'll want to get into voices and accents and acting. I've had wonderful GMs that are terrible at all of those things but who put so much care into the NPCs' behavior and motivations that they painted a memorable vividly for the players. With that said, here's some practical advice.

Include guest NPCs thoughtfully. Usually NPCs are played by the GM, however it can be a lot of fun to bring someone in from outside the group as a special treat. This can be a friend or relative of a player, someone who's considering joining the group, or just someone who wants to experience RPGs for the first time.

To give them the best chance of success, choose a character that has a meaty or dramatic part part in the upcoming session. Prepare a sheet that describes the sort of info you'd normally write down for an NPC, plus any background information on what the guest needs to know in order to understand the NPC's motivations, the setting, and the situation. If there's a possibility of the character joining in combat or a skill challenge, create a PC-style character sheet for them (it can be simplified), but if not, or if the guest doesn't know the rules, you may want to handle the mechanics yourself and just let the guest do the roleplaying.

Include recurring NPCs thoughtfully. A recurring NPC could be an ally that helps out the party with information in exchange for help, an antagonist whose plans are often foiled by the party, or a neutral party that adds color to the situation. Because the party interacts with them repeatedly, they develop a history with the NPC. You have a chance to develop their character more fully and they can grow attached to part of the world. You can plan ahead to make a character recurring, but I also recommend paying attention to NPCs the players enjoy or react strongly to. Find ways to insert them into the story later.

Avoid GM PCs. The difference between a recurring NPC and a GM PC is that the latter tags along with the party and would be expected to be treated as part of the party in-character.

Usually this happens when the GM wants the PCs to be involved with something beyond their level or has a very small group of players but wants to have enough PCs to round out the party. Maybe it makes sense in the story for a PC to want to come along.

Whatever the justification, the GM creates an NPC that becomes a member of the party. Be careful; this is a trap. Using long term NPCs like this has three serious pitfalls, but there are ways to lessen the impact.

Removes Agency from the players. If you have an NPC that can do things the group doesn't, then your players will (rightly!) expect it to save the day if they're in trouble or solve the puzzle if they can't. But this removes their agency, because their fate doesn't rest in their hands any more. Every encounter becomes a potential Deus Machina situation. If you absolutely must have a GM PC, try to find a way to force the GM PC away from the party or to consistently limit what it can/will do.

Steals the Spotlight. You want the players to be in the spotlight as much as possible. You can minimize this by having the GM PC fade into the background as much as possible. The tradeoff is that you're spending time keeping track of an NPC that doesn't really add much to the story or atmosphere.

Blurs the lines. The GM knows a lot about the world that the players shouldn't. If you're investigating a mystery or trying to solve a puzzle or avoiding a trap, you may be able to separate your knowledge from your GM PCs knowledge, but your players will be influenced by the PCs actions and insights. You can ameliorate this by making the GM PC dumb and unreliable and by using checks to determine its knowledge, although you'll need to be careful not to give away information by when you choose to make checks.

When to not Roleplay NPCs

Here are a couple of examples of when you might want to summarize and describe instead of roleplaying the interaction.

- **A series of similar interactions.** e.g. "You talk to everyone on the street. No one noticed the assailant, but three had suspicious gaps in their memory."
- **When players fixate.** Sometimes players fixate on an interrogation or other roleplay detail, convinced there is more information to find if they just figure out the right question to ask. Once the start repeating themselves, you can encourage them to move on by falling out of roleplaying and just summarizing the discussion.

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- **For practical reasons.** For example, if the NPC is a small child, screaming in terror, you might want to say that rather than scream in real life and scare your neighbors.
 - **Two NPCs talking to each other.** Because this puts the players in a passive role of being an audience to your performance. When possible, plan ahead so that the situation doesn't occur. If it does, consider summarizing the discussion rather than roleplaying it. For example, "John and Joe bicker for several minutes, letting slip that the outbreak started three weeks ago, after a visit from a shaman they'd never seen before."

