



COWBOY

WORLD

A pen and paper
role-playing game
powered by the apocalypse

Street Rat Games

COWBOY WORLD

A pen and paper role-playing game

Wynand Louw



A Street Rat Entertainment Production

<https://streetratgames.com/>

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Dedication

Cowboy World was built by stealing ideas and rules from other more brilliant and original games. It is dedicated to the creators of those games.

- Apocalypse World, by D Vincent Baker (Lumpley Games). Cowboy World's basic dice and moves mechanisms as well as the narrative system they drive are wholly Apocalyptic. The "World" part of the title "Cowboy World" is a small tribute to the game's indebtedness to Apocalypse World. The two moves "Read a Situation" and "Read a Person" were stolen almost word for word from Apocalypse World.
- Dungeon World, by Sage La Torra and Adam Koebel (Sage Kobold Games) was the gateway drug.
- Fate Core System by Fred Hicks and Rob Donohue (Evil Hat Productions) provided the inspiration for Character Aspects and Grit.
- Big Eyes Small Mouth, or the Tri-Stat System, by Mark MacKinnon (Guardians of Order) provided the inspiration for the Body, Mind and Soul Attributes.
- Burning Wheel by Luke Crane provided the ideas for Beliefs and Goals.
- Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson started it all.

The following playtesters broke the game again and again over the years, so without them building it would not be possible:

Driaan Louw, Pieter Louw, Katja Louw, Anja Louw, Thomas Melville du Plessis, Samuel du Plessis, David Albertyn, Robin Shelton, Alex Wood, Pierre Lopes, André Lopes, Leon Venter, Bodine Dumas, Jannie Maritz, Hylton Lamb, Simeon Botha, Misha Jacobs, Megan Bremner, Eugene Vermeulen, Chris van Wyk, Stefan Pretorius.

Thanks guys, you are epic!

I rode down from the high blue hills and across the brush flats into Hattan's Point, a raw bit of spanning hell, scattered bit or miss along the rocky slopes of a rust-topped mesa. Ah, it's a grand feeling to be young and tough with a heart full of hell, strong muscles and quick, flexible hands! And the feeling that somewhere in town there's a man who would like to tear down your meat house with hands or gun. It was like that, Hattan's Point was, when I swung down from my buckskin and gave him a word to wait with. A new town, a new challenge, and if there were those who wished to take me on, let them come and be damned. I knew the whiskey of this town would be the raw whiskey of the last town, and of the towns behind it, but I shoved through the batwing doors and downed a shot of rye and looked around, measuring the men along the bar and at the tables. None of these men did I know, yet I had seen them all before in a dozen towns. The big, hard-eyed rancher with the iron-gray hair who thought he was the bull of the woods, and the knifelike man beside him with the careful eyes who would be gunslick and fast as a striking snake.

Riders of the dawn, Louis L'Amour.

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FIRST THINGS

COWBOY WORLD

Cowboy World is a table top role-playing game (RPG) based on the Apocalypse World Engine, a game system by Vincent Baker. It emulates different genres of Cowboy stories, from classic Louis L'Amour novels to the Spaghetti Western movies of Sergio Leone and zany modern Western movies like Disney's Lone Ranger.

And Cowboy World Weird is all Steampunky Gothic Horror.

When you play Cowboy World, you sit around a table with friends, making up a story to see what happens. The way the story unfolds is governed by rules, and those rules insert random elements into the story by way of dice rolls.

Each participant controls part of the emerging story. The Players control one character each. (A Player Character or PC) Non Player Characters (NPC's), and indeed the rest of the world are controlled by the Games Master (GM).

Who wins?

Well, everybody, if the emerging story is awesome enough to remember!

Why?

Because it is fun. It is fun because stories are hard wired into the human psyche. It is fun because creativity is hard wired into the human psyche. And it is fun because friendship is hard wired into the human psyche. And when you combine stories, creativity and friendship at one table, awesomeness happens. It is like the perfect storm.

But why cowboys?

Seriously... If you have to ask, then maybe you should rather be playing another game, like one about accountants doing accountancy stuff?

SOME BASIC TERMS

Player: Any one of the people, excluding the GM, sitting around the table to play Cowboy World. (OK the GM is also a player, we all know that. But in RPG tradition, you get two types of players: GM's and players. So even if the GM is a player, he is not.)

Game Master (GM): The GM is the person who directs the story. He sets the scene, arbitrates the rules and has the final say about outcomes. Note that the "M" is for "Master" not "Minion". That means the GM's word is final and his authority overrides that of this book.

Player Characters (PC's): The players' avatars. Each player controls the thoughts, emotions, and actions of one character in the game fiction.

Non Player Characters (NPC's): Every character in the game fiction that is not a PC. NPC's are usually controlled by the GM, and are sometimes called "GM Characters".

Session: A single session of play that may last two to four hours.

Campaign: A series of sessions played over a long period of time that involve the same Player Characters and the same story line.

TL; DR

THE GOAL OF COWBOY WORLD

The goal of Cowboy World is to tell stories about interesting characters in conflict, set in the old American West.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY COWBOY WORLD

- This book
- Yourself and 3-5 friends. One of you will be the Game Master (GM). The others will be Players.
- Six sided dice. At least two, but two per player is better.
- Printed Character Sheets and Character Creation Cheat Sheets.
- Printed Player Move and GM Move Sheets.
- Paper, pencils, erasers and index cards.
- Tokens, coins or glass beads to use as Grit counters.
- 3 Hours or so of free time.
- Your imagination!

THE MINIMUM YOU NEED TO KNOW TO PLAY COWBOY WORLD

The Character Sheet and Character Creation Cheat Sheet

The Character Sheet contains all you need to know about your character, and at the first session the first 30 minutes or so of game play will be used to fill it in. Have a look at the Character Creation Cheat Sheet, it tells you exactly how to create your character. Ask the GM to help you if you get stuck! If you cannot figure out what to write in some of the spaces, just leave it for later. You can always complete it during play.

Cowboy World game mechanics

Everything in Cowboy World happens in a conversation where the GM sets up a fictional situation and asks “What do you do?” You, the player, respond with your character’s fictional actions in reaction to the situation the GM narrated. Fictional situations in the game trigger mechanical Moves. For example, if you say that your character shoots somebody, it triggers a Move that will determine, by means of rolling dice, whether you hit or miss. So if what you say corresponds with the trigger of a specific Move, the GM will tell you to roll for that Move.

Now have a look at the Player Moves sheet: Find the Move the GM told you to roll for on the sheet and roll two six sided dice (2d6). Add the pips together and then add the applicable Modifiers to the roll. The modifiers are usually an Attribute (Mind, Body or Soul) + a

Skill (e.g. Shoot or Brawl). Some moves may tell you to add another +1. You may also have to deduct the Skill of an opposing character from the roll.

Then follow the instructions of the Move text.

If you roll well, (a total of 10+ after modifiers are added) you are successful and get to say what happens next.

If you roll 7-9, it is still a success but the GM will add a complication.

If you fail your roll (on 6 or less after all modifiers added), something really bad happens to your character, according to the fiction. The GM will tell you exactly what. But there is also a good side to failing: You get 1 experience point every time you fail. In Cowboy World it is called Grit. Using counters to track your Grit is a really good idea.

You also earn 1 Grit each time you resolve a Bond with another Character, and when you achieve a Goal.

Your Character's Archetype, Twist, Belief, Goal, Issue, and Strong Bonds (+3 Bonds) are known as Character Aspects. If you are Famous or Infamous (Fame or Infamy with a value of +3) that also counts as a Character Aspect.

You may at any time play one of your character's Character Aspects, pay one Grit and then add +1 to a roll after it is rolled. When you "play your Character Aspect" you have to explain exactly why that Character Aspect makes a difference at that moment in the fiction. The GM may also suggest that you play a Character Aspect to subtract 1 from the roll after it is rolled. You may choose to ignore his suggestion but then you have to pay 1 Grit to do so.

Finally, you may buy skill points for your character at a cost of 5 Grit per point, as she gets better at what she does.

The important thing is to tell an awesome story at the table, and have some serious fun with your friends doing so.

This is all you need to know to start playing Cowboy World as a player.

But if you are going to be the GM, then it is suggested you read the rest of the book... :-)





The best weapon for a gunfight is a shotgun from ambush
Wild Bill Hickok



INTERESTING CHARACTERS

CREATING YOUR CHARACTER

Cowboy World is about interesting characters in conflict. That usually means badass people kicking butt.

So lets start with the “interesting character” part. Character creation happens during the first session of a campaign. Everyone gets a Character Sheet, and the GM quickly explains each section as the players fill in the sheets.

It is important not to let character creation drag on too long. Not everybody will be able to fill out every line of the character sheet in 30 minutes. If players do not know why their character is good at a certain skill, or have not figured their belief or goal out yet, don't worry. They can do it during play.

RULES FOR CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation is a group effort. When you create your characters, keep the following in mind:

- Player Characters must be competent.
- The Player Characters must have a reason to be together.
- The Player Characters should complement each other.

Player Characters must be competent.

That means they must be independent and courageous enough to get involved in a story. You may decide to play an old pie-baking granny, but exactly how will she fit into the story? If you and the other players can figure that out, then go ahead.

The Player Characters must have a reason to be together.

That means that there must be some reason why the different characters would be involved in the same story. That is why the first step of character creation is were the group decides on a theme for their party. It can be a daunting task for a GM to direct the story of characters who have no reason to be together.

The Player Characters should complement each other.

Body +1 characters do physical stuff. Soul +1 characters influence and control people. Mind +1 characters work stuff out intellectually. When they work together they have a higher chance of success.

Character creation steps: Use the Character Creation Cheat Sheet!

- Decide on a theme for your group.
- Decide on the basics: Your name, gender, age and how you look.
- The High Concept: Archetype, Twist and History.
- Assign your attributes: Body, Mind and Soul.
- Grit, Fame and Infamy all start at 0.

- Choose your starting skills and write them in the starting skill slots. Write a sentence about each to say why you have those skills.
- Choose your Belief, Goal and Issue.
- Choose your gear.
- Everybody at the table introduces their character. The GM ask questions and takes notes.
- Discuss your Bonds with the other players and write them down.
- Everybody gets a chance to tell the others about their Bonds.

AN INTERESTING BAND OF...

Remember, all the characters know each other at the start of the game. So decide on a theme for your group. Look at the examples, then write your own.

- We are cowboys, drifters, hired hands. We'll take any job if it pays enough.
- We are Pinkertons.
- We are Federal Marshals bringing law and order to the west.
- We are spies, working for...
- We are bounty hunters.
- We are outlaws, robbers, desperadoes planning our biggest score.
- We are missionaries, our goal is to bring the light in a dark universe.
- We are mercenaries, selling our guns to the highest bidder.
- We are pioneers, seeking freedom and settling in a hostile land.
- We are convicts, planning our escape.
- We are journalists for a rag back east.
- We are homesteaders, defending our land.
- We are trappers, prospectors, or other assorted hillbillies.
- We are a troupe of traveling entertainers or circus freaks.

THE BASICS

Name, gender, age and look. For instance, you could be Cathy Woodson, a 16 year old red headed girl. Or Marv Sullivan, a 55 year old bald man with missing front teeth.

THE HIGH CONCEPT

The High Concept is who your character is in two phrases. **The first is your Archetype.** For example, you may be a Cowboy, a Gunslinger, an Undertaker, a Native American Shaman, or an American Indian Maiden. In literature, an archetype is *“a typical character that seems to represent universal patterns of human nature.”* **In other words, an archetype is a stereotype**

of the genre.

There is a list of Cowboy and Western genre Archetypes on the character creation cheat sheet to help you, but you are in no way limited to the list.

The second part of your High Concept is the Twist. If your archetype is what you are on the surface, your Twist is what makes you unique and interesting.

Cathy Woodson is a barmaid. That's her Archetype. Her Twists is, she has a shotgun. What happened to her that makes her carry the gun around? That's unexpected and interesting. So her High Concept is, "Barmaid with a shotgun."

Or Marv Sullivan. His Archetype is, he is the Sheriff. His Twist? He has a shady past. Maybe he is convicted bank robber on the run. So his High Concept is, "Sheriff with a Shady Past."

Yuan Liu, the Chinese boy, is actually a girl in men's clothing. Why? Because Chinese women are barred from entering the United States. She came to look for her brother who disappeared while working on the Trans Continental line.

So, are there limits on who your character can be or what the High Concept can be?

The answer is, not much. Cowboy World has no classes, like "Fighter", "Thief" or "Battle Babe" as you may have encountered in other RPG's.

Here are the bare essential guidelines: Your character must fit into the Cowboy-Western genre. So think cowboys and gunslingers. Sheriffs and outlaws. Native American warriors and shamans. School marms and cat-house madams. But remember the Old West was a frontier, a place where people from all over the world came to because of the great opportunities, in spite of the risk. Do you want to play a Russian noble on the run from the Czar? You absolutely can – as long as your back story explains how you got here.

The High Concept in terms of game mechanics: Your Archetype and Twist are Character Aspects, and may be played to change the outcomes of die rolls. Any time after rolling dice, a player may spend 1 Grit to play his Archetype or Twist and add +1 to the outcome of the roll. This means that your High Concept will have a real mechanical impact on the story. We will cover that in more detail later.

SOME COWBOY AND WESTERN ARCHETYPES

The Cowboy / Cowgirl

The guy or gal who lives in the saddle and drives cattle. He may be a diamond in the rough, an amateur philosopher or a fugitive from another life. In Tombstone, Arizona the word Cowboy was a derogatory term, meaning a scoundrel and gang member.

The Drifter

The mysterious stranger who rolls in and out of town like a tumbleweed, doing odd jobs and punching cows along the way to stay alive and on the road. A Drifter is often a guardian angel who will save a town or an oppressed widow or orphan, only to ride off again into the

sunset.

Shane: I gotta be going on.

Joey: Why, Shane?

