

# CYCHOSYS

A role-playing system by Will Straight

Version 9.0

Total	Standard	Impact	Rank	Hit Locations
1	trivial	1	+0	1 head
2	trivial	1	+1	2-4 throat, shoulders, chest
3	trivial	1	+2	5-6 left arm, hand
5	simple	2	+3	7-8 right arm, hand
7	simple	2	+4	9 left hip, leg, foot
9	simple	2	+5	0 right hip, leg, foot
12	average	3	+6	
15	average	3*	+7	
18	average	3*	+8	
22	tough	4*	+9	
26	tough	4*	+10	
30	tough	4*	+11	
35	remarkable	5*	+12	
40	remarkable	5**	+13	
45	remarkable	5**	+14	
51	fantastic	6**	+15	
58	fantastic	7**	+16	
66	fantastic	8**	+17	
75	legendary	9**	+18	
85	legendary	10***	+19	
100	legendary	15****	+20	

Symbol	Wounding Effect	Reduction	Power	S/F	Function
#	hits	--	1	--	raw damage
E	exhaustion	1, any facet	1	fades	3 fatigue
D	down	1, P facet	2	fades	cannot fatigue
P	pain	1, M facet	2	fades	each extra roll costs +3f
R	reversed	1, E facet	2	fades	reduce actions by rank
H	held	2, P & E	4	sticks	reduce actions by rank until free
O	out	2, M & E	4	sticks	replaced by effect from next impact
X	burn	2, P & M	4	sticks	add 3f to all reduction costs
B	bleed	3, P M & E	8	sticks	1 hit per round
U	unnerved	3f per facet	8	sticks	lose next action, +3f per action
S	stricken	6 actions, -6Q	16	sticks	serious wound
W	wild	3, any 1 facet	16	sticks	unpredictable reaction

Symbol	Range Effect	Difficulties	Power	Function
L	length	2 / 6 / 12	2	~x2 range (distance or time)
F	fast	4 / 12 / 24	4	result +10
T	target	4 / 12 / 24	4	refines target, bypasses soak step
C	counter	8 / 24 / 48	8	attack reversal
V	volume	8 / 24 / 48	8	increases space filled by effect

## Skills

**Physical Facet:** bash, brawl, climb, cut, drive, evade, flex, heave, move, throw, whip  
*CW-blast, KS-dazzle, W-fly, CG-force, K-grapple, A-negate, K-parry, M-raise, MW-shift, A-twist*

**Mental Facet:** analyze, concentrate, invent, mend, navigate, observe, pilot, recall, search, shoot, tinker  
*X-concoct, A-conjure, FK-focus, AX-figure, X-hotwire, N-jinx, C-network, F-purify, MS-quest, W-scan*

**Emotional Facet:** bluff, brave, charm, command, dress, gamble, negotiate, resolve, sneak, talk, torment  
*S-amuse, NX-animate, N-bind, M-call, G-embrace, FN-invoke, G-shield, F-touch, G-veil, C-warp*

## Acknowledgements

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## Opening Thoughts for a New Audience

After a total of nine versions and approximately 11200 man-hours of tabletop play-testing (and lots more late nights number-crunching, adventure writing, and design flame-wars via e-mail), I still recall that the original intent of this system was to make a system that was simple to use, retained the same game mechanic throughout all its functions, didn't require a lot of math to get a total, managed to retain some realism. I also wanted to do away with the much-used "damage points" that all systems seem to have that record injury.

I should have set a more realistic goal, I suppose. These pages pretty much confirm that I didn't get all that I wanted. And now I know why.

As gamers and game-masters we are challenged to simulate every aspect of real life while simultaneously incorporating every imaginable aspect of a fantastical, heroic life. The sad reality is, even a calculator as monstrous and minutely detailed as the universe can't simulate all these possibilities—and if it can't, what chance do we have? I have learned that a lot, if not most, of the game is best when improvised, grown from the interaction between storyteller and actors, not from hard-and-fast rules.

