# Cranium Rats/W.(M).D.R – Beta

Version Beta 2.1

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This is a Competitive(/Cooperative) Story Interaction Game, aka CSI Game, my CSI Game blog can be found here: http://competitiverpgs.wordpress.com/

This game has nothing to do with the Cranium Rats presented in TSR's Planescape Campaign world.

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# **<u>Introduction</u>**

I like roleplaying games. I like card games. I like board games. I  like computer games.
I like games

Some of the recent games that were spawned by the Indie makers have pushed towards
conflicts. Say yes or roll the dice, escalation in Dogs, the general mood and theme of
Polaris.
I like Conflicts.

I decided to go one step further. All Conflict, all the time. I want there to be a strong
Gamist influence on the game I create. I want there to be ecstasy and adrenaline pumping
as someone else is nearing victory and you realize you and your previously rival must
join forces in order to stop the one racing to victory. In the end, there can be only one.

This game's background draws heavily from my own interests and past experiences. If
this game seems to feature fucked up people, or at least people that seem to spend an
inordinate amount of energy fighting themselves and focusing inward, and seems to have
a faux-psychological/philosophical background combined with a certain mythological
flair, you know why.

If you want to know how the in-game action looks like, from the view-point of the
characters, look at *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels*; *Snatch!* or *4 Layer Cake.*
Where the action is furious and there are many interwoven storylines that culminate
together.

You're not actually playing these characters though. What you're playing are the three
Aspects that rule a person's motivation, the bits which make him act, the bits that push
and pull him. The character wants Enlightenment, the Aspects want control of the
character.

Hopefully this game will get you people to feel the action of a game, and perhaps even
the dilemmas of not knowing whose puppet you are, who really controls your actions;
you or some alien influence that may be called "Emotions".

Remember, there is one true goal in this game, fun.[1]

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[1] Fuck that lie. Play for the Win!

# What is a CSI Game?

The following is taken from my Blog, and is included for the purposes of explaining what this game is supposed to be like, and to hopefully further my agenda regarding CSI Games.

So, we keep talking about CSI Games, but we do not yet have a clear definition of what comprises a CSI Game. What we do have right now is what I said in my first post on the topic. To whit:

*".."CSI Games", CSI being Competitive Story Interaction. These are RPGs("What is an RPG?" is a question I will leave unanswered for now, hoping you know what I mean) where there is a story being generated, but the social interaction is competitive and even antagonistic in nature, rather than the "Cooperative" mode suggested and propagated throughout our hobby's history. In a way, this is us going back to Board/War games, from which our hobby draws much of its history. I'd say that we're growing in the opposite direction, rather than regressing.*
*What is Chainmail, Dungeon and Dragon's Proto-form if not a Wargame to which one adds little acting? So CSI Games are in a very real way RPGs to which you add a Wargame mentality!"*

So we'll start with that as an introduction and continue to construct a definition, one that hopefully could be used as is, or as a basis in game-book introductions.

CSI Games.

C is for Competitive/Cooperative.[2]
Most games under the umbrella of "Role-Playing Games"(RPGs) till now had been Cooperative in nature, the social interaction between players, players and Game Master(GM) and that of between player-characters had been Cooperative. This is the origin of or originated from the "party". We're all in this together.
This may also be a leading cause into the "You don't win in RPGs" when explaining what you're doing to an elder party member.
The other side of the coin is that which I am putting up as the main identifier of CSI Games, the Competitive side. Competition is something inherent to human interaction, inherent to the act of gaming. You find competition in Board, War and Card games, along in most sports(where you have competition between groups and cooperation inside them). I want the players to compete, whether for spotlight, victory, control, in-game resources, whatever. There need be a competitive element somewhere in the game.
It should be reflected in the mechanics as well, but that comes second.

S is for Story.

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[2] And that's good enough for me!

We're here to tell a story, to hear a story or experience one's wake. We're not here to merely roll the dice or shuffle the cards. Unlike board-games and card-games, we have a story unfolding here. If we don't, we're dealing with something else.

Story often goes with Cooperative. The story-building part is a joint effort by all participants.

I is for Interaction/Isolation.

We're playing a game with other people, you interact with them. You want to help them stop that other guy from winning, you're talking to them and trying to stop them, that's also interaction! You do not play in a void, you're playing with people, interact with them.

Mechanics should have some way to represent and encourage interaction between the players.

Isolation has little place in this scheme, it's mostly there as the other side of Interaction, where you're "Snubbed" for game reasons, as others ally against you. Alternately, if you're snubbed for out-of-game reasons, you're unlikely to do well in game, or have fun.

Game is self-explanatory.

This is a game, it has winners. This is a game, it has rules. This is a game, it is an activity you do for fun. This is a game, one of the basic human activities, and you know one when you see it.

So we are left with CSI Game, or Competitive(/Cooperative) Story Interaction Games. Isolation plays little part in this, and is mostly there as something to be avoided. Competitive is what sets this apart from other games, so we're paying it more heed. Cooperative is also there, but more as part of the Story or Interaction bits and less as an individual agent.

# **Glossary**

**Advantage Dice:** When in a Conflict, every advantage that one can describe having over the other side nets them one more die to be used in the Conflict.

**Aggressive Flood Scene:** A Flood Scene where one Initiates the bidding.

**Aspects**: Rat, Dirt and Water. Game end at Aspect 10/0, all Aspects combined cannot surpass 16, 15 for UnSeeking.

**Conflict**: A contest in the actual world, uses a Trait.

**Defender:** One against whom a bidding is Initiated.

**Dot/Rating:** Rating at an Aspect/Trait.

**Dice Reservoir:** Current reservoir of dice left in an Aspect for purposes of bidding or conflict augmentation. Also **Reservoir**.