Exploration

A major facet of narrative roleplaying is exploration and interaction, going to new places and interacting physically with things in the environment. You won't be able to describe the entire world, but prioritize the following

- **Overview with a few sensory details.** So players understand the basic context as well as have some sensory information to help them create a picture in their heads. E.g. "You're in the Brighthaven Woods. The rain patters gently through the broadleaf canopy 50' above you."
- **Context.** Where are you on a map? What's the date? Time? Weather? You don't need to answer all of these every time, but give some sort of context when you start a session and if the context changes. In narrative mode, it's easy to become unmoored in time and space in your descriptions, skipping hours as you walk around a city or through a path in the woods. Counter this by updating your player when time passes or when their PCs move to a new location.
- **Creatures.** Especially mention creatures if a player has a high biologicas or domesticas savvy because then they'll be more likely to notice them as well as more likely to be interested in trying to interact with them. Even if they don't however, the bright flash of hummingbirds birds or the yip of a coyote can be a useful detail to ground the setting.
- **Interactive Features.** Always mention elements in the setting with which players can interact. Doors they can open or close, and machines they can turn on or off are particularly useful to mention indoors. Solitary elements in the landscape to which they can travel e.g. "a keep on a distant hill." is useful to mention, because it can tempt a party to go check it out.
- **NPCs.** Either as individuals e.g. "a stout man, rushing towards you waving a bolt of cloth" or as a group, e.g. "a line of merchants hawking their wares." They not only help flesh out the world, they are always things to potentially interact with.

What to leave out

Commonsense details. If you're in the woods, you don't need to also mention that there are trees all around.

Exploration Pitfalls

Aimless wandering. It can be fun to explore a world, but it can also be overwhelming and amorphous. Counter this with with goals, constraints. For example, they can be trying to find a path through mountains or a hidden pirate treasure.

Implicit GM intrusions. You want to paint a scene without telling the players what their PCs think or feel about it. Sometimes it can be easy to accidentally introduce loaded terms that cross that line. Avoid this by sticking to elements in the scene, sensory (not emotional) descriptions of them, and knowledge the PCs would have about it. For example, if you are tempted to describe a mist as "eerie", think about what would cause someone to think that. Does it roll in at the wrong time of day? Muffle sounds from more than a few steps away? Can the players just barely hear whispers from it? If you are tempted to call a ruins "mysterious" think about what would cause the PCs to draw that conclusion. Is it in a style they've never seen before? Is there something weird about where it is or how it's laid out? Think specifics.

Implied railroading. Since you decide which things to mention, it's easy to guide players the way you want them to go. This isn't always a bad thing, but it's always more interesting for players if they have real choices.

Players leaving the planned area. This happens to everyone.

Single point of failure. Multiple paths to success

Types of Exploration

Detection. The players may be examining a crime scene to gain clues to solve a mystery. They

Hunting. They could be following a treasure map, searching for treasure.

Exploration.

Travel,

Survival Basics

In real life, adventuring needs to take into account a lot of practical details such as food and water, but in a game, it's usually usually easier to gloss over things like mealtimes, sleeping, going to the bathroom, darning the holes in your socks, and so on. Have fun roleplaying as much of this as you wish, but the mechanics will not dwell on such details except as abstracted savvy checks in survival situations.

Challenges

The Declaration

When you come to a point where the challenge should start, you need to formally declare the challenge. You need to declare:

1. **Mode switch.** You'll need to make it clear that you're going to switch modes into a skill challenge.
2. **Goal.** The goal of the challenge could be anything from making it out of the disaster area alive to solving a murder. When they win the game, they generally achieve the goal. If they lose, they don't achieve the goal.
3. **Allowed skills.** Typically 5-7 skills.
4. **Threshold.** Especially if it's different than usual for that level, or if using one of the skills has a bonus or penalty.
5. **Number of booms needed.** Choose at least as many booms as the number of players, that way everyone is guaranteed to go at least once. Challenges start to drag after 2-3 rounds, so don't require more booms than two times the number of players, but I prefer the same number as the number of players or a little more.
6. **Number of busts** allowed before the challenge ends in defeat. The same amount as the number of booms is standard. You can have fewer busts allowed to make the challenge harder or more busts to make it easier.
7. **Roll for the turn order.** Telling them to roll tells them the declaration is over and gets everyone moving towards the challenge itself.