So, this system is what I came up with to help me tell a variety of adventures. In here you'll find a simple game mechanic that is consistently applied for each type of task resolution. This system uses the same mechanics for building the character as it does for advancing the character. There is a very flexible (unfortunately also somewhat complicated) scheme for personalizing one's character too. Since experience acquisition is linked to the dice roll and is administered by the player rather than parsed by the GM, each type of character improves by "doing his own thing" and on the player's schedule. This system includes a peculiar system of recording injuries, one that uses a list of "effects" to simulate different types of incapacitation—the object of the hero's game is, to take as few of these effects as possible. This system's effects also allow the player to tailor weapons and spells and powers both on the fly and as person elements of his character—you won't find a list of spells in here for which you must memorize range, coverage, damage, etc. My favorite part is the set of interchangeable/removable modules for the different types of universes/game genres you might wish to play in. And finally, perhaps a little anticlimactically, you will find something that looks a lot like damage points. Even here, some game traditions endure.

In essence, what you'll find here is only a framework; I leave the detailed mechanics of your universe up to you.

Dr. Will Straight  
Durham, NC  
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## What's Necessary?

Several components of the system are essentially extras. If you just want enough information to get started, read the sections listed below as you create your characters, then add additional complexities as you need them.

dice	page 5	wounding effects	pages 17-18
building a PC	page 6	weapons	pages 21-22
sample PC	page 7	combat time and rounds	page 25
skills and fitnesses	page 8	quickness	page 26
skill tables	pages 9-11	outfit	page 32
fatigue pools	page 12	burden	page 33
using skills (action total)	page 12	outfit protection	page 33
hit pools	page 15	trademarks	pages 38-41
ways to wear out	page 16	genre modules	pages 43-53

Now you're PC should be fleshed out enough to play. If you have one of the following questions, read the listed pages. They'll lead you to other questions, and eventually you'll get to all the neat stuff.

How do I use my skills?	→using skills	page 12
How do I attack?	→attack	page 27
How do I get the most out of my weapon?	→adding effects to attacks...	page 30
Where did I hit?	→injury location	page 31
How do I improve area/targeting/range?	→range effects	page 19
How do I defend?	→evasion defense...	pages 27-30
How badly am I hurt?	→injury and health	page 36
How do I reduce injury?	→wounding effects	page 16
How do I heal myself?	→natural recovery	page 37
Can someone heal me?	→medical treatment	page 36
What's the * for?	→piercing effects	page 28
How does my armor help me?	→outfit protection	page 33
How do I advance skills?	→improving characters	page 8
How do I get new trademarks?	→trademarks	page 38
How do I cast a spell?	→Arcana (genre)	page 43
How do I use martial arts?	→Kata (genre)	page 46
How do I use telepathy?	→Ghostway (genre)	page 45
How do I play a cosmic superhero?	→Heroics (genre)	page 45
How do I play a werebear?	→Wilderkin (genre)	page 48
How do I coerce the dark forces of evil?	→Nethermancy (genre)	page 47
Okay, what's a genre?	→genre modules	page 43
Where are stats for a car or a robot?	→Building Stuff	page 42
How do we cooperate on something?	→combining skills	page 14
I want a fireball/atemi strike/eye beam!	→tricks	page 23
How do I make my character really unique?	→trademarks, genres	page 38, 43

What's still to come?

Examples for the genres; GM section, detailing construction and operation of NPCs and trademark construction mechanics; description of a card deck that simplifies the GMs work dealing with combat; descriptions of some of the game material covered in our playtest campaigns: *Cychosys* (the story before the system), *Outlands*, *Manifest Destiny*, and most recently *Victorian Fog* (to name a few). I'm already on it...

Chapter One  
**THE BASICS**

### The Standards Table

The following table provides the central measurement for the system. Character starting points, task difficulties, combat injury and defense values are measured against this relative scale which reflects a target's resistance to change. Seven general categories (or **standards**) of increasing resistance include **trivial, simple, average, tough, remarkable, fantastic**, and a seldom-achieved **legendary** level. It is therefore possible to have an Average character, a Tough task, a Trivial defense, or a Legendary weapon.