Shane: A man has to be what he is, Joey. Can't break the mold. I tried it and it didn't work for me.

Joey: We want you, Shane.

Shane: Joey, there's no living with... with a killing. There's no going back from one. Right or wrong, it's a brand. A brand sticks. There's no going back. Now you run on home to your mother, and tell her... tell her everything's all right. And there aren't any more guns in the valley.

Joey: Shane...

[Joey notices that Shane is wounded]

Joey: It's bloody! You're hurt!

Shane: [Shane starts to stroke Joey's hair] I'm all right, Joey. You go home to your mother and father and grow up to be strong and straight. And, Joey... take care of them, both of them.

Joey: Yes, Shane.

[Shane rides off]

Shane (1953)

The Gunslinger

He makes his living by his gun. If he is also the Fastest Gun in the West, other contenders for the title will be on him like ticks on a dog. He can do trick shots, like shooting a hangman's rope in two at a hundred yards. If his name is [Something] the Kid, he will probably die before he starts shaving. If he lives long enough to retire, he may get to be gun shy (Acute post traumatic stress disorder), or have found religion and decided to use his skills only to protect the weak. If the gunslinger is a lady, even better. In a world dominated by men she makes a statement that will stop most men in their tracks – with a bit of hot lead in the chest.

Kid: No no no no, you see it's a gun fight. We both have guns. We aim, we fire, you die.

The Quick and the Dead (1995)

The Outlaw

The man with a price on the head, forced out into the wilderness to be hunted by lawmen and bounty hunters. The Outlaw may be the leader of a gang of stagecoach, train or bank robbers, or a lone wolf. The Rustler is a cattle thief who will often re-brand cattle with a similar brand over the brand of the real owner. He is the evil counterpart of the Cowboy. The penalty for cattle rustling is hanging.

Tuco: I never hurt anybody!

Officer: ...wanted in 14 counties of this state, the condemned is found guilty of the crimes of murder, armed robbery of citizens, state banks and post offices, the theft of sacred objects, arson in a state prison, perjury, bigamy, deserting his wife and children, inciting prostitution,

kidnapping, extortion, receiving stolen goods, selling stolen goods, passing counterfeit money, and, contrary to the laws of this state, the condemned is guilty of using marked cards...

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)

The Bandido

The Bandido is an outlaw from south of the Rio Grande, wears a sombrero and poncho, has a thick mustache and a thicker Hispanic accent. He is also a lover of renown.

The Retired Outlaw

Maybe he pulled that last, big paying job, changed his name and hairstyle and set up the ranch he always dreamed of. Or maybe he spent years in prison and paid his debt to society. Whatever the case, the past is always there, waiting to catch up with him again.

The Bounty Hunter

The guy who collects “Wanted. Dead or Alive.” fliers and makes his living by hunting outlaws. Considered by society to be little better than the scum he hunts.

Dr. King Schultz: How do you like the bounty hunting business?

Django: Kill white people and get paid for it? What's not to like?

Django Unchained (2012)

The Circuit Judge

The Circuit Judge rides from town to town to hear cases. If he is a Hanging Judge, don't expect any mercy.

Judge E. Clarence 'Necktie' Jones: Bein' as we ain't got any Bible and no one here has ever seen one, the jury will not be swore in.

Ride Him, Cowboy (1932)

The Pinkerton Detective

Also known simply as “Pinkertons” or “Pinks” these agents of the Pinkerton's National Detective Agency are brutally effective hired guns on the side of Law and Order. But not always the good guys.

“Vice may triumph for a time, crime may flaunt its victories in the face of honest toilers, but in the end the law will follow the wrong-doer to a bitter fate, and dishonor and punishment will be the portion of those who sin.”

Allan Pinkerton

The Sheriff

Elected by the people to be the local law enforcer. The buck stops here.

The U.S. Marshal

A Federal law enforcer, charged with apprehending fugitives from federal law. They may deputize locals to form a posse. Or they may ride into the wilderness alone to hunt the villains.

Cross-examining Lawyer: Mister Cogburn, in your four years as US Marshal, how many men have you shot?

Rooster Cogburn: Shot? Or killed?

Cross-examining Lawyer: Let us restrict it to killed so we may have a manageable figure!

True Grit (2010)

The Trapper / Hunter / Mountain man or woman

The loner who lives in the wilderness. He lives off the land, and rides into town once or twice a year to sell pelts, get a bath and clean clothes, and a fresh supply of coffee and ammunition. Invariably has a Native American friend, and serious skills with a hunting rifle.

Gabby Johnson: I wash born here, an I wash raised here, and dad gum it, I am gonna die here, an no sidewindin' bushwackin', horns-wagglin' cracker croaker is gonna rouin me bishen cutter.

Blazing Saddles (1974)

The Pioneer

The first to move into new territory. A visionary dreamer, fiercely independent and self-reliant. And extremely resourceful. The pioneer often arrives in a covered wagon with a family and all their belongings.

The Rancher

Owns a spread of land and raises cattle. He employs the cowboys.

John Cannon: "It's High Chaparral, all the things I want for it. It's your life, it's mine, your children - for all the Cannon children that come after us. That's what we're building."

The High Chaparral

The Cattle Baron

The mega-rancher. He has ranches all over the place, thousands of head of cattle and often a beautiful, rebellious daughter. He may be the big bad evil guy, who drives farmers off their land so that his cattle can roam unhindered by barbed wire fences.

The Railroad Baron

One of the richest men in the Old West, a pioneer of industry. In stories of the Old West, they are often the bad guys, who step on the small people as a means to making more money.

Latham Cole: I want to show you something. From the time of Alexander the Great, no man could travel faster than a horse that carried him. Not anymore. Imagine; time and space, under the mastery of man, power that makes emperors and kings... look like fools. Whoever controls this, controls the future.

The Lone Ranger (2013)

[Frank, the hired gun, sits at Morton, the railroad boss' desk]

Morton: How does it feel sitting behind that desk, Frank?

Frank: It's almost like holding a gun... only much more powerful.

Once Upon a Time in the West (1968)

The Homesteader

The Homestead Act of 1862 awarded 160 acres of free land to a homesteader who could turn it into a viable farm. A homesteader will hang on to his land, come hell or high water, locusts or cattle ranchers. His wife and children are equally resolute, and when he dies, his widow will carry the torch.

The Chinese Railroad Worker

Imported from China to build railroads, these men were discriminated against and abused by their employers. Few Chinese women came to America, because of discriminatory laws against them. There is a story of a Chinese lady who disguised herself as a man to be with her husband working on the railroad line. In the late 1880's the Chinese Exclusion Act banned Chinese immigration.

Roy O'Bannon: [Reading a reward poster] The Shanghai Kid. This is terrible!

Chon Wang: I know. I'm not from Shanghai.

Shanghai Noon (2000)

The Medicine Showman

A traveling salesman exhibiting marvels of science and medicine. For a few pennies you can buy the Elixir of Life, that will cure all ailments from lumbago and warts to loneliness and bad luck at the poker table.

Professor Marvel: That's right. Here -- sit right down here. That's it. Ha ha! This -- this is the same genuine, magic, authentic crystal used by the Priests of Isis and Osiris in the days of the Pharaohs of Egypt -- in which Cleopatra first saw the approach of Julius Caesar and Marc Anthony, and -- and so on -- and so on. Now, you -- you'd better close your eyes, my child, for a moment -- in order to be better in tune with the infinite...

Wizard of Oz (1936)

The Prospector

Often an old timer with a gray beard, missing teeth and a donkey. He gets severe bouts of gold fever, celebrates when he strikes it rich and is paranoid about his claim.

Pardner: You're diggin' a hole.

Mad Jack: Hey, you don't miss a trick, do yah?

Paint your wagon (1969)

The Pony Express Rider

If you got the job, you swore an oath before the Almighty God never to use foul language, drink alcohol or quarrel with your fellow employees. Your job was to deliver mail between St Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California in ten days or less. The pony express disappeared after the advent of railroad lines.

The advert said, "Young, skinny and wiry fellows, not over eighteen. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred. Wages \$25 per week."

The Gambler

A skilled intellectual, a student of statistics, risk management and human nature. There is a sucker born every minute. Gamblers are flashy people. While they may or may not cheat, they will definitely know how to spot a cheat, and will always have something up their sleeve. Probably a derringer.

*My ole pappy always told me your fate is in your hand
Stand pat or draw, it's yours to choose
Luck don't have a thing to do with how you play the game
Maverick didn't come here to lose*

Ed Bruce - Theme From "Bret Maverick"

The Tenderfoot

An Easterner who recently arrived in the West, where his skills are suddenly useless. Who knows why he came, it may be a death wish, it maybe that he had a dream of being a rancher or a farmer. He will have to learn quickly or die.

The Barber

Often the guy in town who best knows how to handle a sharp knife. He will cut your hair and trim your beard, and do minor surgeries. He is often also the mortician, because he shaves corpses too. Barbers are sources of information, central repositories for gossip and amateur psychologists. And if they are Italian, they have Family in Sicily.

The Blacksmith

Strong, because they pump massive bellows and wield heavy hammers, blacksmiths are indispensable in any town that relies on horse powered transportation. They are also skilled in crafting other things than horseshoes and nails.

Buford "Mad Dog" Tannen: You owe me money, blacksmith.

Doc: How do ya figure?

Buford "Mad Dog" Tannen: My horse threw a shoe. And seem' as you was the one that done the shoein', I say that makes you responsible.

Doc: Well, since you never paid me for the job, I say that makes us even!

*Buford "Mad Dog" Tannen: Wrong! See I was *on* my horse when it threw the shoe and I got throwed *off*! And *that* caused me to bust a perfectly good bottle of fine Kentucky red-eye. So, the way I figure it, blacksmith, you owe me five dollars for the whiskey and \$75 for the horse.*

Back to the Future, part 3. (1990)

The Frontier Doctor

A tough and resourceful professional. He would travel long distances at night through blizzards and hurricanes to make house calls, where he could do brain surgery on the kitchen table with only a bowl of boiling water, towels and the instruments in his bag. Having said that, there was a reason why the doctor left the good life back East. Perhaps he was an alco-

holic, addicted to the drugs he should have administered to his patients, or killed a man. Or maybe he was just an idealist who came West without thinking it through.

Dr. Michaela Quinn: Tobacco? You know what that'll do for your tuberculosis?

Kid Cole: No ma'am, but I'm sure you're plannin' on tellin' me.

Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman

The Clerk

The Clerk is indispensable for creating paperwork in any business, and therefore, even if he is scrawny and pale, he is a hero in his own world. He has skills of the mind and soul, so do not discount him!

The Schoolmarm

She came from outside the community to lead a one room school with children of all grades in one class. She is well educated and has upstanding morals, as stipulated by her contract. Because she runs a whole school full of juvenile barbarians on her own, she should definitely not be underestimated.

Clara Clayton: Emmett, do you think we'll ever be able to travel to the moon like we travel across the country on trains?

Doc: Definitely, although not for another eighty-four years and not on trains. We'll have space vehicles, capsules to sail off in rockets, devices that create giant explosions, explosions that are so powerful that they...

Clara Clayton: [finishes Doc's sentence] "They break the pull of the earth's gravity and send their projectile through outer space."

[Doc stares at her in shock. Clara laughs]

Clara Clayton: Emmett, I read that book too. You're quoting Jules Verne, "From the Earth to the Moon".

Doc: You've read Jules Verne?

*Clara Clayton: I *adore* Jules Verne.*

Back to the Future part 3 (1990)

The Southern Gentleman / Belle

Well dressed, well spoken, suave and charming to fault to the opposite sex. All this is tempered by racism, gambling, drinking, and pride.

Scarlett: Rhett, Rhett... Rhett, if you go, where shall I go? What shall I do?

Rhett Butler: Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

Gone with the Wind (1939)

Johnny Ringo: [waiting by an oak tree for Wyatt Earp for a showdown, he believes the person approaching is Wyatt] Well, I didn't think ya had it in you.

Doc Holliday: I'm your huckleberry.

[Ringo is startled that it's Holliday and not Wyatt]

Doc Holliday: Why, Johnny Ringo, you look like somebody just walked over your grave.

Johnny Ringo: Fight's not with you, Holliday.

Doc Holliday: I'll beg to differ, sir. We started a game we never got to finish. Play for blood, remember?

Johnny Ringo: I was just foolin' about.

Doc Holliday: I wasn't

Tombstone (1993)

The Undertaker

An important service provider in town. He is often the only one to profit from violence in town.

Joe: Get three coffins ready.

[later, after gunning down four men]

Joe: My mistake. Four coffins...

A Fistful of Dollars (1964)

Undertaker: If you would like to sleep in a coffin, it would be all right.

True Grit (2010)

The Preacher Man

Looking after sinner's souls. But that doesn't mean he can't look after himself.

Megan Wheeler: [Reading from the Book of Revelation] And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth beast said: "Come and see." And I looked, and behold a pale horse. And his name that sat on him was Death.

[The Preacher rides up on his pale horse]

Megan Wheeler: And Hell followed with him.

Pale Rider (1985)

The Cat-house Madam

Another important service provider in frontier towns.

Sheriff J. P. Harrah: [Cole has just been treated for a gunshot wound] Doctor, can he be moved?

Dr. Miller: Sure, in a couple of hours, but don't go bouncin' him around.

Maudie: He can stay here. I'll... I'll make him comfortable.

Sheriff J. P. Harrah: Oh, I've got a fine bed over at my place. It's, uh, narrow and it's hard and it's uncomfortable, but, uh, he won't get bounced around.

El Dorado (1966)

The Music Man

He came from back East because of the high demand for his skill: to play any and every popular tune for hours on end on the piano without stopping. He will stoically go on playing even if a the saloon is demolished in a brawl around him. That's just who he is. South of the border, he's El Mariachi, the guitar player.

El Mariachi: You know, it's easier to pull the trigger than play guitar. Easier to destroy than to create.