So a declaration would sound like this:

GM: Okay, let's treat this as a challenge. In order to be hired by the mercenary captain you need to impress her in the tryouts using Athletics, Fortitude, Discipline, Dexterity, Military, Influence, or Stealth. To win, you need to get 5 Booms before 4 Busts. The Threshold is 10. Any questions? No? Then roll for turn order."

During the Challenge

Even if you want to fade into the background, you're still responsible for the following.

Track the turn order. Everybody has their own method. I like to use initiative cards for each PC. After they roll for the turn order, I ask who has the highest roll and the players volunteer a few high rolls.

I arrange their cards from highest to lowest, usually having to make them repeat a couple times to get the order right. As the play progresses, I indicate whose turn it is by silently bumping a card above the rest so that it sticks out of the line a bit, and then putting it back when they're done. Other people use other methods like writing it on a whiteboard or using clips. Note: you can also delegate tracking the turn order to another player.

Adjudicate skill combos. Players will usually try to use their best skills of those allowed, regardless of whether their description of what they're trying to do makes sense in story or as a description of the skill. You'll need to make rulings on whether its allowed.

Announce booms and busts. Even if you announce the Threshold ahead of time, you should still officially announce whether a roll counts as a boom or bust. In theory, if you have an amazingly mature group of players, since you announced the Thresholds at the beginning, they can decide for themselves whether they succeed. However. If they're in the habit of making their own calls rather than waiting for you to have the final word, then they will also start disagreeing with your decisions more in general. Decide for yourself if you're comfortable enough with table management to let the players get used to being their own referee.

Track booms and busts. You and your players will likely be able to track the number of booms by noting it on a piece of paper or just remembering it. But it can also be fun to have a more tangible tracker, especially if you have sensory-motivated players. One way to do this is to have a bust bowl and a boom bowl, with marbles or something similar to represent the number of success needed or failures allowed. If they want, the players can take the marbles out of the bowl to represent their results, or you can remove them. The first bowl to be emptied is turned over to indicate the result of the challenge.

Translate check results into outcomes. After you announce what the check did, you should strive to translate that into in-game effects. Their checks represent their actions and should affect the game world. Say a sentence or two after each check saying what happened as a result of their actions. Alternatively, you can run skill challenges so that the players always describe the impact of their actions according to the check result. Whichever system you go with, just be consistent so players know whether they're responsible for describing it or not.

Ending the Challenge

Declare the end. Maybe the party succeeded, maybe they failed, but either way, they've come to the end of the challenge and should have a clear indication of whether or not they achieved the goal of the challenge.

Hand out rewards & consequences. If the players win, this will be fairly straightforward. You've already set the goal, so you know what the result should generally be. The only thing left is to describe it in sufficiently dramatic detail that the players feel like they have achieved something memorable and then to hand out FP. But what do you do when the players lose the skill challenge? Hopefully this will happen at least once, so be prepared. The most important thing to keep in mind is that SOMETHING should happen. Regardless of whether they win or lose, there should always be an effect on the game world, and you should always translate it into a few dramatic sentences.

Prompt to begin the next mode. Once the cheering has died down (let's think positive, here), give the party a cue to spur their next action. They may enter combat, especially if they lose the challenge, but more often they'll slip into roleplay mode, so you'll want to keep the momentum going forward.

For example, if you win, you might end the challenge something like this:

You: "Boom! Okay, that's the fifth boom. You won the challenge. Thanks to Bob carefully distracting the last guard, the party is able to sneak inside the fort unnoticed by its many defenders. You're inside a great tiled hall, empty of people but with a dias at the far end backed by an intricate mural. Two open doors yawn on each side of the mural. What do you do next?"