**Dice Pool:** The dice you are rolling for the current conflict.

**Enlightened:** Those who have reached Enlightenment. Also the name for the GM.

**Flood Scene:** A bidding in which an Aspect Dot is up for grabs.

**Goals:** Goals *of* the Aspects, *for* the Character.

**Initiator:** The one who initiates a bidding.

**Magician:** One who had walked towards Enlightenment on the road of Equilibrium, possesses great power, but is always at risk of becoming a paragon for an Aspect if he loses his equilibrium.

**Rainbow Scene:** A Flood Scene which ends with all the Aspects being of equal value.

**Round:** A full circle of scene-setting, beginning with the Enlightened and ending the player sitting left to him. Also **Turn**.

**Seeking/Seeker:** Those who are on the road to Enlightenment. Pcs belong to this group.

**Specialty:** Certain capabilities inherent to the character that act as Permanent Advantages. They are worth two bonus dice when they apply.

**Tokens:** a resource used by the players and Enlightened to affect game-play.

**Traits:** Physical, Social, Mental. No Trait can go above 5.

**Unclaimed Region:** Aspect Dots that currently do not belong to any Aspect are placed here.

**UnSeeking:** Those who are not on the road to enlightenment, includes most NPCs.

# Metaphysical Background

## Legends of the Fall:

And Man was cast from the Garden of Eden, Man which was created from the Dirt, who shall toil the Dirt, and to the Dirt shall one day return.

Man was tempted by one, one was in turn seduced by two others. Man was seduced by Woman, whose name was Life. Procreation tempted Man.

Woman was tempted by two. Woman was tempted by a fruit, whose juice was knowledge. Woman was tempted by Snake, whose name was Beast.[3]

And God cast the three out, Man, Woman and Snake.
And Snake and Woman keep tempting Man.
And Snake and Man tempt Woman.
And Man and Woman tempt Snake, into coming and tempting them once more.

## Legends of the World:

And so it came to pass that the Illusion was created. Some called it Maya, some called it The World, some have recently called it The Matrix. The lie is being maintained by three forces, they strive to encompass all of creation but they are currently held in check by the other two, who will not relinquish control so easily.

Where did they come from, no one knows, who created them, no one knows. Who knows of them?

Very few, at the table where people are reading this *paper*, probably only one will, we call him Enlightened for that.

Who are we?
Enlightened.
Who are we?
You.

## Legends of the Child:

When a child is born, his body is soft, so soft that for the first week he can clench his feet. His skull is also soft in the beginning, and in burrows the Rat.

The Rat: perhaps an idea, perhaps a concept, perhaps a fourth-dimension entity that is squid-like in look and Lovecraftian in outlook.

From that moment and till its death, the Rat is part of the child, teen, adult, elder. When the Person it inhabits dies, so does the Rat.

The Rat has vested interest in the well-being of the person.

The Rat has an even greater vested interest in the well-being of Rat.

Such is Rat, and such were always Rat's tales, even when he was called Raven.

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[3]     And yet Snake, or Beast is Rat.

### Legends of the Moon:

A quiet sea, overseen by the moon. Underneath the moon, a ship rides the waves. The ship is sinking fast, a hole breached in its hull. The sailors are shouting, torchlight dances merrily on the waves of an indifferent sea.

In the tricky light small forms can be seen swarming out of the ship. Out of the ship and into the salty water of the sea. These are Rats.

Rats on a sinking ship, escaping into an endless sea, in the middle of nowhere.[4]

### Legends of Wrath:

And the Jews were a troubled lot, so their Rabbi came up with a plan. Gathering the earth he constructed a mannequin, the Golem. Into the Golem's empty head he delivered a small Rat. For animals are God's own Truth.

And the Golem protected the Jews.

And the Golem ran amuck.

None could stop the Golem, for it was mighty, and it feared for itself, protecting itself.

Protecting Golem. Protecting Rat.

Till from the heavens rain poured down on Old Prague.
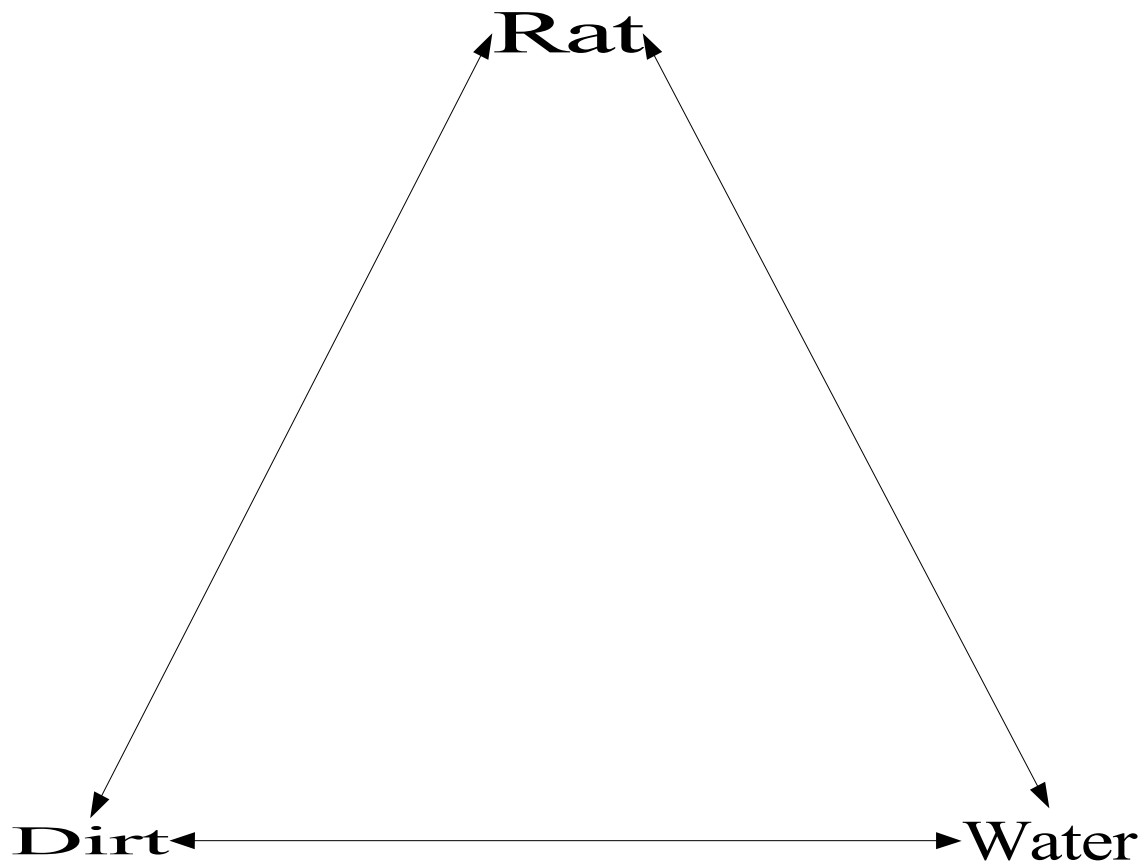
The Golem melted, the Rat drowned.