Desperado (1995)

The chorus of 'Hey Jude' had petered out, and the piano was plinking some other old ballad. Voices murmured like broken threads. The gunslinger paused outside for a moment, looking in. Sawdust floor, spittoons by the tipsy-legged tables. A plank bar on sawhorses. A gummy mirror behind it, reflecting the piano player, who wore an inevitable piano-stool slouch. The front of the piano had been removed so you could watch the wooden keys whonk up and down as the contraption was played.

Dark Tower I: The Gunslinger, Stephen King

The Indian Maiden

Like Pocahontas she is innocent and good hearted, the archetypal Eco-feminist.

Pocahontas: [singing Colors of the Wind]

You think I'm an ignorant savage

And you've been so many places

I guess it must be so

But still I cannot see

If the savage one is me

How can there be so much that you don't know

You don't know

Pocahontas (1995)

The Magical Indian

OK, lets face it: The Natives know some serious mystical shit. Or at least they think they do.

Tonto: [to Reid] Eight men rode into canyon... I dug seven graves. Horse says, you are spirit walker: a man who has been to the other side and returned, a man who cannot be killed at all...

The Lone Ranger (2013)

Danny: That is some mystical shit!

The Ridiculous Six (2015)

The Medicine Man

He is a Magical Indian, but also an expert in traditional herbal medicine, cauterizing wounds and cutting out arrow heads and bullets. He can give you strong stuff to make you lucky in love. And when you need someone to perform a rain dance for you, he's your man.

The Half-Breed

Rejected by the whites for not being white enough, and rejected by the natives for not being native enough, the Half-Breed is a loner on the edge of both societies, often with a chip on his shoulder because of it.

The Savage Indian

Nobody says it better than Louis L'Amour.

When you see Apaches, be afraid; and when you can see no Apaches, be twice as afraid.

Sbalako, Louis L'Amour

The White Man Gone Native

Reviled as a traitor by his own people. Distrusted as a stranger by his adopted people.

John Dunbar: [in Lakota; subtitled] And now they will hunt for me. And when they find me they will find you. I think it would be wise to move the village to another location right now. As for me... I will be leaving. I will be leaving with my wife Stands With a Fist as soon as possible. I must go and try to talk to those that will listen.

[Shouts and protests immediately begin around the council. Wind In His Hair stands up and screams his objection. Even Kicking Bird is protesting. However, Ten Bears rises both of his hands as a sign to stop]

Ten Bears: [in Lakota; subtitled] Quiet! You are all hurting my ears! Leave us!

[all the Sioux file out of the tent, and within seconds Ten Bears and Dunbar are alone]

Ten Bears: [in Lakota to Dunbar; subtitled] You are the only white man I have ever known. I have thought about you a lot. More than you think. And I understand your concern. But I think you are wrong. The white man the soldiers are looking for no longer exists. Now there is only a Sioux named Dances with Wolves.

Dances with Wolves (1990)

The Army Scout

Armies in pursuit of Indians or other enemies relied on auxiliaries with local knowledge to scout. They were either cavalry soldiers or locals, even Indians who were hired for their knowledge of the area and its people.

The Cavalry Officer

He is in charge of a group of mounted soldiers. He is The Man, macho, self important, commanding and authoritative, with healthy disdain for people of lower social station. And of course, he has the ladies swooning.

Kirby Yorke : [Paying tribute to his comrades] You're wrong there. They aren't forgotten because they haven't died. They're living right out there, Collingwood and the rest. And they'll keep on living as long as the regiment lives. The pay is \$13 a month and their diet is beans and hay. It may be horse meat before this campaign is over. They fight over cards or rotgut whiskey but share the last drop in their canteens. Their faces may change, the names. But they're there. They're the regiment, the regular army—now and fifty years from now."

Fort Apache (1948)

HISTORY

Your character's history is a short explanation of

- The High Concept
- How she came to be here. (Wherever “here” is. It is not only geographical, it is also emotional and relational.)

GM: “Cathy, how did you get here?”

Player: “I was born back East. My family lost everything in the Civil War. Father decided to go west. Mother was killed during an Indian raid on the wagon trail. Father is always drunk. I got to defend myself.”

ATTRIBUTES

Your character's attributes are his or her inborn abilities. Think of it as your character's DNA. There are three attributes: Body, Mind and Soul

Rules for attribute modifiers

Assign the modifiers +1, +0 and -1 to the Body, Mind and Soul attributes according to your character's High Concept.

The Body attribute changes as the character takes harm and heals, but may never be higher than the initial modifier assigned to it.

Body

The Body attribute is your character's ability to do physical things.

It may be his ability to brawl, ride a horse, or shoot with a gun. The Body attribute also reflects the character's ability to survive harm, and when a character takes harm, it may decrease temporarily.

Characters with Body +1 solve problems physically: They fight, shoot and ride.

Mind

The Mind attribute is a reflection of your character's intelligence.

Characters with Mind +1 solve problems intellectually. They use their Awareness to assess situations and gain advantages (The Read a Situation move grants +1 forward). They can track their opponents through the wild, investigate clues and come to conclusions.

Soul

The Soul attribute has to do with your character's emotional and relational abilities.

Characters with Soul +1 are leaders. They do not get their hands dirty but get others to do the work by commanding, intimidating or charming them.

SKILLS

A skill is something you can learn to do. Mechanically it adds a skill modifier to your roll. Skill modifiers range from -1 to +2. A skill modifier can never be more than +2.

Rules for skills

- 1: All the starting skill slots on the character sheet must be filled.
- 2: Each skill must be tied fictionally to the character's High Concept and History.
- 3: Negative skills must come from different attribute groups.
- 4: Custom skills (that are not on the list) are encouraged.
- 5: Negative skills may not be custom or specialist skills.

General skills are skills that everybody has, but some people are better at it than others. If a character does not have a general skill, he can still use that skill at a default modifier of +0. If, for instance, a character does not have the Brawl skill, he may still brawl but with a +0 skill modifier, using the Body attribute modifier only.

Specialist skills (skills with asterisks) cannot be used by people who do not have them. For instance, a character that does not have the Medical skill cannot heal somebody.

During character generation, each player chooses her starting skills and writes them in the starting skill slots. There are 2 starting skills with +2 modifiers, three with +1 modifiers and 2 with -1 modifiers. All the starting skill slots must be filled.

Then she writes down the fictional reason why she has this skill. It has to tie in with her High Concept and History.

The negative skills must come from different attribute groups. For instance, you may not have Athletics and Strength as negative skills, because they both come from the Body attribute group. Negative skills may not be Specialist or custom skills.

Players are encouraged to choose custom skills that are not on the list. If a player chooses a custom skill, it has to have a reasonable chance of coming into play when the character is in danger, under pressure, or when the stakes are high. If a player wants to choose "Pie Baking" as a skill, he has to be able to explain to the GM how he will use it under those circumstances.

Skills may be upgraded using Grit. The cost is 5 Grit per skill point. New skills may be bought with 5 Grit. New general skills are bought at a +1 modifier. New specialist skills are bought at a +0 modifier.

A skill is "opposed" if a character uses it in direct opposition of another character. The rules for opposed skills will be explained a bit later on.



Body skills:	Mind skills:	Soul skills:
Shoot	Awareness	Nerve
Brawl	Investigate	Charm
Ride / Drive	Gambling	Command
Rope	Mechanics	Intimidate
Athletics / Acrobatics	Business	Bluff / Deceive
Strength	Medical*	Empathy
Stealth	Engineering*	Provoke
Sleight of hand	Tracking/Survival*	Music*

Manolito Juárez is a masked Mexican vigilante. He decides that his main weapons will be a pistol, saber and a whip. Fighting with a saber requires the Brawl skill, but the GM rules that Brawl does not cover the use of a whip, which can also be used to do other stuff, like swinging from a balcony. So after discussing the issue, it is decided that Manolito will have Whip +1 as a custom Body skill.

Body skills

Shoot

Handling a firearm. Shooting may be an opposed skill if the target is actively shooting back at the character, like in a fast draw duel. Shooting a bow and arrow also counts as Shoot.

Brawl

Fighting with anything but firearms or bows and arrows, for example fists, knives, empty whiskey bottles or chairs. Brawling is always an opposed skill. Throwing things in combat such as knives and bottles counts as Brawl.

Ride / Drive

How well you can ride a horse, a mule, or drive a cart, a wagon, a buggy or a coach. Riding or driving may be an opposed skill if there is a race.

Rope

Using a cowboy's lasso. Tying knots.

Athletics / Acrobatics

Running, climbing, swimming. Anything that requires endurance and some sort of athletic skill. Also jumping, swinging and falling with style. Athletics may be an opposed skill.

Strength

Lifting things, breaking things, opening things, bending things. Strength may be an opposed

skill, for instance in an arm wrestling match or a tug-of-war.

Stealth

Doing things without being noticed, or simply hiding. It may be opposed by Awareness.

Sleight of hand

It includes things like picking pockets or card sharpening. It may be opposed by Awareness.

Mind skills

Awareness

Awareness is a character's ability to notice things in the environment, interpret them and draw conclusions from them.

Investigate

Investigate is the skill of actively looking for clues and using them to come to conclusions. The difference between awareness and investigate is that the awareness skill is used in the moment, passively and on the fly. Investigate, on the other hand, is a premeditated, purposeful and systematic process.

Gambling

This skill is used for games of chance, like poker, craps or betting on the outcome of a gun draw. Gambling is often an opposed skill.

Mechanics

The ability to make or fix common stuff like a wagon's axle, or shoeing a horse. It differs from the Engineering skill in that Engineering is specialized, like fixing a steam engine or blasting a mine tunnel open. If there is uncertainty about which skill to use, the GM makes a ruling based on the complexity of the task. Is it something an ordinary person can do?

Business

Wheeling, dealing and negotiating. Hiring henchman. When used to negotiate, Business is an opposed skill.

Medical*

Doctors, nurses, Native American traditional healers and army medics have this specialized skill.

Engineering*

The specialized version of the Mechanics skill. See above. It includes things like railway engineering, mining etc.

Tracking/Survival*

The skill of surviving in the wild. It includes tracking a prey (human or otherwise), hiding your tracks, hunting, finding water and navigating in the wild. Tracking /survival is a specialist skill and may be an opposed skill, if you are trying to hide your tracks from someone, or

vice versa.

Soul skills

Nerve

The ability to stay calm under stress. Charm, Intimidate and Provoke may be opposed by Nerve. The GM should also ask you to roll + Nerve if you do something while under stress.

Charm

The ability to make people like you, trust you and do what you want them to do. It may be opposed with the Nerve skill, depending on the situation.

Command

The ability to lead people. The Command skill makes people trust and respect you enough to follow your orders.

Intimidate

The ability to make people do what you want by instilling fear in them. Intimidate may be opposed with Nerve.

Bluff/Deceive

The ability to hide your true intentions. It is opposed with the Empathy skill.

Empathy

The Empathy skill is about emotional awareness. It allows you to read people's true intentions. It also induces people to confide in you. As an opposed skill, it may be used to opposed with the Bluff/Deceive skill.

Provoke

The ability to rub people the wrong way to make them angry or lose their temper at times that are advantageous to you. It can be opposed with Nerve.

Music*

Performing in public. It is a specialized skill.

BELIEFS AND GOALS

Beliefs in Cowboy world has nothing to do with the characters' religion. Beliefs are specific things a character believes about the world that guides his thinking and actions. A character's Belief is the reason why he is willing to put his life on the line. It is the underlying idea that defines his goals.

A Character's Goal is the concrete, do-able manifestation of his Belief. So in Cowboy World the formula works as follows: "I believe X, therefore I will do Y" where X is your belief and Y is your goal.

When writing your Belief and Goal, answer the following questions

- Is this Belief directly translatable into a Goal?
- Can this belief be challenged in the game?
- Do I want to play a game in which this particular belief is challenged?
- Is this the goal I want my character to pursue in the game?
- Does this goal put my character on a specific course of action?

If you are uncertain that the answer on all accounts is “yes” you may need to refine your Belief and Goal until you are.

Belief examples:

Goal examples:

All men are equal with inalienable rights... therefore I will defend the downtrodden.

We must bring the light of civilization... therefore I will make peace with the Natives.

Law and order is everything... therefore I will arrest Black Bart.

The law is for the weak... therefore I will rob the bank.

Money rules the world... therefore I will find gold in those hills.

I was destined to have this ranch... therefore I will defend it with my life.

I am the fastest gun in the West... therefore I will challenge Black Bart to a draw.

I deserve a better deal in life... therefore I will take my share of the claim.

I will never be humiliated again... therefore I will kill Joe Dalton.

My sister is vulnerable... therefore I will defend her life with mine

Challenging Beliefs

One of the GM’s imperatives in Cowboy World is To Find the Conflict – By challenging their Beliefs. The GM will present the players with situations specifically designed to challenge their beliefs. Therefore the character’s Beliefs are some of the main drivers of the fiction in Cowboy World.

Ten Bears: Then you will die.

Josey Wales: I came here to die with you. Or live with you. Dying ain’t hard for men like you and me. It’s living that’s hard when all you’ve ever cared about has been butchered or raped.

The Outlaw Josey Wales (1976)

Playing Beliefs and Goals.

When you play your character’s Belief or Goal for a better outcome, explain why it is fictionally appropriate, pay 1 Grit and take +1 to a roll after it is rolled.

When the GM tells you to play your character’s Belief or Goal for a worse outcome, explain why it is fictionally appropriate, and take -1 to a roll after it is rolled. Alternatively pay 1 Grit to ignore the GM. If you fail the roll because of it, take 1 Grit as usual.

The question you have to answer when you play a Belief for a better or worse outcome is,

“Does this roll involve a risk the character is taking for staying true to his or her Belief?”

The question you have to answer when you play a Goal for a better or worse outcome is, “Will succeeding with this roll bring the character closer to his or her Goal?”