If you lose, it's fun and immersive to use the skill duo of the last check to decide how the failure translates into the real world. For example (after you wait out the groans of chagrin from the loss with as diabolically eager a grin as you can manage), if Bob had tried (and failed) to use Deception + Kinesthetics to throw rocks and make the guard walk away to check out the noise, then maybe you say...

You: "That's your last failure, and you've lost the skill challenge. The guard glances at where the rocks landed, but then traces the path backward to where Bob is sitting. He's starting to walk over to your hiding place. What do you do?"

On the other hand, if Bob had tried (and failed) to use Influence + Society to try to bribe the guard into letting them in, maybe you say...

You: "The guard sneers at Bob, telling him how all the gold in the world can't buy her honor. She smashes the butt of her spear against a giant drum to her left, the sound echoing through the building. What do you do now?"

Pitfalls

As useful as skill challenges are, they have the following problems. Being aware of the will help you avoid falling prey to them

- **Abstraction.** Skill challenges are a bit more abstracted than the other modes. It can have a very board-gamey feel to it. Counter this by consistently having the players roleplay their turns or describe them with enthusiasm, rather than simply dealing with the mechanics.
- **Repetition.** Challenges provide few game design levers. They can be applied to very different situations, but still end up feeling very samey. Counter this tendency by varying the strategic challenge (by using challenge variants), by allowing different skills, and by emphasizing the roleplaying aspect of the skill challenges

Combat

Initiating Combat

When you come to a point where the combat should happen, you need to cover the following:

1. **Declare the start.** Something happened to start the fight or to introduce the potential for a combat. Say what that thing is and make it clear that you're going into a combat encounter..
2. **Set up the battle grid.** You'll be setting up or unveiling the grid. Explain what it looks like, and give the players a chance to ask any questions about it. In particular, make sure you point out any terrain conditions (except hidden elements) or special types.
3. **Set up the enemies.** Put the minis or tokens on the board that represent the enemy. Go through them, explaining the information the PCs would know about the enemy, such as how they look, how they're acting, and what weapons they might use. Give the players a chance to ask questions about the enemies and roll savvy checks to learn deep information about them.
4. **Set up the party.** You can allow the players to set themselves up, although you may want to give them specific constraints depending on how they were before combat started. For example, they may all start on one edge of the battle grid or within an area. If they were sleeping, they may start prone.
5. **Roll for initiative order.** Telling them to roll tells them the declaration is over and gets everyone moving towards the challenge itself. Make sure that you keep track of the initiative rolls—some powers allow players to change their place in the initiative order.

Surprise

If the players are taken by surprise by the attack, you can choose to grant the NPCs a bonus to their initiative and/or grant them combat advantage until the PC goes.

NPC Turns

NPCs get 6 APs (Action Points) to spend on their turns. The APs don't accumulate; after your turn is over; any unused APs are lost at the end of the turn. NPCs also get 1 Reaction to use each round.

Attacking

The GM doesn't roll when using powers; instead, the players targeted by a power roll to determine the results. So if the NPC attacks, to the following:

1. **Declare the attack,** including
 - Who you're attacking
 - What power you're using
 - What the threshold is
 - What combat savvies the power targets
1. **Optional:** Players may roll a reaction. The targeted player or another player may have a Reaction power that triggers off of your attack. If a Player is using a Defense power, they need to declare it before rolling their defense check, and it may negate or replace the defense roll. If they're using a different sort of reaction, they may roll it after the defense is rolled.

The player rolls. The roll determines both your NPC's attack and the PC's defense.

You: Aeoli attacks Boru. He gestures and a dark cloud engulfs you. Before disappearing, you feel the stinging insects crawling everywhere. Roll AC+Fort with a threshold of 15.

Player: I use my Shaman's Defense....aaand I rolled a high. I resist up to 5 dam.

You: On a high grade result, the attack only did 2 HP toxin damage, so with your resistance, you took no damage

Defending

When the players attack you, you just need to let the player know the Threshold result.