And Truth was no more.

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[4]    I call that lemmings. Bloody lemmings.

# In Between

**Aspect Relations:**

The following section is meant to explain what the Aspects *are* and how they interact. You will note that it is not explained, but shown, each person will have his interpretation, but at the core it will be the same, influenced by the **bolded** and *italicized* words.

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                         Rat
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                  /                \
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               /                      \
              /                        \
             /                          \
            /                            \
           /                              \
          Dirt ◄────────────────────► Water
```

More Dirt and Rat initiate more Change, the downside is Indirection. Less Dirt/Rat cause stasis and lack of direction.

More Dirt causes brittleness, more Water causes Fluidity.

More Water makes Burrow for Rat easier but gives less protection. Less water means the body provides more protection but it is harder to burrow, in or out. Locked within its own armour.

Dirt and Water give **Clay.**

Dirt and Rat give **Personallity.**

Rat and Water give **Instability.**

### On Rat:

Rat is **Animal**.
Rat is *Urges*.
Rat goes up: Change, Base.
Rat goes down: Timid, unfeeling.
As Rat goes up you become more bestial, more prone to act by urges.
Mind/Dirt suppressed. Water is controlled.

Rat is instinct, it is the urge to reproduce, it is saving yourself and your kin. It is mindless thought and pheromone transmitted mass-hysteria. It is the need to prove yourself in order to better your chances of breeding. Rat is what we like to repress.

### On Dirt:

Dirt(Mud) is **Drone.**
Dirt is *Mind*.
Dirt goes up: Change, High.
Dirt goes down: Uncaring, lack of thought.
As Dirt goes up you become more cerebral, more detached from your body and emotions.
Rat/Urges suppressed, Water unflowing

Dirt is the "totality of human existence". Dirt from which you come, to which you shall return, dirt which you toil to get your food from and from which you get the materials to construct your house. It is society, it is keeping things stable, it is on ordered advancement as opposed to disorganized. Dirt is what we like to claim we are.

### On Water:

Water is **Meltdown.**
Water is *Freedom*.
Water goes up: Infirmness.
Water goes down: Rigidity.
As Water goes up you become free, you become loose. You change into the stable form, the path of least resistance
Rat flushed out, Dirt loses form.

Water is passive, yet isn't. Look at how a torrent changes the landscape, yet a twig at the right place will change its course. It seeks to escape containment, to dwell at the state of least energy. It seeks to find release, and yet will sweep aside the minor details on the way. Water in a way is non-action.

Some would call the Aspects Avatars or Shamanic Spirits, the White-Wolf crowd may call them Wyrm, Weaver and Wyld. Jung will call them Archetypes and Freudians may name them Id, Ego and Super-Ego.
I call them Rat, Dirt and Water.

## The Enlightened:

When one reaches Enlightenment, he becomes Enlightened. The Enlightened reached Enlightenment. When you are enlightened, you leave the conflicts of this world, or you ascend to a higher path, or you reach a solipsistic enlightenment where nothing but you exists, and all that is is your own projection.

The Enlightened is the world in a way, he is the characters and their Aspects, and he isn't. He has vested interest in how things turn out.

He is impartial, not that he's neither for nor against the Aspects, but he's not for or against any specific Aspect.

# <u>Setting up Shop</u>

## <u>Who?</u>

I suggest not playing people who are together all the time, but rather people whose lives run in a tangential manner. You're just covering the same things from different viewpoints without really advancing the story, also, you have certain characters as NPCs during several scenes.

Examples:
To take the movie "Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels", you won't have the 4 "Protagonists" as three of the characters, but rather pick one of them, the armed robber and any other of the participants will do, Hatchet Harry, one of the Weed Growers, whatever.

Siblings, who meet twice-or three times a day, to avoid constant action together: Middle Sister gets mugged and tells Older Brother over Lunch. He goes out and looks for the mugger, accidentally killing him during the confrontation. The Young Brother getting back from Elementary School spies this and decides to run away, being sure he's next!(Such a Rat reaction..)

Cross-time lines, or even realities: Character A is an author, down on his luck, writing for Full-Metal Magazine. Character B is his successful cousin, who always looked out for him. Character C is the Hyperborean Conan-esque protagonist of Character A's last novel! How does that shake up your view of reality?
Or have two of the characters be the grandfather during his WW2 Service and his grandson, fighting in Iraq.

Make the setting an interesting one, have things cross-over, have impact on others' future scenes, even for other characters.

## <u>What?</u>

The following are questions that "Set up" the game, not all of them need to have "Hard" answers, merely thinking of the questions and keeping them in mind is enough for some of them. The answers do not have to be the same for all characters, not discussing and sharing your answers with the other players can result in some interesting results, especially in regards to Cosmology(questions 1-2).

1. What is the Enlightened?
2. What is Enlightenment?
3. How do the characters relate to one another?
4. What external elements exist in each character's surrounding that create tension and conflict?
5. How does the external conflict relate to one's road towards Enlightenment?
6. How would the Character react to violence?

## Preparation:

Gather a group of friends, optimally four people total, though alterations could be made(rules will be included in final version or if someone will ask for them) for a group ranging from 3 players up to N.

You would need to make use of the sheet included at the end of this document, about ten dice of the normal variety, which can be found in any hobby or game shop and about 4 tokens(Poker Tokens, chips, coins, whatever draws your fancy) per player.

Decide who will be the Enlightened who controls the scenery and pacing to a degree, all the other players will portray Aspects of Characters.