When a character fails to act according to his Belief there will always be consequences down the line.

Changing Beliefs and Goals

A player may change a character’s Belief at anytime under the following circumstances

- When there is sufficient fictional reason to do so.
- If changing the Belief does not have an influence on the outcome of the situation the character is in at that moment. This means you may not change your Belief on the spur of the moment to get out of trouble!

A player does not pay or earn Grit to change Beliefs and Goals.

Achieving Goals

When a character achieves his or her goal, take 1 Grit. You have one session to write a new Goal.

ISSUE

Each character has a flaw, that may make things difficult at the most importune times. Anything that makes a character’s life difficult may be an Issue. It may be an addiction, a character flaw like obsessive compulsive disorder, unresolved emotional scars, a pathological relationship or negative character traits like envy or greed. The important rule for Issues is that it must have a high probability of coming into play.

Pick one from the list or write your own.

- I am addicted to _____
- I am obsessed with _____
- I have a compulsion to _____
- I am distracted by _____
- I am afraid of _____
- I am afraid to _____
- I lie about _____
- My rage is triggered by _____
- I am lazy when _____
- I hate _____
- I freeze when _____
- I owe _____
- I am on the run from _____

- I envy _____
- I was found guilty of _____
- I am in trouble with _____
- I made an enemy of _____
- I don't have _____

The GM may at any time suggest that a player plays his character's Issue. When this happens the GM will say after the dice are rolled, "But you are..." (For example, "drunk", if the character's issue is "Addicted to Whiskey") and give the reason why it is fictionally appropriate. He then subtracts 1 from the roll total. If the player accepts this and therefore fails his roll, he is awarded one Grit. The player may refuse the play by paying one Grit.

Resolving Issues

An Issue is resolved when there is a fictional reason to resolve it, and the player pays 5 Grit to make it so. The GM may impose a new fictionally relevant Issue on the character at a later stage.

BONDS

Most Player Characters will already know each other when the game starts. Bonds are emotions based on Player Characters' shared history.

The Bond modifier is an indication of the strength of those emotions. 0 means indifference, so there is no Bond. +3 means strong emotions, as in marry or murder each other.

Bond points may not be negative; even very negative Bonds (characters that hate each other) have positive Bond points, since the Bond points reflect the strength of the emotion, not the type of emotion between the characters.

Each character starts with 4 Bond points to distribute between 1 to 4 other characters. No bond may be allocated more than 3 points. A character does not have to spend all 4 bond points at the start of the game, and may have more than 4 Bond points allocated to different characters later on in the game.

Types of Bonds

- Positive Bonds: These represent positive emotions like Love, Friendship, Respect, Gratitude, Admiration etc.
- Negative Bonds: These represent negative emotions like Anger, Hate, Envy, Rivalry etc.
- Shared bonds: Both parties share more or less the same emotion.
- Unilateral bonds: One party couldn't care less.
- Bonds of desire: "I wish [character name] would _____."
- Bonds of intent: "I will do _____ to/for [character name]"

George's Bonds

1. *Cathy*. +3 (*Strong Bond*) *Childhood sweetheart. "I wish Cathy would marry me."*
 2. *Billy*. +2 (*Weak Bond*) *Arrested him after a bank robbery. "I will see Billy hanged."*
 3. *Marv* +1 (*Weak Bond*) *Once rode in the same posse.*
-

Playing Bonds

A Bond is "weak" if it has 1 or 2 Bond points, and "strong" if it has 3 Bond points.

Bond modifiers may be used instead of any Soul + Skill modifier in Player vs Player moves when they are fictionally applicable.

Strong Bonds (+3 Bond) are Character Aspects and may be played for a better or worse outcome when fictionally applicable. **You may not use a Strong Bond as a Character Aspect if you used the same Bond as the initial modifier for the same roll.**

Resolving Bonds

Whenever players feel that their characters have forged a new Bond that replaces the old one, the old Bond is resolved. Bonds can be resolved in both positive or negative ways. Lets say two characters had a weak Bond because they grew up together. But then they fall in love with the same girl. The fact that they were childhood friends before does not matter anymore, that Bond is resolved. Their weak Bond of friendship has been replaced by their strong Bond of rivalry and hatred. Or maybe the one character saved the other's life. Their weak Bond of childhood friendship has been resolved to be replaced by their strong Bond of owing each other their lives.

When a Bond is resolved, the new Bond that is formed with that character must have 1 Bond point more or less than the previous Bond. Remember it cannot be more than +3 or less than 0.

Whenever a Bond is resolved, the players involved take 1 Grit each.

Creating new Bonds

Player characters may create new bonds with player characters they did not have bonds with before, whenever the story demands it. They simply write the new Bond on the character sheets.

Player Characters may not have Bonds with NPC's. Players may use Beliefs, Goals or Issues to reflect their characters' relationships with significant NPC's.

FAME AND INFAMY

Fame is an indicator of the amount of hero worship that the general population has for you.

Infamy is an indicator of the amount of trouble you are in with the law.

The Laws of Fame and Infamy:

- All characters start with 0 Fame and 0 Infamy.
- Fame and Infamy may be 0, 1, 2 or 3.
- Fame cannot increase while Infamy is > 0 .
- When Infamy increases Fame decreases point for point.

Gaining Fame

A character gains 1 Fame whenever he performs a Heroic Deed in the presence of eye witnesses. A “Heroic Deed” is anything that puts the character in danger for the benefit of somebody else. Fame points are not awarded for saving cats from trees or helping old ladies across the street. Fame points are only awarded for truly Heroic Deeds.

When a character already has 3 Fame and would gain another Fame, he does not gain that point but there are situational consequences in the fiction: People swarm him, ask for his autograph, try to elect him mayor, or make him head of the school board or something like that.

Losing Fame

A character loses Fame when he gains Infamy, point for point.

Gaining Infamy

Whenever a character does something illegal in the presence of eye witnesses or when he leaves evidence of his involvement, he gains Infamy. The amount depends on the felony, petty crimes do not earn Infamy.

- Armed robbery: 1 Infamy.
- Horse theft or murder: 2 Infamy.

When a character already has 3 Infamy and would gain another Infamy, he does not gain that point but there are situational consequences in the fiction: People will call the sheriff, form a posse, try to arrest or lynch him etc.

Redemption

A character may lose Infamy only if he does an Absolutely Epic Act of Redemption (the whole table should agree that it is appropriate) and pays 5 Grit. His Infamy is then reset to 0 and his Fame to 3.

Playing Fame and Infamy

Fame and Infamy modifiers may be used instead of any Soul + Skill modifier when they are fictionally applicable.

Billy has 3 Infamy. He wants to intimidate a cowboy into telling him something. He would usually use his Intimidate skill, which is Soul + Intimidate = +1, but his Infamy is +3 so he

chooses to use that instead.

Being Famous or Infamous

If you have 3 Fame, you are Famous. Being Famous is a Character Aspect and may be played for a better or worse outcome. You may not use Famous as a Character Aspect if you used Fame as a modifier for the same roll.

If you have 3 Infamy, you are Infamous. Being Infamous is a Character Aspect and may be played for a better or worse outcome. You may not use Infamous as a Character Aspect if you used Infamy as a modifier for the same roll.

GEAR

Standard gear

- You have a horse and a saddle.
- You have a firearm. Choose one: Revolver, Rifle or Shotgun.
- If you have the Shoot skill, you have two firearms.
- If you have the Brawl or Tracking / Survival skill, you have a bad-ass knife.
- You have all the stuff that is necessary for your occupation, for example mining tools, medical kits, etc.

Your pockets, saddlebag or baggage:

You may produce 5 simple items from your pockets or immediate personal belongings that could logically be there, to fill 5 fictional slots. For instance, if you need a match, you may at the moment you need the match fill one of the slots with “matches”. For the rest of the session, “matches” will be in that slot. Slots may be reset when the character is in town and has time off. The GM has the final say whether you may produce an item or not.

Optional gear

Whatever you decide you should have before a session, within the limits of the fiction and your financial status. The GM may require that unusual items be written on your character sheet before play starts, otherwise it does not exist. What is an “unusual item?” It is up to the GM, she has the final say! You may also buy gear in the game fiction from for example, the local general dealer. You may only buy things you could logically afford according to your financial status.

Weapons in detail:

- Single action revolver: Range near. +1 to Harm.
- Lever action rifle: Range far. +1 to Harm.
- Shotgun: Range near. . +0 to Harm.
- Native American bow and arrow: Range far. +2 to Harm.
- Knife; Range hand (or close if thrown). +2 to Harm.

WEALTH

You have some money depending on your High Concept and history. You are either

- Rich: You can buy property and pay workers or henchmen.
- Comfortable: You can buy an extra horse, a cart, or farming or mining tools.
- Poor: A simple roof over your head and a decent meal a day.
- Broke: You probably have to sleep under a tree, but you can still buy some beans and stale bread. For anything more than that, you'll have to beg or steal.



Rose Dunn of the Cimarron, lover of the outlaw Bittercreek Newton



TELLING THE STORY

PLAYING COWBOY WORLD IS TELLING A STORY

Because Cowboy World is collaborative storytelling, everything in the game happens in conversation. So most of the rules of Cowboy World are concerned with giving structure to that conversation. No game will run exactly as set out in this chapter; a lot of the talk around the table will just flow naturally - discussion, jokes, role-playing in character and so on. But whenever any significant conflict happens in the fiction, the basic underlying principles and structure outlined here should always be present.

The GM makes a move: "Black Bart lifts the whiskey bottle ready to swing at your head, and charges." To indicate that the GM passes narrative control to the player he addresses, he adds "What do you do, George?"

The player who controls George responds: "I jump on the table, grab the chandelier, swing and kick him in the face."

The GM decides that George has to use his acrobatics skill to do this, since George is "in danger, under pressure or the stakes are high". So he says, "That's acrobatics. Roll for 'Use a skill: Athletics / Acrobatics'." If George had just gone in with flying fists, it would have been the Brawl move, but this is way cooler.

George's player rolls snake eyes. This means the GM gets to make a hard move. He says "You jump on the table and grab the chandelier OK, but it breaks as you swing. Bart whacks you on the side of your head with the bottle as you fly across the room. Take non-lethal harm."

The player rolls for harm. "It's a six."

GM: "It feels as if your head explodes in a flash of blinding white light, and then everything goes black as you fall on a chair, smashing it to pieces. You are knocked senseless."

Since George is knocked out, it is the GM's responsibility to move the story forward again. So he makes a new move at somebody else: "Black Bart smiles with immense satisfaction. He turns to you, Cathy, and growls, 'So Missy, are you going to fight or are you going to come with me?' So Cathy, what do you do?"

There are three types of narration in the Cowboy World conversation.

- Beats.
- Exposition.
- Description.

BEATS

As I said, the goal of Cowboy World is to tell stories. According to story gurus the basic building blocks of stories are "story beats". So the basic building blocks of the Cowboy World story are Beats.

Let me start by defining a Cowboy World Beat: It is **"An instance of conflict that results in a change in the status quo and causes more conflict."** Think of Beats as dominoes.

A domino standing on its own is in status quo. It just is. A domino falling over represents a change in status quo. It changes from what it is (a standing domino) into something else (a domino lying flat). A domino falling over and knocking another domino over is a Beat.

For instance, a story beat in a novel may look like this:

The door swings as George walks in; the saloon is suddenly dead quiet. Except for the clicking of guns being cocked.

"Which one is Black Bart?"

"You're looking for me?" Bart spits on the floor, twirling his gun carelessly.

"Bartholomew Sharpe, you are under arrest for cattle rustlin."

The Beat here is George walking into the bar and telling Bart he is under arrest. It is an instance of conflict that changes the status quo and causes more conflict. In novels or movies, story beats are strung together to make scenes, and scenes add up to a complete story. All the little conflicts escalate to a final big conflict that ties everything together in a unified, satisfying whole.

In Cowboy World, a Move is a codified part of a Beat. **Where beats are the fictional building blocks of any story, Moves are the mechanical building blocks of those Beats that make up the Cowboy World conversation.**

The mechanical structure of Beats

In computer programs, procedures often have the following structure:

Input → Calculation → Output

Beats in Cowboy World have a similar structure, but it is mostly fictional. The structure of a Cowboy World Beat is:

Setup → Mechanical stuff → Outcome

The Setup and Outcome parts of a Beat are purely fictional. The Mechanical Stuff happens in the middle and determines the Outcome.

Some terms

Soft move

A setup move the GM makes that follows from the fiction, narrates what happens, but stops before the effect.

Player setup

The Player's reaction to the GM's soft move. It follows from the fiction, narrates what happens but also stops before the effect.

Clarification

The GM asks questions about the player's setup in order to be specific about what happens

and to create awesome fiction.

Hard move

When a character fails, the GM narrates the outcome and makes a Hard Move. He narrates a bad thing that happens to the character, that follows from the fiction and is irrevocable.

Beat Setup

Beats always follow logically from the fiction of the preceding Beats. (Remember what I said about Beats being like dominoes?) The Setup part of a Beat describes the intention of the Beat, and is always a fictional narrative of an action. In Cowboy World you never say “I make a spot or perception check”. You state your intention in the fiction by describing an action, for example, “I look around the place, trying to figure out what just happened here!”

So this is how the Setup of a Beat works: The GM sets up a situation, asks the player “What do you do?” and then the player gets to set up his response to the GM’s setup. When the player is done the GM may ask the player questions for Clarification.

So the structure of Setup is:

GM setup → “What do you do?” → Player setup → Clarification

During Setup, both the GM and the player say what happens fictionally but stop before the effect.

GM Setup: Soft Moves

The narrative bits the GM makes to set up a Beat are called “Soft Moves.” They describe things that happen in the game world that demand a response from the player, but stop before something bad happens. In the example of the fire below, the fire and the thug demand a response from the player. If the player fails to respond successfully, something bad happens.

Bart swings the spade at your head.

Bart spits in your face.