The rest of the table will be explained in due course. Briefly, the *Impact* column refers to the relative severity of injuries acquired during combat. The *Rank* column displays the relative difficulty in acquiring a particular modifier.

<u>Total</u>	<u>Standard</u>	<u>Impact</u>	<u>Rank</u>
1	trivial	1	+0
2	trivial	1	+1
3	trivial	1	+2
5	simple	2	+3
7	simple	2	+4
9	simple	2	+5
12	average	3	+6
15	average	3*	+7
18	average	3*	+8
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30	tough	4*	+11
35	remarkable	5*	+12
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66	fantastic	8**	+17
75	legendary	9**	+18
85	legendary	10***	+19
100	legendary	15****	+20

## Dice

The game requires the use of one 12-sided die. For **CYCHOSYS**, the twelve and eleven are always treated as zero. However, the two numbers do very different things.

Twelve represents failure. Any time this zero (shown here as ⑫) is rolled, the action total ends (all rolling stops), but the character earns an **experience point**. If the first roll for any total is a ⑫, a disaster called a **crash**, the character has catastrophically failed his action, occasionally with spectacularly dismal results. On a crash, the total is always 0, no matter what other numbers might be added to it.

### Dice Roll of Twelve

<i>Alan rolls three times and gets a ⑫ on the last roll. He must stop rolling now.</i>	$⑧ + ① + ⑫ = 9$ and 1 XP.
<i>Todd rolls once, and gets a ⑫ on the first roll. He cannot roll any more.</i>	$⑫ = 0$ , 1 XP. Total will be 0.

Eleven represents success. Whenever this zero (shown here as ⑪) is rolled, the character gains an experience point and rolls again. If the first roll for any total is a ⑪, a condition called a **surge**, the character gains an additional roll on that action.

### Dice Roll of Eleven

<i>Cory rolls three times and gets a ⑪ on the last roll. He rolls one more time and may continue if he wishes.</i>	$⑧ + ① + ⑪ + ⑨ \dots = 18$ and 1 XP.
<i>Jon rolls once, and gets a ⑪ on the first roll. He rolls twice more and may continue if he wishes.</i>	$⑪ + ⑧ + ⑦ \dots = 15$ and 1 XP.
<i>Jerry rolls three times and gets and ⑪ and a ⑫. He must stop after the ⑫.</i>	$⑨ + ⑦ + ⑪ + ⑫ = 16$ and 2 XP.
<i>Colin rolls twice and starts well, only to have to stop on a free roll.</i>	$⑪ + ⑫ = 0$ and 2 XP.

The dreaded **nit** is also a horrible roll that is not inherently a failure, but usually the herald of one. A nit is a roll of ⑩. These usually come up when they are most expensive and least desired, and some lucky few PCs can evade some of them.

## Building a Player Character

A player character (PC) is a numerical representation of the person the player models for the purposes of the game. The PC's abilities are split into three **facets** representing the character's **physical**, **mental**, and **emotional** components. Ideally, each facet contains an ever-growing array of entries which include skills, finesses, trademarks, and tricks. **Skills** come from basic training and experiences of everyday life, whereas **finesses** represent more specific education in a small area of expertise. **Trademarks** are "hardwired" characteristics of the PC's body, mind, and ego that shape his development and strengths. **Tricks** are specific maneuvers, actions, or processes (e.g. particularly spells, operations, rituals, etc.) that the PC can customize and expand through practice during play.

At the start of a new game, the Game Master (GM) selects a number of starting **experience points** (XP) from which each player gets to build his or her PC; I recommend starting with between 80 and 100 XP. The player builds the abilities of his character by spending these experience points on **levels** in skills and finesses. Levels represent the relative competence of a character in that field; the higher the level in a skill, the higher the relative prowess in accomplishing such feats.

In this manual, PCs are assembled in the following order: skills and finesses are chosen first, to define what the character can do. The PC's tricks, weapons, and outfit are the next step, and some of these elements may require XP to build. Third, the PC's trademarks modify and enhance the PC, adding endurance and a few nifty wrinkles to make the character a hero—this step may also produce a few more XP. Last, a few finishing touches are applied, like burden and quickness—these usually don't require XP but may require some tweaking to make the PC come out right.