Player: Boru uses 4 AP to whip out his bow and attack Aeoli's AC with a Mighty Shot.

You: The threshold is 14.

Player: I got a medium. That's 10 HP damage and he's pushed back 1 hex to here (moving Aeoli's token). He's also knocked prone.

Some creatures may have abilities that trigger on a defense result, for example they may counterattack or resist if the PCs miss or roll low. If that's the case, then you also continue like so:

You: Aeoli's Bloodied now. He gets a crazed look in his eye and tentacles burst from his mouth like obscene tongues. You take 2 HP Fear damage.

Ending Combat

1. **Declare the End.** Maybe a win, maybe a loss, but the battle has ended. If the party has completely defeated the enemy, then the moment the battle ends is clear. However, sometimes tactical combats can devolve into tedious slugfests despite our best efforts. If you see that the party will definitely win, but it may take several more long rounds to entirely finish off the combat, feel free to simply leave combat mode at the end of a round and summarize the rest of the fight with a couple narrative sentences.
2. **Hand out rewards and consequences.** Including both mechanical FP and narrative "this happens next" sort of consequences.

Pitfalls

As useful as combat encounter are, they have the following problems. Being aware of these will help you avoid falling prey to them

- **Death.** PCs can die. If you eliminate the possibility of the PCs dying, either by making the combat too easy or stepping in to change the results of the rolls, then you cheapen their victories. If you're not sure of their combat abilities or your evaluation of risk abilities, start conservative in how difficult you make the fights, or insert some fights that are aimed to be nonlethal. Then ramp up the difficulty as you get more comfortable judging the difficulty. In addition, have the stakes sometimes not be death. Perhaps if they lose, they'll be captured or shamed or have their belongings taken by the victor. Also keep in mind that death is not necessarily the end for a PC. The section on Consequences discusses handling PCs death.
- **Violence Mindset.** If violence is too easy, it cheapens the immersion and world building. On some level, players know that. Now, if you want to run a campaign focused on combat—a dystopian world or a dungeon crawl for instance—then that can work. But your players will probably get more engaged if they feel like death has some meaning in the world, and that the NPCs react in real ways to violence or to violent characters.
- **Slow combat.** Tactically complex turns where only one person at a time can go means players can wait a long time for their turn to come around, especially if the party is large. If you find your combats are dragging, have your players try to speed up their individual turns, and make sure you're on the ball making NPC turns speedy as well. Also, make sure your combats use elements which give lots of PCs a chance to react, whether it's area attacks or hazards, etc. This way players have things to do even outside their turns.

Combatants

Combatants are roughly described by their creature type, level, role, and hierarchy.

Roles

Combatants, like PCs, have tactical combat roles. However, the NPC roles are different PC roles. They're designed to make an interesting tactical challenge rather than win the fight. So, for example, there's no type that specializes in healing or defense, since that would just make the fight last longer. The roles are intended to give GMs insight into how to deploy them.

- **Artillery** have high accuracy and a focus on ranged combat. Like other ranged combatants, they can be vulnerable on their own, but if paired with melee characters to distract the PCs, they can attack anybody while staying safe.
- **Brutes** have lots of HP and do a lot of damage, but have relatively low defenses. They're most effective attacking vulnerable backline PCs in melee, but smart players will work to keep their squishy folks protected by defenders, shielding by magic, or mobility.
- **Flankers** have high mobility and a mix of melee and ranged powers. They're most effective using their mobility to leapfrog the frontline and threaten ranged PCs.
- **Lurkers** deal high damage and are characterized by their ability to hide or remove themselves from battle. They don't have the HP or defenses to stay in melee, but they jump in to do damage and then retreat to safety.
- **Schemers** specialize in applying conditions from a distance. They can appear to be artillery at first glance, but focus on terrain and PC control makes them more effective against the high-HP melee PCs, as plus their defenses tend to be better, especially their mental defense.
- **Soldiers** have high accuracy and defenses and are most effective attacking the frontline in melee, punching through the high defenses of melee defender and savior PCs.
- **Twisters** are melee characters whose powers focus on applying conditions positioning people. They have good defenses and can appear like soldiers, but their powers incline them more towards thwarting offensive melee PCs rather than defensive ones.