A bullet rips into the door right next to your head.

There is a pothole in the road, you have two seconds before the wagon’s left front wheel hits it.

He says, “It was Jimmy. I swear, I saw him do it!”

The flames block your way to the door, while the thug up on the balcony aims his Winchester right at the back of your head.

The GM signals that his setup is complete when he asks the player “What do you do?” or something similar.

Player setup

The moment the GM asks “What do you do?” the player has to respond with his own setup. Player setups always describe the Player Character’s action in response to the GM’s setup,

and stops just before the effect.

Player setup may be just one action that will trigger a roll, for example:

I duck under the spade and hit him in the belly.

I swing the whiskey bottle at his head.

I draw my gun and shoot.

I jump off the wagon.

I watch him closely to see if he is lying.

I run and dive through the window.

It may also be a more complex plan of action:

I'm going to run to the edge of the roof, jump on him as he rides past below me, and slit his throat.

Clarification

The GM asks questions to help the player to be specific about what the character does, to narrate awesome fiction, and so that everybody at the table can be on the same page as far as the fictional action is concerned.

- When a player names a move, have her describe her action in the fiction. Remember that the Setup has to be fictional!
- When a player mentions an unspecified person or thing, ask her to specify it.
- When a player says what his character does, let him describe the action in detail.
- When a player makes a generalization, ask him to be specific.
- When a player has his character do something stupid, tell him the consequences and ask him to reconsider.

If the player says, "I roll for Brawl," ask "Exactly how do you attack him?"

If the player says, "I attack one of the thugs," ask "Which thug do you attack and how do you do it?"

If the player says, "I watch him closely to see if he is lying," ask "What specifically are you looking for?"

If the player says, "I insult them," ask "All of them or someone in particular? And tell me what you say!"

If the player says, "This whole town is corrupt," ask "Everybody? Is the sheriff corrupt too? And what about the bank manager?"

If the player says, "I jump off the cliff", say "You will probably not survive it. Do you really want to do it?"

As soon as everybody is clear about the setup, move on to the Mechanical Stuff.

Mechanical Stuff

The mechanical stuff that happens is simply deciding what Player Move, if any, is triggered, and then following the text of the move. The moment the player's intention is clear and the fictional setup is good, the GM decides if a Player Move is triggered. There are three possibilities

- A Player Move is not triggered. When this happens, see what happens. The GM may continue to ask questions for clarification until a Player Move is triggered, the conversation may just meander on for a while, or she may proceed to the Outcome. If the player's setup leads to obvious failure, proceed to the Outcome even if no move is triggered.
- A Player Move is triggered but no roll is required. This depends on the text of the Move triggered. Resolve the move and proceed to the Outcome.
- A Player Move is triggered and a roll is required. Roll the dice according to the text of the Move triggered, and proceed to the Outcome.
- The GM may decide that more than one roll will be required. In the example above, the character will run on a roof, jump on a horse, and slit the rider's throat. If the fictional difficulty is relatively low, (flat roof, the target of the attack rides at a slow walk etc.) the GM may decide that only one Athletics / Acrobatics roll is called for. But lets say it is a pitched roof and the target rides at a gallop. The GM may decide that four rolls are called for: An Athletics / Acrobatics roll to run on the pitched roof, another to jump onto the running horse, another to hang on to the rider and then a Brawl roll to stab him.

Triggers

Player Moves are triggered when things happens in the fiction. A Player Move has a condition, for instance "**When you do X...**" or "**When X happens...**" If the condition happens in the fiction, the Move is triggered, and the effect takes place.

- The effect may simply be something like "Y happens."
- The effect may trigger a roll that determines what happens.

Examples of triggers and moves

Player: "I look for an escape route."

GM: "Roll for Read a Situation"

Player: "Give that thing here, dammit!"

GM: "Roll for Influence, Command or Intimidate."

Player: "I shoot him in the knee."

GM: "Roll for Shoot"

Player: "I hit him with a chair"

GM: Roll for Brawl."

GM: "He draws his gun and shoots"

Player: "I do nothing" (No move is triggered)

GM: "You are shot, roll for Lethal Harm, +2."

Moves without rolls

Some Moves do not have associated rolls. If they are triggered, the effect simply happens. For example: **When you are under concentrated fire**, take -1 to all Body rolls.

Moves with rolls

If a Move with a roll is triggered, the player rolls two six sided dice (2d6), and adds the appropriate modifiers.

Note that moves with rolls are only triggered if

- there is uncertainty about the fictional outcome.
- the character is in danger, under pressure or if the stakes are high.

If a player says, "I kick the door open" and the door is unlocked, a move is not triggered. If the door is locked and there is a chance that he may succeed, a move is triggered, but only if the character is in danger, under pressure or if the stakes are high. If it is the steel door of a bank safe, a move is not triggered.

- On a total of 10 or more (10+) the character succeeds at what he wanted to do and the player narrates the outcome.
- On a total of 7-9, he succeeds but only partially or with cost. The GM adds a complication and may make a new soft move against the active player or somebody else.
- On a total less than six (6-), he fails and the GM generally makes a hard move. After the Hard Move, the next move the GM makes will be against somebody else.

George's player says, "I walk to the bar counter and say to the barman, 'You know where I can find Black Bart?'"

Since this action of the of the player character does not satisfy the conditions of any moves, no move is triggered.

But let's say the barman does not want to talk to George, because he is scared of Black Bart. If Bart finds out that he betrayed him, he will be dead. The GM decides that even though George is not in danger or under pressure, the stakes are definitely high, since the barman may be killed.

And because the stakes are high, a move will be needed. So the GM says, "The barman is scared. He shuts up like a clam. What do you do?"

George now has a choice. He can try to charm, intimidate, or command the barman. Intimidate seems to be the most appropriate choice, so he says, "I grab him by the shirt, and repeat my question. 'Where can I find Black Bart?' in a tone that would scare the thorns off a cactus."

This satisfies the conditions of the move "Influence: "When you try to get somebody to do what you want by commanding, intimidating, or charming him..." So George's player has to roll dice to find out what happens.

Modifiers

There are two main types of modifiers: Those added before rolling, and those added after rolling.

Modifiers added before rolling

These are attribute modifiers, skill modifiers, opposing modifiers, and move associated modifiers.

Attribute modifiers

Every player character has three attributes: Body, Mind and Soul. They represent the character's innate abilities, and may be -1, 0 or +1.

Skill modifiers

Each of the Attributes have Skills associated with them. They represent the character's learned skills, and may be -1, implied 0, +1 or +2.

Opposing modifiers

When a move is "opposed", the skill modifier of the target character is subtracted from the roll.

Bart called George out into the street for a draw.

George's player says, "I stand in the middle of the street, facing Bart, ready to draw."

The GM responds, "You lock eyes with Bart and see his left eyelid jumps. He draws. What do you do?"

"I shoot."

"Roll shoot. Bart has a shoot skill of +3"

Because George is not shooting at a bottle on a post but at somebody who is shooting back at him, the move is "opposed" and Bart's skill is subtracted from George's roll.

Move associated modifiers:

These are modifiers that are introduced by the text of a Move.

- Take +1 (or -1): Add +1 or -1 to the current roll.
- Take +1 (or -1) forward: Add +1 or -1 to the next roll only.
- Take +1 (or -1) ongoing: Add +1 or -1 to all rolls as long as the fictional situation lasts.

The Rock Hard, Iron Clad Law of modifiers added before rolling.

No matter how many +1's moves tell you to take, you may never add more than +4 to any roll before it is rolled.

Modifiers added after rolling.

A player may, after the dice are rolled, add one point to the total of the roll by playing a Character Aspect. Character Aspects are words or descriptions that define who your character is. Character Aspects are:

- Archetype.
- Twist.
- Belief.
- Goal.
- Issue.
- Strong Bond (Bond = 3).
- Famous (Fame = 3).
- Infamous (Infamy = 3).

To add +1 to a roll after it has been rolled two things must happen

- The player must narrate why and how the Character Aspect changes the outcome of the action.
- The player must pay 1 Grit.

So in the above example, George's player rolls 6. He has Body of +1, and Shoot of +2. So his total is 9. But Bart is one of the best gun fighters in history, he has a Shoot skill of +3, which is deducted from the total. George's roll total is therefore 6: A failure.

George's player says:

"But Cathy is my True Love (they have a strong Bond), and Bart will go after her if he kills me now."

The other players agree that it is valid in this fictional situation since he would probably shoot better to save his girlfriend. (The GM has the final say) So George's player pays 1 Grit to add +1 to his roll. He now has a total of 7, and succeeds with cost.

The GM may also, at any time suggest that a player plays one of his character's Character

Aspects for a worse outcome, after the dice are rolled. If the player accepts the suggestion, he subtracts 1 from the total. If the total is now 6, he fails the roll and takes 1 Grit. The player may pay 1 Grit to ignore the GM's suggestion.

To subtract 1 from a roll after it has been rolled two things must happen

- The GM must narrate how and why the Character Aspect changes the outcome of the action.
- The Player must accept the suggestion. (If he does not, he has to pay 1 Grit)

Marv, the Sheriff with a Shady Past, confronts Black Bart, and says "Stick them up, Bart, you're under arrest!" Marv's player rolls 5 + 1 (Soul) +1 (Command) = 7. Whenever a player rolls 7 or 10 after adding modifiers, the GM must decide whether to suggest a worse outcome or not. If the player has a Character Aspect that makes it fictionally possible, he should probably go ahead and do it. In this case it is almost too easy.

So the GM says, "Black Bart grins at you Marv, and says, 'But don't I know you from somewhere? Ain't you that guy from Dead End Gulch who held up the mail coach?' " If Marv's player accepts the play, he takes -1 to the roll, fails and takes 1 Grit. He may instead choose to pay 1 Grit and not accept it by saying "You mistake me for someone else, punk!"

The Rock Hard, Iron Clad Law of modifiers added after rolling.

No matter how many applicable Character Aspects you have, you may never add more than one modifier to any roll after it is rolled.

Outcome

There are three possible outcomes: Success, partial success or failure.

1) Success.

This may happen

- When no Move is triggered.
- When a Move is triggered but no roll is required.
- When a roll is required and the roll + Modifiers = 10 +.

A success is defined as anything that is in favor of the player, or as described by the words of a Player Move for when a 10+ is rolled.

If the outcome is a success, the player gets to narrate the outcome.

Examples of successful outcomes, narrated by the player:

The bottle shatters on his head and he falls backwards into the water trough. He is out for the count.

The bullet rips into his left thigh, he is flung to the ground by the force of it. I walk over to him and kick his gun from his hand.

Is he telling the truth? (The GM has to answer truthfully) The bloody bastard is lying to me! I draw my gun and stick it in his face.

2) Partial success or success with cost.

This happens when a 7-9 is rolled on a triggered Move.

The GM tells the player to what extent his Move was successful and what the complications are. He may start a new Beat by making a new Setup Move (or Soft Move) directed at the active or another player.

Player: I jump from the roof to the balcony. (She rolls 9 on Use a skill, Athletics / Acrobatics)

GM: You miscalculate the distance and topple over the balustrade, you are now hanging on to the railing by your right hand.

Player: I climb onto the balcony.

GM: Because you slipped, you are in clear view of the sharpshooter on the roof of the saloon. Shots ring out and bullets tear into the wall behind you. You are now under concentrated fire. What do you do?

3) Failure.

This happens whenever the outcome is negative for the player, even if no Move was triggered.

GM: "Do you really want to jump off the cliff?"

Player: "I'll take my chances. I jump."

GM: "Take Lethal Damage, -1"

It also happens when the player rolls a 6- after all modifiers are added.

GM: The native warrior gallops straight at you, rises from the saddle and throws his spear right at your head. What do you do?

Player: I dive out of his way.

GM: Roll "Use a skill – Athletics / Acrobatics"

He rolls.

Player: "Four!"

GM: *“Take Lethal Damage, +2”*

He rolls again, the total is six.

GM: *“You dive to the left, but you are not fast enough. The spear nicks your right shoulder as you fall, and then the horse is on you, trampling you with its hooves. You hear the Indian yelling a curse as everything goes black.”*

When the outcome of the Player Move is failure, the GM immediately makes a Hard Move at the active player. If the failure happens because of a failed (6-) roll, the player takes 1 Grit. The new Beat will be directed at another player.

How hard must a move be?

- The Hard Move should follow the text of the Player Move that was triggered.
- The Move should be as hard as the fiction demands.

The hard move should follow the text of the player move that was triggered

For example: If the Player Move says the character gets shot, he gets shot and takes lethal harm.

The move should be as hard as the fiction demands

- When the active player’s character’s fictional position is more or less safe, the effect of the Hard Move should be minimal.
- When the active player’s character is in danger, the effect of the Hard Move should be the logical consequence of that danger.
- When it is a desperate situation, the effect of the Hard Move should be catastrophic.

Ruling not to roll when a roll should have been triggered, depending on genre and Character Aspects.

Sometimes the player may want to do something that should trigger a Move with a roll when a roll is clearly not necessary. This may vary according to the genre that you are trying to emulate or according to the character’s Character Aspects.

Let’s say the player says, “I jump off the bridge on to the roof of the speeding train”.

In a more realistic setting, there would be no way that the character would survive the jump, so the GM tells the player the outcome and asks him to reconsider. If the player insists, the GM will make the player roll for lethal damage with a low modifier, or even simply narrate the character’s bloody demise.

In a setting like that of Disney’s Lone Ranger movie, the GM would reply “Sure. Roll for Use a Skill: Athletics / Acrobatics.”

The character’s Character Aspects are also important. If the character is an old banking clerk, the GM may tell him he will not survive the jump, even if the setting is more light-hearted.

If, on the other hand, the character’s History says “Grew up in a circus and trained as a trapeze artist” the GM should let the player roll for Use a Skill: Athletics / Acrobatics even

in the more realistic setting.