## Character Generation:

The characters in Cranium Rats are made of several components, but first, it's important to note that Character Generation is part of the first session, meaning that each player gains 3 Tokens beforehand and the Enlightened gains 5, these belong to the player rather than the Aspect. You do not make the characters on one occasion and play on another, not in this game.

Second things second[5], for each player besides the Enlightened there is one Character. Aspect and Character distribution is such that each player plays all three Aspects, spread over three different characters, and each character has all three Aspects, as per the following 'table':

Players are P1, P2, P3.
Characters are C1, C2, C3, each has (W)ater, (R)at and (D)irt.
P1 is W, C1; R, C2; D, C3.
P2 is W, C2; R, C3; D, C1.
P3 is W, C3; R, C1; D, C2.
An Aspect belongs to <u>one</u> player.
Set each Aspect at 5, with a full Die Reservoir, of 6.

The player of the Dirt Aspect carries out most of the character generation, with input from the players of the other two Aspects:

Come with a short synopsis of the character. Short means short, mind, anywhere from two words to a sentence.

Spread 8 Dots amongst the character's 3 Traits, the Traits may not be 0 or go over 5 at this stage. The Traits are used for Conflicts that occur in the "real" external world.

Give the character 3 Specialties, these may include hobbies, professions, areas of knowledge, social status, wealth and other temporal things, these act as permanent Advantages, which give the character a slight edge in these fields. Do not pick any personality traits, as these are covered by the Aspects.

The players of the Rat and Dirt Aspects each come up with a Goal for the Character that aligns with the Aspect's nature. For example, Rat may want to bed that woman the Character met at the bar yesterday while Dirt will want to show his boss off and prove he's smarter.

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[5]    Oh, how amazingly sharp I am, I almost cut myself.

Last, and most importantly, each Character Generation culminates in a Flood Scene, where the three Aspect players vie for the 16th Aspect Dot. This marks the moment when the character steps on the road towards Enlightenment, and leaves balance behind.

Repeat the above for each Character.

# Rules

## Game Zones and Traits:

Each Player has Tokens he keeps separated from all other resources.

Each Aspect has a Die Reservoir, where the amount of dice it has and can use at the time being is kept. Each player thus has three Die Reservoirs, one per Aspect. The Die Reservoir Limit is 6, you may not have more than six dice in it at any time.
When you go *below* 0 dice in your Reservoir, a Flood Scene is initiated.

Aspect Dots are the Aspects' semi-permanent rating, they are ranked 0-10. When an Aspect reaches 0 and no Aspect can give it a Dot(when all three Aspects are at 1, 1, 1) game ends with the character and Aspects "losing". When an Aspect reaches 10 it has won the game and the character has lost. All Aspect Dots combined may not surpass 15 for Unseeking characters or 16 for Seeking Characters(which include the PCs).
Aspects gain "Marks" when participating in a Conflict where they win. When an Aspect loses in a Conflict it loses all Marks. When an Aspect has Marks equal to its rating it may initiate a Flood Scene.

The Unclaimed Region is where all Aspect Dots that currently belong to no Aspect reside. They may be fought over during Flood Scenes.

Traits belong to a character, they may not under 1, lest the character dies or falls into oblivion. Traits may not go over 5, which is the human pinnacle.
Traits gain "Marks" when a Conflict involving them is lost. When a Trait has Marks equal to its rating it goes down by one.

## Narration Structure:

The format in which the game and narration should progress/occur is as follows:
1) Enlightened Sets general stage.
2) Rat/Dirt pick Goal, Narrate Scene.
3) When a Conflict of interest or a conflict of interests arise, or any of the Aspects wants something to happen they interject; Roll the Dice or Say Yes.
4) When a Conflict between the character and an NPC occurs and the dice are rolled, OR when the different Aspects strive for different goals, Roll the Dice.
5) Water Narrates results according to Stakes.
Repeat Stages #2-#5 as necessary per character.

"Free play" or story development only happens at stages #2 and #5. The only story happens in order to get to or as a result of a conflict.
Scenes have _at least_ one stage #4, if stage #4 leads to another such immediately after, any player may call for scene continuation, subject to Enlightened's Veto.

## Scene Framing:

Scene-setting goes in a clockwise direction, beginning with the Enlightened. The Enlightened can set the scene, tell a short story that may or may not deal directly with the characters or Aspects, yet.

A player may normally only set a scene for a character for whom he portrays the Dirt or Rat Aspect, the scene should follow one of the character's Goals(even if that goal does not belong to the Aspect he owns).
In order for a player to set a scene for a character for whom he Portrays the Water Aspect, he needs to give the Enlightened one of his Tokens.

A player may offer another player a Token in order to set a scene for him, the player whose turn it is need not accept the offer if he doesn't desire so.

No character may have two scenes ran for him in a row.

## Aspect Ratios[6]:

When the Aspects are imbalanced, the character and the nature of the relationships between the Aspects can do nothing but give. Change leads to more change.
Plus and Minus refer to Dice taken or added to the Dice Pool that occur when the following conditions apply[7]:
- Water is higher than Dirt; Rat gains a Die when Defending, loses a Die when Attacking(Initiating).
- Dirt is higher than Water; Rat loses a Die when Defending, gains a Die when Attacking.
- Rat and Dirt combined are higher than Water*2; Initiators gain 1 extra Die.
- Water is higher than Rat and Dirt combined; Initiators lose 1 Die.
- Rat is higher than Dirt; Social Conflicts gain 1 Die, Mental Conflicts lose 1 Die.
- Rat is lower than Dirt; Social Conflicts lose 1 Die, Mental Conflicts gain 1 Die.

## Tokens:

Tokens belong to the <u>players</u>, not the Aspects or characters.

### *On Token Acquisition:*

At the beginning of each session each player gets 3 Tokens and the Enlightened gains 5, at the end of each session all unused Tokens are lost. Use them or lose them[8].
When an Aspect would go over his Die Reservoir Limit(6) the other players gain a Token.

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[6] On when your metaphysical goggles are askew. Vision Askew Productions, here I come!

[7] See page 33 for help.

[8] Just like life, or people for that matter.