Hierarchy

The combatant hierarchy describes how powerful they are within a level.

- **Standard** enemies are the most common. They usually get a couple ordinary attacks and 1-3 rechargeable/special attacks.
- **Elite** enemies are more powerful. They have about 3-5 rechargeable/ special powers and have two turns per round. They have higher HP and sustain thresholds, and start combat with one FP.
- **Solo** (x5) enemies are the most powerful enemies. They have more (3-6) rechargeable and special powers and have three turns per round. They have much higher HP and sustain thresholds and start combat with 2 FP.
- **Minion** enemies have identical stats to standard enemies, except they have no HP. Instead they are out of the fight on any easy attack check. Generally, you use minions in groups of about 5, who all go in the same turn. Minions are especially vulnerable to area attacks.
- **Lackeys** are like minions, except they require two easy attacks to take down. They're generally used in groups of 3-4.

Whom to Target

In general, you'll want to target the PCs that the monsters would target, which is often whoever is the most annoying to the enemies. Your enemy combatants will attack the PCs that have recently hurt or annoyed them. If they're smart enough to reason, they'll assess threats and go after whoever seems the biggest threat even if they're not the closest or showiest. However, if you notice that some players who have been hiding and avoiding the fight, you'll want to actively seek them out and not let them skate by even if it may not be exactly what the NPCs would do. Also, you'll want to prey on defenses that appear weak on PCs if the combatants are smart enough to figure it out.

Strategically, the players should do their best to chase down your schemers and artillery and stand up to brutes, but stay away from twisters, and save soldiers and lurkers until the end. So as the GM, you'll want to make it hard for them to do this.

Reading the Block

A PC block will have information about the PC, including what it appears to be to the PC, what its Thresholds are, and what powers it has. Let's look at an example.

ESCOBA

Living (Human), Level 2 Elite Skirmisher

Rangy man wearing a wrap skirt and poncho, wields a hatchet

Initiative 16, 6 **Speed** 3 (Fly 1) **Threshold** 10 [Perception 8, Will 11]

Hatchet Strike 3 AP [BMA, Slashing] Melee 1 AC + Athl **0** 8 dmg, Prone **1** 5 dmg **2** 2 dmg

Hatchet Throw 3 AP [BRA, Slashing] Ranged 10 AC + Kine **0** 5 dmg **1** 2 dmg

Grasping Winds 4 AP, Re 7 [Ranged Attack, Air] Melee Blast 3 AC + Fort **0** 5 dmg, Pull 3h **1** 4 dmg, Pull 1h **2** 3 dmg

Clear Mind Free [Defense] Attacker Attacker Grants Combat Advantage til Next Turn

Here is the character Escoba. The first line should be straightforward - it's a verbal description of what the players would see or perceive of the NPC. The next line includes the character's initiative, Speed, modifiers, and keywords. The initiative defines the order in which the NPC goes. Since Escoba has two initiative numbers, this means he goes twice per turn, at 16 and at 6. The speed is the base speed for regular walking, however he also can fly slowly, at one hex per round. The threshold number is the overall number to use for a single skill check. In brackets after are particular savvies where the threshold is especially high or low. So, for example, if a player rolls a Perception+Nature to hear him coming in the middle of the woods. Below that are Escoba's abilities, one per line. Each has a name, cost,

The Battlegrid

Although it's perfectly possible to run an RPG combat without a grid, Mestezia is designed to use one, specifically a hexagonal grid. You can use fancy painted minis on handcrafted dioramas or Monopoly pieces on a printed grid or anything in between. The use of a grid

Terrain Conditions

Height, Cover, and Vision

Traps & Triggers

Other Considerations

Realism

Physical Pieces

Initiative cards

Minis

Grids

terrain & terrain condition templates