When the GM makes rulings like this, it is important to have all the players on board, by explaining exactly why the ruling is made.

So to sum it all up

GM setup → “**What do you do?**” → **Player setup** → **Clarification (if necessary)** → **Triggering** → **Roll (if necessary)** → **Three possible outcomes.**

→ **Success:** The player narrates the successful outcome.

→ **Partial success or success with cost:** The GM narrates the complications and may start a new Beat with a Setup Move aimed at the same or another player.

→ **Failure:** The GM narrates the failed outcome and makes a Hard Move at the active player’s character. He starts a new Beat with a Setup Move aimed at another player.

EXPOSITION

Exposition happens when the GM or a player explains something in the game world. This may be a character’s back story, something that happened in the past, or any other explanation of game world facts. When exposition happens, the rules of Narrative Authority have to be respected. This will be explained later.

Rules regarding Exposition

- Rather than delivering exposition, let the Player Characters discover the world on their own. Play to find out what happens also means play to discover the world!
- Use NPC’s instead of the GM as narrator to deliver exposition when possible.
- When the Player Characters should know something, let the players provide that information.
- When a player gives exposition, the GM should ask Clarification questions according to the guidelines described before in the section on Beats.
- Never let exposition become boring. Inform players on a need to know basis only!

DESCRIPTION

Description is when the GM describes the surroundings the characters find themselves in. This usually happens when the players enter a new Location. It is also the GM’s job to describe people.

Describing Locations

Describing a location has three parts: Impressions, Areas and Tactical Elements.

Impressions

These are what your senses tell you about a location when you first enter it.

Rules regarding Impressions.

- Use Impressions to create atmosphere: for example bright and cheerful, dark and depressing, foreboding, scary, horror, impending doom.
- Use Impressions to make Cowboy World feel real!
- First give a brief overview of what the Location looks like.
- Then describe it in terms of the other four senses, sound, smell, and touch.
- How do people / animals /nature respond to the arrival of the Player Characters?
- Finally, describe the emotional feel of the place: What do the Player Characters feel in their guts when they walk in?

GM: "You ride into town just as the sun is setting. It is small, the proverbial one-horse-town. Dark storm clouds are gathering above, so it is darker than it should be. Even so, most houses have no light in the windows. A dark figure disappears up an alleyway as you ride past. A wooden sign creaks and flaps in the gusty wind; it says Lucas Messerschmidt, Blacksmith and Undertaker. Mr. Messerschmidt has a brand new coffin on display outside the door, at a discount price. Across the road is the saloon: Bright lights, bad piano music and shrill female laughter spill into the road. As you approach, you cannot shake the feeling that you are being watched..."

Areas

In Cowboy World, the action does not happen in a physical space but in a narrative space. There will be no detailed map of where the encounters take place. When describing a Location, it is always important to tell the players what the different areas in a location are that the characters may move to and interact in.

Tactical Elements

Tactical elements are things in the Location the Player Characters may interact with, especially during combat: Tables that can be turned over and used as cover. Chairs and bottles that can be used as improvised weapons. Rocks and shrubs that people can hide behind. A herd of cattle that can be spooked to cause a stampede.

Tactical Elements may be made up at the spur of the moment, often in response to the "Read a Situation" move.

GM: "You stop in front of the saloon, it is a poorly constructed double story wooden building with a balcony on the first floor. There are about five horses tied to the post outside. Next to it is the church, it is run down, the front door is boarded up and the windows are broken."

Player: "Any good hiding places for a sniper?"

GM: "The belfry would be the perfect spot for a sniper... Oh, and there are a few barrels in the alley between the saloon and the church. On the other side of the saloon is the general dealer, and behind you next to the blacksmith, the stables. There are plenty of dark shadows between the buildings where people could hide."

In this example, the Areas are the road, the saloon, its balcony, alleys and the various other buildings that may be accessible to the player. The Tactical Elements are the horses and barrels, and whatever else the GM decides to make up at the spur of the moment to complicate things. There may be a wagon coming around the corner, or anything.

Describing people

When describing an NPC, start with the obvious: Gender, apparent age, and look.

Try to give each NPC a memorable aspect, like something about his anatomy, clothes, a mannerism or maybe an accent.

Use descriptive terms that say something about the character, not just how she looks.

A cranky old judge who should eat more prunes

A feral mountain man with the social skills of a grizzly bear

A seductive lady aiming for the jugular

A prim, disapproving schoolmarm

We'll say more about NPC's later.

NARRATIVE CONTROL, NARRATIVE AUTHORITY AND NARRATIVE TRUTH

Narrative Control

This brings us to the question of “turn order”. Whose turn is it?

The answer is simple, in Cowboy World, as in all games powered by the Apocalypse Engine, there is no “turn order” or “combat initiative order” for that matter. But each person at the table does get a turn. I prefer to call player turns “control” as in “narrative control.” In other games you may have heard of the “spotlight”. “Control” is basically the same thing, but it is more specific, because the player who has “narrative control” gets to say what happens next.

Usually, the GM decides who gets narrative control.

The GM has the responsibility to pass control around. And she does this according to the following rules.

- **Equity:** Each character gets the same amount of time. This does not mean passing clockwise around the table or timing player turns. It means that the GM has to have a rough idea of how much time each character has had in an arbitrary period, say five minutes, and make sure that every character has more or less the same time in control in that period. Please note the words “more or less”. No fighting about turns allowed!
- **The Story:** Control often has to pass to specific characters as the story demands.
- **Not the loudest player!** It is a fact that some players are more vocal than others, and demand more time in control. Don't put them down or be rude, just pass control according to rules 1 and 2. Or alternatively let them monopolize control for now,

especially if the story demands it, but pass more control to other players later.

- Players always lose narrative control **when they fail a roll**.
- **In player versus player (PvP) moves**, the active player loses narrative control when she rolls 6- or 7-9 and passes it to the target character's player.
- **In non-PvP moves, on a roll of 7-9** the GM takes narrative control to narrate the complication, and then may pass it back to the active player, or another player. Rules 1 and 2 take precedence.

How does the GM pass control to players?

Soft moves followed by “What do you do?” pass narrative control.

A soft move is usually directed at a specific character. “Cathy, Black Bart walks up to you and grabs your arm. What do you do?”

A soft move may also be directed to more than one person or even the whole group, which is like asking for a volunteer to make the next move.

When you make a move against one character, you may demand a response from another character. This is a good method to draw a player who is uninvolved into the conversation.

George is involved in a bar fight. Cathy has stayed out of the fight so far. So the GM says: “So Cathy, you see Black Bart hitting George with a chair. What do you do?” This forces Cathy into a decision. She is given the opportunity to join the brawl with flying fists or even to pull her shotgun from under the counter. But even if she decides to do nothing, she still had narrative control for a moment.

Asking players to narrate exposition passes narrative control. For instance the GM may ask,

“Cathy, you are from the town of Hallehujah. Tell us about the people there. Is it true that there was a serial killer? Who was it?”

Sometimes players will pass control among themselves. Players often discuss what they need to do next, or there may be conflict between player characters. The rule here is very important: Let it happen if and as long as it moves the story forward. The moment you as GM feel that the story is not moving forward, say something like “While you guys are standing around arguing, Black Bart draws his gun. What do you do?”

Players also pass narrative control to each other when they get involved in player vs player conflict.

When to pass control

If for any reason the narration stops, take control and make a move to pass control. This often happens after a hard move. If George is knocked senseless, there is not much he can do to move the story forward, is there? When the players look to the GM to find out what happens next, take control and pass it to a player.

When the players get side tracked in discussions that do not lead anywhere, make a soft move to get them going.

George: "I think we should go to the saloon and speak to some people."

Marr: "No. I think we should go to the Y-Bar ranch and have a look around the place."

The players argue and can't come to a decision, so the GM says, "You hear footsteps in the passage outside and the next moment someone kicks in the door. What do you do?"

The GM had not planned on this, but since the players wasted precious time with their analysis paralysis, she intervened to get the story moving.

This technique instills a sense of urgency in the game. The players soon learn that when they bore the GM bad things happen. There is one important caveat though: All soft moves must follow from the fiction and move the story forward. **Cowboy World does not do well with random encounters that are unrelated to the story line!**

Cliff hangers: When one character is at a make or break point, freeze his time to create a cliff hanger and pass control to somebody else. For example:

"George, Black Bart puts his gun in your face and pulls back the hammer. He starts to squeeze the trigger." Normally you would say "What do you do?" but because this is an ideal cliff hanger you stop right there and make a soft move against somebody else: "OK, we'll freeze it there. Cathy, the prospector aims an uppercut at your jaw. What do you do?" When Cathy has done her move, come back to George and Black Bart. "OK George, that gun in your face, what do you do?"

Cliffhangers work very well when the party has split up, and you have to handle more than one encounter at the same time.

As often as possible. It is important to reduce players' down time to avoid boredom.

Watch your players for signs that their attention is wandering. Then pass control to that player. It may be the guy who fiddles with his mobile phone or the one who builds dice pyramids.

When players get stuck

Sometimes you present the players with a problem, pass narrative control to them, and then they do not know what to do. They discuss it and fail to come up with a solution. If this happens and you do not remedy the situation, your players may feel hopeless. This is good up to a point – a feeling of fighting against overwhelming odds is good for suspense. But the moment they are on the point of giving up you should intervene, because then they are not having fun anymore.

The rule is not to give them the answer on a plate, but to make them work for it. The moves "Read a person" and "Read a situation" are the go to moves for when players get stuck. The GM should always suggest them in such situations.

Narrative Authority

While Narrative Control says who may say what happens next, Narrative Authority says what may be said next. Each player, including the GM, has Narrative Authority over certain aspects of the story.

The Players have Narrative Authority over who their characters are, what they think and what they do. While other players may try to coerce somebody into some line of action, only the character's own player has final say in what that character does or does not do or say. Never take away a player's agency! There are one or two instances where other rules may break this rule, for instance if a character goes insane.

The Players and the GM share Narrative Authority over what the players' characters know about the world. The GM might say,

“George, you worked as a cowboy for Smith’s outfit. How many hands do they have?”

If a player's character has no plausible reason to know something, the player does not have authority to narrate that thing. **A player may establish Narrative Authority over something by making up a good reason why her character would know it.** The GM may require a Use a Skill – Mind roll from the player. This allows the players to have a huge say in the creation of the game world, although always with the GM as the final authority.

The GM has narrative authority over every other aspect of the game, including the Non Player Characters, the world, geography, the weather etc.

Narrative Truth

This rule states that Whatever is Said is True, provided that

- The person who says it has the Narrative Authority to say it.
- It is plausible in the game world.
- It is consistent with previously established truths in the game world.
- If it triggers a move that requires a roll, the outcome is dependent on the roll.

This means that if a player says,

“I draw my gun and shoot him in the face”,

...it just happens since it satisfies all the conditions for Narrative Truth. The player has to roll for the Shoot move.

This rule should be stated at the table, but not enforced too rigorously. In the example above, the GM might ask as Clarification,

“His cowboys will kill you. Are you sure you want to do that?”

The purpose of this rule is to educate everybody at the table to think before speaking and to formulate what they want to do before doing it.



Geronimo

GRIT

Grit is the in-game currency of Cowboy World. If you have played RPG's before, you will recognize it as experience points (XP), with some uses comparable to that of Fate Points in the FATE Core RPG system.

Grit is represented by tokens during the game: Use small coins or glass beads for this purpose. At the end of each session the players make a note on their character sheets of their Grit in hand. At the start of the next session, each player takes the amount of tokens equal to the Grit he had at the end of the previous session.

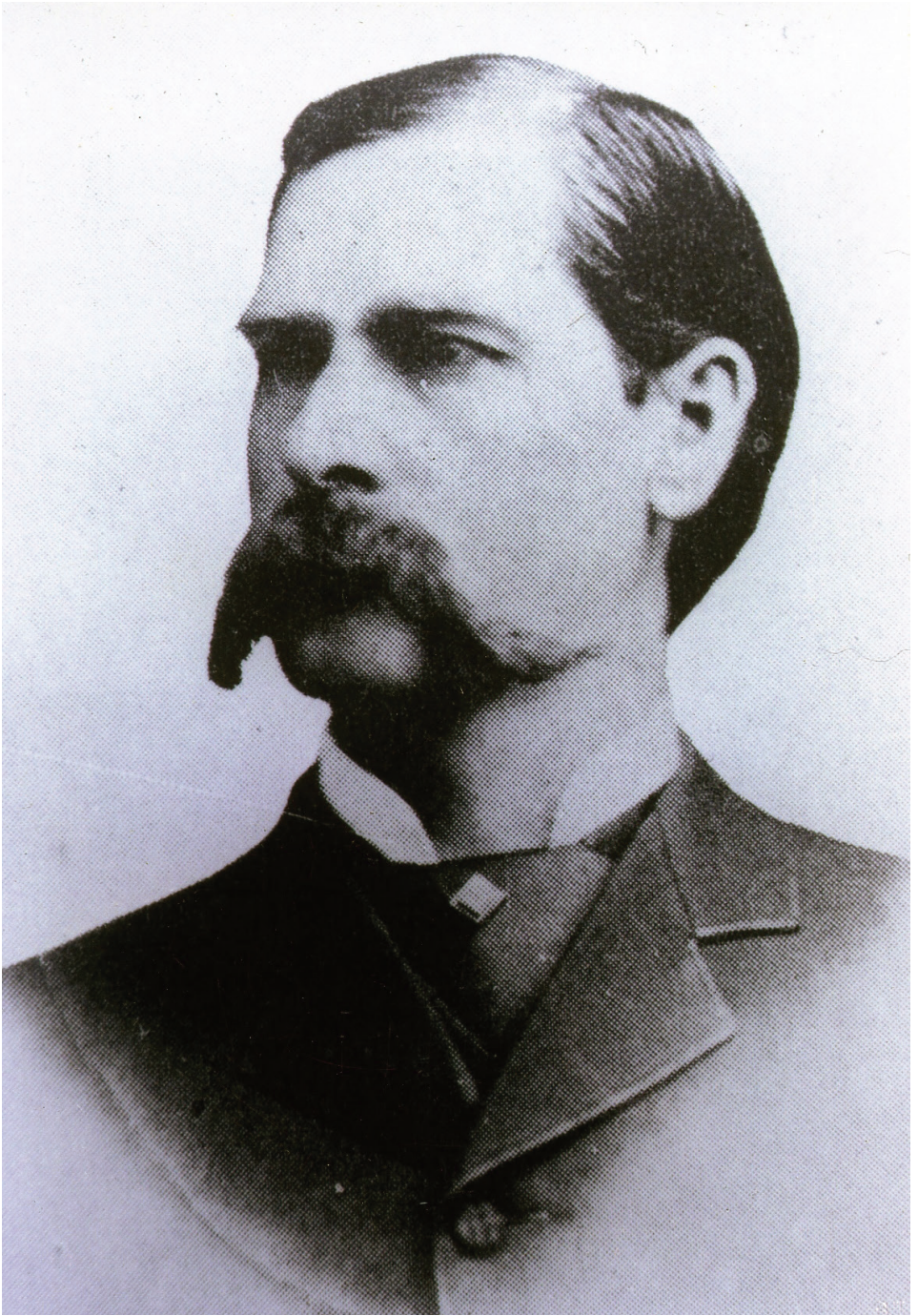
EARNING GRIT

Grit is mainly earned by failing. We learn by our mistakes!