Whenever a Flood Scene occurs or a character loses a Conflict, the Enlightened gains one Token.
When a Goal is completed(success or failure) the Aspect that owns it gains a Token.

When a Goal is completed, you may spend 2 Tokens and fully replenish your Die Reservoir, this may only occur outside of Conflict/Bidding.

### *On Token use:*

Token use falls into two broad groups, you can use them to affect the story or for mechanical gain. The choice and its repercussions are yours to bear, and the character's.
When a Token is "Spent", if a player spent the Token it is given to the Enlightened, if the Enlightened spent the Token it is removed from play.

You may offer another player a Token in order to buy Narration rights off him, this may be either from the player who sets up a scene or from the Water Aspects who narrates a Conflict's outcome. The offered player is under no obligation to accept your offer.

You may spend a Token to give an Aspect a Goal, but one that fits what just occurred.

You may spend a Token to gain two bonus dice in any Conflict or Bidding.

You may Spend a Token and use a Die in order to "Steal" a Die from another player. If the player from whom you stole was at 0 Dice before you stole from him, initiate a Flood Scene instead. The Enlightened may not steal dice as he has no dice to use.

### Dice:

This section refers to dice from one's Die Reservoir:
Dice belong to individual Aspects. Unused Dice are kept in the Aspects' Die Reservoir.
Dice are used in order for the Aspect to increase his chances of winning a Conflict or in order to gain control of a situation in a Bidding.

Every die spent nets the Aspect one additional die to be rolled in a Conflict or Bidding he's part of.
Every two dice spent by an Aspect that does not participate in a Conflict or Bidding nets one of the participating Aspects one die.

When an Aspect wins a Conflict(not Bidding), for every success he has over the other side he gains one Die, up to his Die Reservoir Limit(6).
When an Aspect loses a Conflict(not Bidding), he loses one Die.

## Acts:

When no player, including the Enlightened, has any Tokens left, the Act is finished. Each session only one Act may be completed, though numerous sessions may go by without any Act being completed.

In order to postpone an Act from completion, a player may initiate a "Do or Die" Scene:
Any player with more than one Goal may declare(by turn order) a "Do or Die" Scene, where he narrates the next scene, in which a Goal must be resolved(success or failure do not matter), which would result in a new Token being given(possibly more if the Character fails in a Conflict).

When an Act is completed, the following occurs:
Each character's Water player gets to choose: Remove 1 Mark from each Trait. **OR** remove all Marks from one Trait.
Each character's Dirt Aspect's player *may* choose to add the character a new Specialty, if he chose to do so, then the Rat Aspect's player *must* choose and remove one of the old Specialties.

# Conflict

During game-play, especially of this game, you will reach situations where there is Conflict going on. Whenever an Aspect's player decides he wishes to accomplish something(during Narration) or the Enlightened decides an NPC is out to get something, there are two simple questions to be asked:
1. Is this goal opposed to anyone else's desires?
2. Is the active party going to have any problem accomplishing its goal?

If the answer to those questions is "No", then there is no real Conflict, continue Narration and have the character's goal occur.
However, if the answer is "Yes", then you have a Conflict.

First, decide which Aspect is the one who is going to be active during this Conflict, if more than one Aspect wishes to control the character during this time, it is time to move to Bidding.
After the controlling Aspect is decided, the player of the Aspect or the Enlightened(in case of NPC) states what goal(normal goal, not one of the Aspect's Goals) he wishes to accomplish, and the other side states what will happen if the character loses. This is called Stake Setting.
The Enlightened decides which Trait will be used in the Conflict.

The Aspect rolls an amount of dice equal to his Dots, every die coming equal or under the relevant Trait is considered a success.
The players may spend Dice and Tokens as discussed above.

For non-player characters(NPCs), which are rolled for by the Enlightened, roll 5 dice and assume Traits of 3.

*Repercussions:*

On a successful roll, the goal stated by the Aspect is met and the action is narrated as agreed by the relevant Aspect(the Character's Water Aspect) and the Enlightened. Final approval is that of the Enlightened.
You may offer the Water Aspect a Token in order to buy narration rights, though he need not accept the offer.
The Active Aspect gains one Mark. He also gains dice equal to the amount of successes the Character has over the opposition are added to the Aspect's Die Reservoir, up to the Die Reservoir Limit(6)

On an unsuccessful roll, the goal stated by the Aspect is not met and the action is failed(the "goal" stated by the Enlightened occurs), narration is as above.
The Active Aspect loses all Marks and one Die from the Reservoir, which may bring him under 0 Dice. The relevant Trait gains one Mark to denote "damage".

*Advantages:*

Every advantage one side has over the other translates into more dice added to the roll on a one-for-one basis. Examples are: In a sword fight, having a longer reach weapon than your opponent, having the higher ground, having the sun in your opponent's eyes, etc. Subject to the Enlightened's approval.

Advantages must be brought up by the Players and Enlightened. Specialties act as a sort of Permanent Advantages that come up repeatedly in the character's life. A specialty is worth two bonus dice.


## Play Example:

Quentin is the Enlightened, GM in other games. The Character taking central scene is Paul, whose Rat is Richard, Dirt is portrayed by Don and Water by Will. Paul has Water 7, Rat 5 and Dirt 4. Physical 1, Social 3, Mental 4 and works as a programmer as a wage-slave

The sitting order is Quentin, Richard, Don and Will, it is now Richard's turn to narrate.

Quentin: Richard, would you mind me setting up the scene for Paul, for whom you're Rat?

Richard: Sure thing man, sure thing.

Quentin: I see your Goal is to hit on the girl working the grocery next door and bed her, how about we set the following scene there? Also, have a Token for giving me the right to set up the scene.

Will raises an eyebrow, wondering what could happen that'd be of any interest there, and knows he'll be surprised, knowing Quentin.

Quentin: So there you are, talking to Daphne, hitting on her, when all of a sudden this unshaven grizzly of a man bursts into the grocery, sawed-off in his hands and yells, "Nobody fucking moves!", he shoots the nearesy bystander to pieces to make his point clear, the bystander explodes into a red shower.