What follows is an introduction to Asterion Parker, an unusual gumshoe from a not-quite-Earth world. Asterion's character sheet is provided afterward to show what a complete PC looks like after a bit of play; the construction and use of each part of this character will be explained in successive explanations and examples throughout the manual.

## Asterion Parker: A Sample Character

*The figures seated around the circular table watch as the eager young initiate rises from his chair. He smoothes his tie, corrects his voice and looks down at the open folder in front of him. "At first glance as his profile, Asterion Parker looks like any private detective for hire. He is completely licensed and insured. He's hardheaded, fast on the draw, and he champions civilians in need. He has a few misdemeanor convictions but our experience has shown the police seem to favor his results and they generally look the other way when he starts getting messy. He hits hard and fast, doesn't loiter or loot, minimizes bystander risk, kills reluctantly, and he is absolutely loyal once he's taken a contract. He has no known vices, debts, or weak spots except a few loosely connected friends."*

*"Sounds like a regular Junior Scout," quips Dreda, which elicits a soft chuckle from those still seated. The initiate smiles thinly at him, then continues. "When Parker isn't swinging his fists, a modified 12-gauge shotgun is his weapon of choice, usually loaded with mystical shot prepared by a xenodyne in his frequent employ. We also know he is allied with at least one of the ER doctors at Lanemount Hospital."*

*"One of the vampires?" asks Vedevilich, his gaunt face turning a shade paler.*

*The speaker nods. "We also know about a couple of his contacts at various precincts around the city. He's large, well-trained, surprisingly intelligent, and very thorough. He has interrupted eight of our operations on the waterfront in the last six months, including hospitalizing Mandan and disrupting our Cantonese alliance." The initiate tips the folder closed with two fingertips. "I recommend immediate sanction."*

Carver steeples his fingers in front of his face, his expression pensive. "Thank you for the review, Mr. Byrne, and the suggestion. I think we'll assign this task to one of Warringame's men." Carver glances at the dainty twitching man across the table, who nods spasmodically twice. The committee relaxes, ready to move to the next topic.

"There is--" Byrne hazards before his audience slips entirely away, "--one last detail. I think you'll find Parker very hard to kill."

Carver frowns, disliking the attitude. "And why is that?"

"He has very tough hide—most small-arms fire won't injure him. He's about two feet taller than average, outweighs a normal individual by almost 200 pounds, and has a solidly boned skull with a solid horn behind each ear. I've seen him use those horns to lift a grown—"

"Horns?" Warringame flinches, glancing from Byrne to Carver and back.

"Yes," Byrne says, showing his thin smile again. "Parker is a minotaur."

Everyone but Vedevilich reacts, and Carver is suddenly the center of attention again. Carver contemplates the young initiate. "Very well. I'll give you some resources. Bring me those horns, Mr. Byrne."

### Asterion Parker, Minotaur Detective

116 XP

Physical Facet		Mental Facet		Emotional Facet	
<i>Skills/Finesses</i>					
Brawl	3	Analyze	4	Bluff	2
/horns	3	Concentrate	2	Brave	2
Drive	2	Navigate	2	Charm	1
Evade	2	/Cityscape	2	Dress	2
Heave	2	Observe	4	Resolve	3
Move	2	Search	3	Sneak	1
Throw	2	Shoot	4		
		/shotgun	2		
		Tinker	2		
<i>Trademarks</i>					
Conditioned	2	Calculating	1	Wary	2
Large	2	Sharp	1	Nemesis	-1
Monster	2				
Boxer	2				
Heavy	-2				
<i>Pools</i>					
Fatigue	22		25		11
<b>Hit</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>6</b>		<b>3</b>
<i>Outfit</i>			<i>Weapons</i>		
Skin	2 DDBB2 (from trademarks)		Horns	2 HP1	
Clothes	Nice Suit 1 RH1		Shotgun	7 VPD2	
<b>Burden</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>Quickness</b>	<b>7</b>	