- Whenever a player fails a roll (6 or less after all modifiers were applied) the character takes 1 Grit. Grit is earned when two players resolve a Bond between their characters. When that happens, each takes 1 Grit.
- Grit is earned when a Goal is achieved.
- Grit may be earned by a player whose character is the target of a Player vs Player Influence move.

SPENDING GRIT

- Grit may be spent to ignore the GM when he suggests that you play one of your character's Character Aspects for a worse outcome.
- When you play one of your character's Character Aspects for a better outcome, spend 1 Grit and take +1 to a roll after it is rolled.
- Grit may be spent to buy new skills and to buy skill points for existing skills to a maximum of +2. The cost is 5 Grit per new skill or skill point. New non-specialist skills start at +1. When you buy a new specialist skill, it starts at +0.
- Grit may be spent to change a character's Archetype or Twist when there is enough fictional reason to do it. The cost is 5 Grit.
- Grit may be spent to resolve a character's Issue when there is enough fictional reason to do it. The cost is 5 Grit.
- Grit may be spent to recover from a permanent Body debility. The cost is 5 Grit.



Wyatt Earp, Lawman of Dodge City and Tombstone



PLAYER MOVES

BASIC PLAYER MOVES

USE A SKILL

When you use a skill when you are in danger, under pressure or when the stakes are high, roll + Attribute Modifier + Skill Modifier.

If you do not have a general skill (a skill without an asterisk) you may still use that skill with a skill modifier of +0.

If you do not have a specialist skill (a skill with an asterisk) you cannot use that skill.

On 10+ you succeed. You describe the successful outcome of your action.

On 7-9 you succeed but the GM adds one or more: Cost, danger, a worse outcome, or an ugly choice.

“Use a Skill” is the basic Player Move of Cowboy World. All other moves are derived from it.

The trigger

The important qualifier here is “...**when you are in danger, under pressure or when the stakes are high.**” This is the basic prerequisite for all Player Moves in Cowboy World. For example, if you are driving the buggy into town to buy coffee and chewing tobacco, you do not need to roll for the Ride / Drive skill. But when a band of Native warriors attack you on the way to town, and you want to escape them in the same buggy, you are definitely **in danger, under pressure, and the stakes are high**, so you have to roll.

So what happens if the character is in danger, under pressure, or the stakes are high, but the action does not correspond to any of the skills on the list? The answer is to treat it as a general skill that the character does not have. All you have to decide is whether the action involves Body, Mind or Soul, and make the player roll + Attribute + 0.

Cathy wants to bake a pie for the pie-baking competition. Even though she is not in danger, she is definitely under pressure and the stakes are high, so she has to roll. Since Pie Baking is not a skill on the list, it is treated as a general Mind skill: She has to roll + Mind + 0.

This move is opposed with

The relevant opposing skill, as the fiction demands. The GM makes the call before the roll is made.

Full success

On a full success, the character succeeds and the player gets to narrate the outcome.

GM: *As you round the bend with the buggy, you are right in the middle of an ambush: Six Apaches with rifles on horseback. They are about forty feet away when you see them. What do you do?*

George: *I'm charging right through them.*

GM: Roll "Use a Skill: Ride / Drive"

George: *"Eleven. I whip the horses into a gallop, and ram them into the Apaches. Their horses are spooked as I charge through them and down the road."*

Partial success

The GM introduces cost, danger, a worse outcome, or an ugly choice.

Cost:

GM: *As you whip your horses into a gallop, the left front wheel of the buggy hits a stone in the road and the buggy tilts dangerously on one wheel. As you struggle to gain control your shotgun slips off the seat and falls in the road. You manage to ram through the Apaches though, spooking their horses.*

Danger:

GM: *As you whip your horses into a gallop, the left front wheel of the buggy hits a stone in the road and the buggy tilts dangerously on one wheel. You fall prone on the buggy's seat, dropping the reins. Your horses are spooked, they barge through the Apaches, spooking their horses as well. The buggy careens dangerously down the road, the horses running wild with the reins dragging in the road.*

Worse outcome:

GM: *As you ram through the Apaches, one of them leaps off his horse and on to your buggy. Their horses are spooked as you race past them and down the road. The Apache draws a blade and starts moving towards you.*

Ugly choice:

GM: *As you ram through the Apaches, one of them leaps off his horse and on to your buggy. The Indians' horses are spooked as you race past them and down the road. The Apache leaps forward and grabs your shotgun. You can either kick him off the buggy and lose your shotgun, or*

grapple him and lose control of the horses.

INFLUENCE

When you try to get somebody to do what you want by commanding, intimidating, or charming him, describe what you say and do, and roll + Soul + Command, Intimidate or Charm. Fame or Infamy may be used instead of Soul + Skill if fictionally appropriate.

On 10+, the person complies, unless the GM thinks it is fictionally inappropriate.

On 7-9, the person complies unless the GM thinks it is fictionally inappropriate. The person will also demand payment or a promise.

Note that the move for player vs player action is different.

Trigger

The “Influence” move differs from the “Henchman” move in the sense that the PC has no relationship with or control over the NPC.

The move is triggered when you try to make an NPC do what you want. The reason why there are three different skills to choose from, is because different personalities will try to influence people in different ways. There is a huge fictional difference between charming and intimidating someone, and the players should be encouraged to roleplay the situation. Note that characters may use their fame or infamy as leverage to try and influence somebody. Again this should be reflected in the fiction.

This move is opposed with

Influence may be opposed with Nerve, if the GM thinks it is appropriate.

Full success

“Fictionally appropriate” means that nobody can be forced to do much more than a reasonable person would do under the same circumstance.

Cathy: I smile sweetly and ask him to buy me a drink. I rolled eleven on Charm.

GM: Sure, he buys you a drink.

Cathy: I smile sweetly and ask him to give me the bag of gold. I rolled eleven on Charm.

GM: Sorry, there's no way he's parting with his gold, no matter how charming you are.

Cathy: I cock my gun and shove it up his nose, telling me to give me the bag of gold. I rolled eleven on Intimidate.

GM: He yells, 'Please don't shoot me, Lady!' and gives you the gold.

Partial success:

The target NPC demands immediate payment or a promise of future compensation.

Payment:

Cathy: I smile sweetly and ask him to buy me a drink. I rolled eight on Charm.

GM: He'll buy you a drink, but you realize you're not going to get rid of him easily.

Cathy: I cock my gun and shove it up his nose, telling me to give me the bag of gold. I rolled eight on Intimidate.

GM: I'll give you the gold, if you let me have the horses!

(Cathy now has to decide whether she really wants to shoot him.)

Promise:

Cathy: I smile sweetly and ask him to buy me a drink. I rolled eight on Charm.

GM: He says, "First promise me you'll talk to Bart!"

HENCHMAN

When you order a henchman to do something by commanding, intimidating or charming him, roll + Soul + Command, Intimidate or Charm. Fame or Infamy may be used instead of Soul + Skill if fictionally appropriate.

If the henchman has the appropriate Skill of +3, take +1.

If the henchman is commanded to Shoot or Brawl, the results of the roll is equal to that of the Shoot or Brawl move. Otherwise:

On 10+, the henchman is successful.

On 7-9 he is only partially successful, or causes you cost, danger, a worse outcome or an ugly choice.

On a fail the henchman fails, refuses or quits. The GM may make a hard move against the Player Character.

Trigger

A "Henchman" is any NPC that has a definite relationship with a PC and is under command of the PC. It may be a gang member, an employee or a person deputized to ride in a marshal's posse.

The player must roll for each individual henchman that is commanded. If a gang is involved in a fight, rather use the Gang Fight move.

An NPC cannot be ordered to do something that requires a specialist skill if he does not have that skill. For instance a henchman with no Tracking / Survival skill may not be ordered to track somebody.

If the henchman has the appropriate Skill of +3, take +1 to the Henchman roll.

This move is opposed with

Depending on the fiction, Charm and Intimidate may be opposed with Nerve, GM's call.

Full success

The henchman carries out the Player Character's command successfully. If the henchman shoots or brawls, the target character is disabled, as described in the combat moves.

Partial success

On a 7-9 the GM has to choose whether to reduce the effect of the henchman's action, or to have the henchman succeed but cause problems for the Player Character. Have a look at the examples for the "Use a Skill" move! If the henchman shoots or brawls, the target character is wounded, as described in the combat moves. Everybody takes +1 to all Body rolls against them.

Fail

What happens on a fail is dependent on the henchman's relationship with the PC. If he is a loyal retainer, he will try and fail. If he was intimidated into doing it he will refuse. If the situation is too dangerous or out of control, he may quit. As always on a fail, the GM should make a Hard Move at the Player Character.

George has deputized Handsome Jack and Benny McLaughlin to catch Black Bart. They track him through the desert. Since George does not have the Tracking / Survival skill and Jack does, he Commands Jack to track Bart. Bart also has Tracking / Survival of +1. George has Soul +0 and Command +1. Because Jack's Tracking / Survival is +3, George's player takes +1. He rolls $8 + 0 + 1 + 1 = 10$. Bart's Tracking / Survival has to be subtracted since it is an opposed move, giving a total of 9, a partial success. The GM decides that the cost of the partial success is that Jack will foolishly lead them down a steep gully, causing Benny's horse to break a leg. They have to leave him behind.

They finally catch up with Bart at a water hole. George Shoots and fails. He is wounded by Bart and cannot act for a moment, so he shouts "Shoot him!" Jack has no shooting skill. George's player rolls $9 + \text{Soul } (0) + \text{Command } (1) = 10$. Since George's player rolled a full success, Jack shoots and mortally wounds Bart.

READ A SITUATION

When you read a **charged situation**, roll+ Mind +Awareness

On **10+**, ask the GM three of these questions.

On **7-9**, ask the GM one of these questions.

You and your allies each take +1 forward when you act on the information.

- where's my best escape route / way in / way past?
- which enemy is most vulnerable to me?
- which enemy is the biggest threat?
- what should I be on the lookout for?
- what's my enemy's true position?
- who's in control here?

Trigger

Read a situation only triggers when there is conflict or danger of violence. When there is no conflict or danger, the Investigate move may be more appropriate. Looking at the questions the player may ask will give you an idea of the situations where the move is appropriate.

A typical example would be a face off between individuals or groups that may escalate to physical conflict.

GM: As you run from the vault with the bag of money, Sheriff Quigly is waiting for you with about six or so guys he just deputized. He aims his Winchester right at your chest.

Biff: Any escape routes?

GM: Roll for Read a Situation.

Biff: Eleven.

GM: You think you can jump over the counter to your left, and from there out the window, but you also think it is probably wiser not to resist arrest. You have two more questions.

Biff: Okay... Who is the most vulnerable to me?

GM: You mean the best target to shoot?

Biff: Yea...

GM: The sheriff. He is the closest, and you can see he is scared, ready to wet his pants.

Biff: The biggest threat?

GM: You recognize Jeremiah Scully at the back. You know him by his gunslinging reputation.

Biff: OK, I shoot the sheriff as I jump over the counter.

GM: "Right. Roll + Body + Shoot +1 (because you act on the information you just got.) Then you are under concentrated fire, so roll + Body + Athletics / Acrobatics and take - 1 (for the concentrated fire, which is canceled by the +1 for acting on the information) to jump over the counter.

This move is opposed with

This is not generally an opposed move.

Where's my best escape route / way in / way past?

The best escape route is often a way of physical escape, but often not. Always think of non-physical ways of escape too. And give the player options.

GM: You think you can jump through the window.

GM: You can jump off the roof, but you may get hurt, or you can shoot him first and then climb down.

GM: The sheriff seems uncertain. Maybe you could talk your way out of it.

GM: You try to bribe this guy, or you could try to run for the door.

Which enemy is most vulnerable to me?

Always ask the player, "Vulnerable to what? Do you want to shoot, brawl or maybe intimidate somebody? Do you think there is somebody who will be impressed with your Fame?" The answer will depend on the answers the player gives you. Again, do not get stuck on vulnerability to physical violence only. There is more than one way to skin a cat.

Which enemy is the biggest threat?

What sort of threat is the player asking about? A physical threat? Is it the threat of being humiliated? Does somebody have emotional power over the player's character - somebody like an ex lover? Ask questions before giving an answer. The more you interrogate the fiction, the better it will be!

What should I be on the lookout for?