Everyone: Oh shit!

Don: I have Paul do nothing, considering he's the type who sits in the background and does nothing. I think the best thing would be for him to stand in the background, not attracting attention.

Richard: I could have him run away out of fear, but fuck that shit, Daphne is here, this is my chance, this is my day. I'm going to have him jump over Grizzly bear and take his gun away!

Quentin: That's a Bidding, Don is going to get one free die, considering his is the default action.

Richard: I bid my 4 Dice, I want this!

Don: I won't bid, I have an idea for my next scene.

Quentin: Remember next scene can't be for Paul. No two scenes in a row for one character.

Don: Grrr, oh well, I don't have any spare Dice, and I need my Tokens for later. Don rolls a 6 with his free die, Richard rolls 2, 3, 3 and 5; 3 successes. Richard will control Paul and set his Goal, but Will will narrate the results.

Quentin: Physical test. If you succeed, you will take the shotgun away from him, if not, he'll knock you with the butt of his shotgun and laugh at you.

Richard: Hmmm, I have 5 dice, need to roll a 1, I don't know if I can. Will, how about you give me some dice?

Will: Why should I? You put yourself into this mess, deal with it! If you'd fail, Daphne won't give a rat's ass about you, where would your goal be then?

Richard: You're the highest Aspect, Physical is at 1, if I fail you'll lose a whole Point.

Quentin: Don't forget, he gets one extra die for having the advantage of the gun.

Will: Damn you, take 3 dice and be done with it.

Some rolls later, Richard wins and manages to take the gun away from the robber. Will, narrating: "Paul jumps him, he's surprised and I manage to wrest the gun from his hands as I knee him. While the gun is still clenched in his hands he manages to shoot though, spraying a young girl standing nearby".

Quentin: Richard, take another die and add a Mark to Rat, and we're through with Paul for now.

Quentin: Now we move on to Don, considering as you can't run another scene for Paul, would you mind if I set a scene up for Terrance, for whom you're Rat?

Don: Do as you wish. *Glowering at Richard.*

Quentin: we move to Terrance as he gets a phone-call, telling him his sister, Beth, died in an attempted robbery. He goes to his locked safe and gets his gun, swearing under his breath. Don, have 1 Token for giving me scene-set up rights, I'm also going to spend 1 Token and add the goal "Get revenge for Bethany" under Rat.

# Bidding

*Glossary:*

**Aggressive Flood Scene:** A Flood Scene where one Initiates the Bidding.
**Defender:** One against whom a bidding is Initiated.
**Flood Scene:** A bidding in which an Aspect Dot is up for grabs.
**Initiator:** The one who initiates a Bidding.
**Rainbow Scene:** A Flood Scene which ends with all the Aspects being of equal value.

Discussions between the Aspects must be carried out in the open. Talking in another room or passing notes between the players is prohibited. The Aspects exist in a balance of power for they know the others are watching.

When it is unclear who the active Aspect is, or when one wants to wrest control of the Character and impose his actions on it, a bidding is initiated.
For example: if a character is a coward being faced with a supermarket mugging his natural response would be staying in the background or escaping. Fear and thus Rat is the default choice. If however he wished to negotiate it'd fall under Dirt, which will need to initiate a bidding in order to gain control and state the goal of the Conflict.

The Dice Pools for Bidding are built up from 0, and the number to roll under or equal to in order to generate successes is 3.

Players may spend Tokens and Dice as stated above, however, in several cases some parties may gain a free die.

*Situational Modifiers:*
- At the Flood Scene which concludes each Character Generation, each Aspect gets one free die.
- In Aggressive Flood Scenes, the Defender gains one free die.
- The default active Aspect gains one free die if someone tries to wrest control.
- In Flood scenes initiated by an Aspect going down, that Aspect gains a free die.

*Results:*
When a Bidding ends with no successes it is considered a tie.

In cases where the Bidding is in order to decide who the Active Aspect is, unless the Initiator wins control stays with the Defender.
In cases where the Bidding occurs as a result of an Aggressive Flood Scene, unless the Initiator wins The Defender retains his Dot.

In cases a Flood Scene ends in a tie, the Aspect Dot is placed in the Unclaimed region.

When the Initial Flood Scene ends in a tie, roll again, unless you've decided beforehand to allow for Magicians.

When a Flood Scene ends with all Aspects being equal, it is called a Rainbow Scene. Mark it on the sheet, the player of the Water Aspect chooses one Trait to be increased by one and gains one Goal.

# Advancement

### Rainbow Scene:

This moment of Satori marks your advancement on the road towards Enlightenement, the Water Aspect chooses one Trait to raise by one after reaching a Rainbow scene, the Water Aspect also gains one Goal after reaching each Rainbow scene.
Mark it down on the character sheet.

### Trait change:

When a Trait has Marks equal(even in the middle of Conflicts) to its Rating, it goes down by one.
When a character undergoes up it gains one dot in a Trait, according to the Water Aspect's choice.
When a Trait would go to 0, it takes one Dot from an Aspect(see below).
An Aspect may choose to increase a Trait instead of gaining a Dot(see below).
When a Trait goes up or down, it loses all Marks.

### Aspect Change:

When an Aspect loses enough dice to put him *under* 0 dice in his Reservoir, a Flood Scene follows: The Aspect goes down by one Dot, his Die Reservoir is filled and bidding begins for the lost Dot, with him gaining one free die(the order of events is important).

When a Trait goes down to 0, the Highest Aspect puts one Dot in the unclaimed region and the Trait goes back to 1. In case there is a tie for who is the highest Aspect, roll one die, with the high roller sacrificing a Dot.

If an Aspect would go down to 0, it gets one Dot from the unclaimed region. If the unclaimed region is empty, the highest Aspect gives it a Dot. In case there is a tie for who is the highest Aspect, roll one die, with the high roller sacrificing a Dot.

When an Aspect wins a Flood Scene it goes up by one Dot.

When an Aspect has Marks equal to or above(as this may only be done after current Conflicts are resolved) his Dot Rating he may either initiate a Flood Scene for an unclaimed Dot or initiate an Aggressive Flood Scene, the Defender being the Aspect with the highest Dot Rating(second highest if he's the highest one), in case of a tie, he picks who the Defender is.

When an Aspect would go up, its player may put that Dot in the unclaimed section and instead raise one Trait by one.

When an Aspect goes up or down it loses all Marks, its Die Reservoir is filled to the Die Reservoir Limit(6)

*Goals:*

When something happens in-game any player may spend 1 Token and add a goal to an appropriate Aspect. This Token goes to the Enlightened. Tokens spent this way by the Enlightened are removed from the game.

When a goal is accomplished *or* failed, mark it down and give the Aspect's player one Token. You can learn equally from success and failure.

When a Goal is resolved and you have no remaining goals, you must set a new one immediately.


## Game End:

5 Rainbow Scenes mark the character's achievement of Enlightenement. The Water Aspect's player will narrate the character's ascent, descent, relevation and/or departure as he sees fit, taking into account the character's views of cosmology.

The character is now removed from the game, its tale finished. For now.


When an Aspect reaches 10 the character's quest for Enlightenment is over, and failed.

The character has lost an integral part of his humanity and himself to a greater and impersonal power and can no longer even see the goal.

At Rat 10 the character acts only upon his instincts. Bestial and unthinking.

At Dirt 10 the character is an uncaring, unimaginative and dull drone, only following his routine.

At Water 10 the character had undergone a complete meltdown; No change or thought is possible and he is in a vegetative state.


The Character cannot die unless a Trait reaches 0 and cannot be brought up, which will only happen once all Aspects are at 1; when at this point a Trait goes down to 0 an Aspect reaches 0. The Character has lost part of himself and is no longer a full-human being.


If the character fights someone with an axe he gets scraped, he ducks and bangs his head on the floor, whatever. The character can survive just about everything[9]. NPC death and random slaughter will happen quite often, but the PCs will live.

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[9] Just like John McClane.

# Other

## Magicians:

There are those that on the first Flood Scene roll a tie, and then using their forceful personality stay at that stage. These people after five more successful Rainbow Scenes where they never fall from equilibrium become Magicians. By marking off one Mark from the two appropriate Aspects they can work Magic: Water and Dirt for Physical actions, Water and Rat for Social actions, Rat and Dirt for Mental actions.
Each such investment gives dice equal to the average of the two Aspects(initially 5), by investing multiple Marks the action gains more dice. The action is supernatural, whether a social contest manifests as charming, a physical manifests as blasting lightning or whatever is up to the one with narration control.

Once a Magician loses control once, it is all over. When one of the Aspects gains the remaining Die it becomes Prominent. Forever this Aspect will be Prominent. No matter how much the Magician or the other Aspects(this being a Magician, they have very little say) wish to contest the Prominent Aspect, it may not go down, only up. This Magician is out of balance and slowly but surely will become a paragon of his Prominent Aspect on Earth.

# __Meta-Chanics__

This section will contain the information on how the game should progress; how the mechanics support one another and what purpose they are serving. For the purposes of Play-testing I believe this document should be left out, the reasons for this and the Meta-Chanics themselves could be found on my Blog, [CSI Games](#).

# Influences

Things which ever got my juices flowing, gave me resources for mechanics and/or may get your juices flowing. Rarely did I spot a hole and stole a mechanic, but rather used a mechanic and later traced it back to where I think I got it from:
Some of these have similar concepts you may want to check out, rather than influences.

**PrimeTime Adventures**: Tokens have some origin from FanMail.

**Dogs in the Vineyard**: Conflict and Escalation.

**Polaris**: Also the strive towards Conflict and spreading one character over various players.

**InSpectres/octaNe**: The basic conflict mechanic. This I stole directly, as it fit me.

**The Shadow of Yesterday**: Goals were influenced by Keys. You could also see the idea of Transcendance showing up in the endgame where the character reaches Enlightenment.

**My Life with Master:** Another game where you have specific end-game results.

**John Wick**'s games: The Advantage Dice mechanic is taken directly from there.

"*Snatch!*", "*Lock, Stock and two Smoking Barrels*" and "*4 Layer Cake*": These gave me an idea of how I want the in-game action to look.

*"Pulp Fiction"(Movie)* and *"A Song of Ice and Fire"(Book)*: These gave me the idea(indirectly, they taught me much) of how what happens before ties to what will follow next. A Game of Thrones is a must read for those interested in pacing/scene framing.

Movies such as "*Vanilla Sky*", "*Revolver*" and "*Mullholland Drive*" were also meant to be influential, but weren't that much, what they do show you is what not being in control may be like.

**Planescape:** For providing the name "Cranium Rats".

# Feel; Read this Before Playing

Well, this is to feel and theme what Meta-Chanics are to system. This is the way play should proceed and how things should look. This is the feel the game was created to convey.

Think of *"Snatch"*, *"Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels"* and *"Pulp Fiction"*. In these movies you have various interlocking stories that affect one another, you have violence and you have a revolving scene-feel.
When you set a Scene, you should strive towards Conflict. Even if you are striving towards the Goal-Conflict, your narration should give options for other players to interject. They may choose not to, but they should have the option.
Play can be funny, humorous, ironically macabre, it has less room for nonsense-silly.

You shouldn't give other players ideas unless they are stuck, if they don't want to run a scene, hopefully someone will buy Narration from them. If they are completely stuck, give them ideas. Character Generation is likewise a solo(or duo) act, you can give ideas, but don't push too hard, it's that person's character, and it's his call.

The game can work without violence, but it helps wet the wheels…

A scene should be a fast thing, you narrate, Conflict, resolution, Narrate and on you go. 3-9 minutes per scene seems more than perfectly alright. Fast, revolving, gritty.

# Character Sheet[10]

```
                         Social
        Water                            Rat


        Physical                    Mental


                          Dirt
```
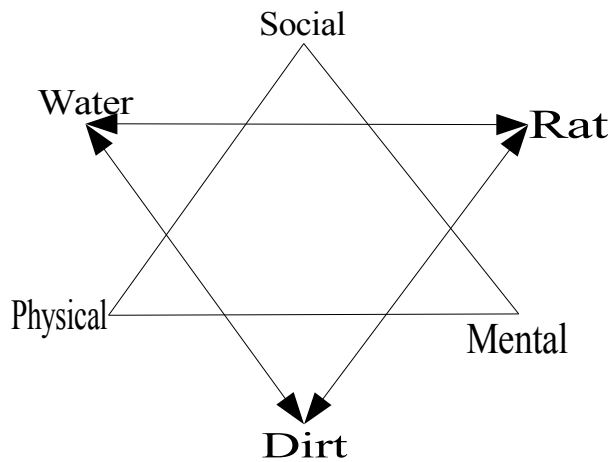
Use the following chart to help you ease and speed up tracking Aspect Ratios, as covered in page 17. The first column gives you the conditional in mathematical terms, the second tells you the effect. The third and fourth columns tell you if it applies to Bidding or Real World conflicts, or both. The fifth and sixth columns give you a place to put a bead, to show if the condition is met right now or not.

Enlightened's Name:


**Tokens:**
Enlightened's:
Player Name:
Player Name:
Player Name:


**Character Name:**
**Specialties:**
**Unclaimed Aspect Dots:**
**Traits**:Rating/Marks                    **Rainbow Scenes:**
Physical:  /                    Mental:  /                    Social:  /
Water Player: **You.**          Aspect Dots/Marks:            Die Reservoir:
Goals:
Rat Player:                     Aspect Dots/Marks:            Die Reservoir:
Goals:
Dirt Player:                    Aspect Dots/Marks:            Die Reservoir:
Goals:
**Details:**

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[10]   Considering the son's Seals, what do you think the father's Shield was for?

**Character Name:**
**Specialties:**
**Unclaimed Aspect Dots:**
**Traits**:Rating/Marks                           **Rainbow Scenes:**
Physical:  /                    Mental:  /                    Social:  /
Water Player:                   Aspect Dots/Marks:           Die Reservoir:
Goals:
Rat Player: **You.**           Aspect Dots/Marks:           Die Reservoir:
Goals:
Dirt Player:                    Aspect Dots/Marks:           Die Reservoir:
Goals:
**Details:**

**Character Name:**
**Specialties:**
**Unclaimed Aspect Dots:**
**Traits**:Rating/Marks                           **Rainbow Scenes:**
Physical:  /                    Mental:  /                    Social:  /
Water Player:                   Aspect Dots/Marks:           Die Reservoir:
Goals:
Rat Player:                     Aspect Dots/Marks:           Die Reservoir:
Goals:
Dirt Player: **You.**          Aspect Dots/Marks:           Die Reservoir:
Goals:
**Details:**

Character Name:

| Conditional | Effect | Bidding? | Real World? | Applies? | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Yes | No |
| Water>Dirt | Rat +1 Defending Rat -1 Attacking | + | | | |
| Dirt>Water | Rat -1 Defending Rat +1 Attacking | + | | | |
| Rat+Dirt>Water*2 | Initiator +1 | + | | | |
| Water>Rat+Dirt | Initiators -1 | + | | | |
| Rat>Dirt | Social +1 Mental -1 | | + | | |
| Dirt>Rat | Social -1 Mental +1 | | + | | |

**Character Name:**

| Conditional | Effect | Bidding? | Real World? | Applies? | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Yes | No |
| Water>Dirt | Rat +1 Defending<br>Rat -1 Attacking | + | | | |
| Dirt>Water | Rat -1 Defending<br>Rat +1 Attacking | + | | | |
| Rat+Dirt>Water*2 | Initiator +1 | + | | | |
| Water>Rat+Dirt | Initiators -1 | + | | | |
| Rat>Dirt | Social +1<br>Mental -1 | | + | | |
| Dirt>Rat | Social -1<br>Mental +1 | | + | | |

**Character Name:**

| Conditional | Effect | Bidding? | Real World? | Applies? | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Yes | No |
| Water>Dirt | Rat +1 Defending<br>Rat -1 Attacking | + | | | |
| Dirt>Water | Rat -1 Defending<br>Rat +1 Attacking | + | | | |
| Rat+Dirt>Water*2 | Initiator +1 | + | | | |
| Water>Rat+Dirt | Initiators -1 | + | | | |
| Rat>Dirt | Social +1<br>Mental -1 | | + | | |
| Dirt>Rat | Social -1<br>Mental +1 | | + | | |