Ask, "What sort of things are you looking for?" Obviously you, as the GM, have an idea of the important factors in the scene, but there may be a myriad things that you have not thought of that your players have. So ask them, and discuss the possibilities before you give an answer. **What should I be on the lookout for?** is the catch-all question for stuff that do not fit in with the other questions.

What's my enemy's true position?

There are three possible answers to this question:

- The enemy's true position is exactly as you see it. Describe it.
- The enemy has a weakness that is not immediately apparent. Describe it.
- The enemy has some advantage that is not immediately apparent. Describe it.

When you describe the enemy's true position, do not go into detail like :

She has a loaded sawn off shotgun behind the counter.

Rather describe it as an impression:

She seems rather unconcerned by your threat. You think she may have her hand on a weapon behind the counter.

Who's in control here?

There are a few possible answers

- The NPC who acts like he is in control, really is in control.
- Another NPC that is present is calling the shots.
- Somebody who is not even there is calling the shots.
- One of the Player Characters, including the one who asked the question, could be in control.

GM: Bart is calling the shots here. That's why he's so obnoxious.

GM: You get the idea that Bart is acting on somebody else's orders, but you are not sure whose.

GM: You are. These guys are mooks, they are scared out of their minds of you.

You and your allies each take +1 forward when you act on the information.

If the player asked three questions, she can potentially make three moves acting on the three different answers. So she gets one +1 for each question she asked, but only if the move is directly related to the answer.

Allies only get the +1's if the character of the active player who rolled for Read a Situation can, in the fiction, relay the information to those allies. If there is no communication, the other characters cannot take the +1.

READ A PERSON

When you read a person in a charged interaction, roll+ Soul + Empathy

On 10+, ask the GM or the PC's player three of these questions.

On 7-9, ask the GM or the PC's player one of these questions.

Take +1 forward when you act on the information.

- is your character telling the truth?
- what is your character really feeling?
- what does your character intend to do?
- what does your character wish I'd do?
- how can I get your character to ___?

Trigger

There is a famous urban legend that states that 80% of communication is non-verbal: Body language, the tone of voice, facial expressions etc. carry more information than the words themselves. In movie-talk, it called subtext - that which is said that is *not actually* said. The best actors are the best because they are the best at communicating subtext.

Since an RPG is very much confined to verbal communication (unless all the players are also extremely good actors, which most are not) there has to be a way to emulate subtext. So this move is triggered whenever a player wants to interrogate the subtext of the scene.

GM: She says she does not know where Bart is.

George: I think she's lying!

GM: Roll Read a Person.

It is important for players to realize that when they ask Read a Person questions, they are out of character. That is why the question is not “Are you telling the truth?” and directed at the character, but “Is your character telling the truth?” and directed at the player. Those questions in and out of character may have vastly different answers!

Asking the questions in character does not trigger the move.

This move is opposed with

This move may be opposed with Bluff.

The target character's player (or GM) may decide to

- Answer the questions directly and in character. In this case it ceases to be subtext.
- Answer the questions out of character.

Ideally every out-of-character answer to a Read a Person question should have two parts:

- Describe how the active player's character gets the information. It may be the target character's body language, or prior knowledge of the character - her wants or needs.
- Then describe how the active character interprets it. (The character's perceived emotion.) If your description of the body language is good enough, you may even skip this step.

Body language: “She looks down and blushes...” or “He folds his arms across his chest, glaring at you with naked hostility.”

Other knowledge of the target character: The character may be an alcoholic, greedy, a killer, in mortal danger; anything that will give the active player’s character insight in the target character’s actions and motivations.

Perceived emotion: This move does not give characters the ability to read minds, so the answers are not precise and on the nose. Do not name the characters’ emotions, but describe their emotions as perceived by the other characters. Begin your descriptions with statements of vagueness, like, “You think she may be...” or, “He seems to be...”

Is your character telling the truth?

GM: He simply cannot look you in the eye as he says it. You think he is lying.

GM: She looks at you with wide pleading eyes. Either she is telling the truth or she is the best actress in the state.

George’s player: George’s left eyelid flickers. You recognize his poker tell. You think he is lying.

What is your character really feeling?

GM: He drums his fingers impatiently on the desk. You are fairly certain he does not like what he is hearing.

GM: She’s on the verge of tears.

Cathy’s player: (In character) I’m annoyed as hell!

George’s player: George looks at her, blushing. You think he may be in love with Cathy...

What does your character intend to do?

GM: She grabs her shotgun and storms out the door.

GM: It’s obvious he’s going to go after Bart, you know him well enough by now. He is as obstinate as an ass.

Cathy’s player: Cathy turns her back on you. You don’t think she is going to follow orders.

George’s player: George is just standing there. He seems to have no idea of what to do next.

What does your character wish I’d do?

GM: He says, "We'll be okay. Please go!" but he seems to be scared out of his mind and wants you to stay.

GM: She turns to Handsome Jack and starts speaking to him. Consider yourself dismissed.

Cathy's player: Cathy is very annoyed. She says, "I want my money. Now!"

George's player: Let's just get the hell outta here!

How can I get your character to ___?

GM: You know that he is greedy. He has a price.

GM: She spent the whole morning looking for her son. If you were to help her find him...

Cathy's player: After what you did just now, you know it is not going to happen. Ever.

George's player: I need a horse right now. I may be willing to barter

INVESTIGATE

When you investigate a scene

If you are in a human settlement, roll+ Mind + Investigate.

If you are in the wild, roll + Mind + Tracking / Survival.

On 10+, the GM tells you three relevant facts.

On 7-9, the GM tells you one relevant fact.

Take +1 forward when you act on the information.

Trigger

Whenever a character is looking for something like an object, clues or evidence, *and the answer is not obvious*, this move is triggered. If the character is looking for his keys that he left on the dining room table, the move does not trigger. If he is looking for somebody else's keys in a dark room, the move will trigger.

This move is opposed with

In the wild, Tracking / Survival may be opposed with Tracking / Survival if somebody is trying to hide his tracks.

Relevant facts

There may be lots of interesting things to say about a scene that are not relevant to the problem at hand. Obvious things that require no skill to find also do not count towards the fact count. On a 10+, the player will definitely know what is relevant or not. On a 7-9 the GM may tell the player a few facts anyway, of which only one may be relevant.

GM: *You find a burnt out campfire at the water hole. Looks like they made camp here.*

George: *I look around for tracks and stuff. (Rolls 11 on Investigate - Tracking / Survival.)*

GM: *The coals are still hot. The fire is not more than an hour or two old. Somebody scraped the remains of his beans into the coals. (Anybody could see the warm burnt out fire, no skill is required, so it does not count.) You see the footprints of Indians over the boot prints of the cowboys. It seems like there was a fight. (First fact) You find some empty shells where the horses were tied. (Second fact) There is a small blood stain on the log the horses were tied to. (Third fact)*

George: *"Which way did they leave?"*

GM: *"Sorry, the ground is too rocky, so you can't tell." (George already got his three relevant facts.) "You'll have to circle the camp to find the tracks again."*

Take +1 forward

There must be a direct link between the fact that the character learned and the move that gets the +1. It does not need to be immediately, it can even be days later.

George found a knife in the chest of a murder victim, which he identified as Bart's. He catches up with Bart a week later and decides to intimidate him, using the information that links him to the murder as leverage. He takes +1 to that Influence roll.

Note that you can get only one +1 forward per fact learned.

TEAM WORK

When you work together as a team to help one another, each helping character rolls + Attribute + Skill.

Only the highest of all the rolls counts.

On 10+, you do it faster, more efficient and with a better outcome as a group than you would have on your own.

On 7-9, you succeed but with cost, danger, a worse outcome or an ugly choice. If anybody rolled a fail, that person causes the complication.

Trigger

When characters work as a team. Be careful: Working together must make sense in the fiction, and all the characters must have the appropriate skill if it is a specialist skill.

"We all chase Bart" does not trigger the move since one character cannot make the others run faster.

"We corner Bart in the barn" will trigger the move since the more people try to cut him off, the easier it will be to trap him.

"We shoot the cowboys" does not trigger the move if everybody shoots at a different target.

"We lay down covering fire for George so he can run across the field" will trigger the move.

The GM needs to make the ruling before the players roll. If you do not allow the move to be triggered, make sure everybody understands why.

This move is opposed with

It depends on what the characters are collaborating on!

OPPOSED MOVES

When you make a move in direct opposition to somebody else, subtract that character's Skill (for an NPC) or Attribute + Skill (for a PC) from your roll.

For instance:

- When you shoot at somebody who is actively shooting back at you, like in a quick draw duel (Shoot).
- When you brawl with somebody (Brawl).
- When you race horses (Ride).
- When you track somebody who is trying to hide his trail (Survival / Tracking).
- When you lie to someone (Bluff / Deceive vs Empathy).

The GM has the final say whether it is an opposed move or not.



Jesse James and his gang

COMBAT

In Cowboy World there is no special combat mode. There is no turn order or initiative. There are no miniatures and no map. Combat happens exactly the same as any other actions in the game.

Tactical games are about numbers that simulate range, speed, accuracy, tactical positioning and so on. In Cowboy World combat is more like directing a movie. The focus is on the characters and the cool things they do. Watch any modern action movie. When fight scenes happen, there is no explanation of the combatants' powers and skills, or tactical positioning. You just see what they do as the camera zooms right in to the point of impact. A fist connects with a jaw, flinging the head back. A knife flashes and blood gushes forth. When the camera pulls back you see the aftermath.

Cowboy World combat is fast. It may be resolved with two or three rolls. This is an intentional design feature, as we wanted the focus of the game to be on drama and role-playing, not drawn out combat simulations.

Cowboy World combat is deadly. Again this is intentional. Veteran fantasy RPG players may come to the game thinking they can solve everything with violence. But if they play as murder hobos they will not survive long. They will soon learn to talk instead of fight, and to brawl instead of drawing their guns.

Remember, if a character fails three consecutive rolls, she is dead. (Shoot, Harm and Heal) And there is no resurrection. Dead means dead. Period.

If you are uneasy with a high mortality rate and want a more lighthearted game, then make the weapons less lethal by increasing their Harm modifiers, and give less NPC's shooting skills.

One Move or roll does not represent one blow or shot fired, but one significant outcome. *This means that each roll may represent a lot of blows in a brawl or many shots fired.*

The GM and involved players are free to narrate as many or as few blows during a brawl as they want to, as long as the outcome of the exchange of blows conforms to the result of the die roll.

The same goes for a gunfight. Each Shoot roll may represent many shots fired. During the infamous gunfight at the OK Corral in Tombstone, thirty shots were fired in thirty seconds. In Cowboy World that whole gunfight would be represented by a maximum of four or five rolls.

It is up to the GM and players to narrate the most awesome battle possible.

Every fight must be motivated. All characters, NPC's included, must know exactly why they fight and what is at stake. Do not make an NPC draw his gun on a PC unless there is a good reason (being drunk may be a valid motivation for a gunfight) because he will probably die. NPC's must have a high self-preservation instinct. If the odds are against them they should surrender or run.

Describe the fictional space: When there is a fight, make sure the players have an idea of the fictional space the characters find themselves in. If it is in a saloon, they should be using chairs and bottles as weapons, and tables as cover. In a canyon in the Sonora, there are boulders and shrubs to hide behind, and rocks to start rock falls with. In Cowboy World, things in the environment that are important for fights are called "Tactical Elements".

A Shoot roll should seldom be the first roll of combat. The most important part of a cowboy movie gunfight is that long moment when the antagonists measure each other up before the shooting starts. Stay true to the genre and build the tension before the stuff hits the fan! Use the Read a Situation move to create an advantage. Use the Read a Person move to see if you can find a psychological weakness. Make them roll + Soul + Nerve to see if they have what it takes to face death.

GM: Bart stands 20 feet away in the street, facing you, his feet apart and his hand hovering over the butt of his Peacemaker. "You got what it takes, Yellerbelly?" Since Bart is known as the best gunfighter in the territory, roll + Soul + Nerve.

George: I rolled 8. I want to see if I can make him lose his temper. He has to draw first, otherwise I'll be in trouble.

GM: Roll for Read a Person.

George: Eight again. How can I get him to lose his temper?

GM: You remember something about his mother being a lady of ill repute. Maybe if you insulted her...

George: I say, "I hear your mother was so ugly, her pimp had to pay your old man to have her!" I take +1 forward... That's ten on Use a Skill, Provoke.

GM: Bart roars in anger and draws-

George: I shoot him.

Put them under concentrated fire. They will soon learn how deadly it is. If a person is under Concentrated Fire, he takes -1 to -3 to all Body rolls. Remember that when a person is under concentrated fire at Close range, the penalty to Body rolls is the shooter's Shoot skill.

The solution for the PC's: Make use of Covering Fire. If the PC's do not work together in a fight they will probably not survive.

GM: Bart draws his gun and starts shooting at you at close range.

George: I attack him with my knife.

GM: Roll brawl, and since you are under concentrated fire at close range, take -3 for Bart's Shoot skill.

GM: Bart and his gang are hunkered down behind the turned over wagon, ready to shoot. If you want to cross the road to the saloon, you will be under concentrated fire.

George: I run for it!

GM: Shots ring out and the bullets whistle past your head. Roll + Athletics / Acrobatics and take -2 for being under concentrated fire.

If an NPC draws his gun on a PC and the PC does not shoot back in response, he will come under concentrated fire. On the other hand, if the PC is already under concentrated fire, even shooting is at a penalty. If a PC is under concentrated fire and he does not do something or take cover, tell him the consequences. If he still does not act, he is shot.

Keep track of the NPC's: When there are more than one NPC in a fight, identify each enemy so that the players can keep track of them. There is more than one way to do it:

- Name each NPC, if there was reason to do so before.
- Give each an identifying mark: The guy with the red bandanna. The guy with the sombrero. The guy with the limp. The one-eyed trapper. The cowboy behind the bar. And so on.
- Draw a rough map on a piece of blank paper and mark the NPC's positions with numbers or stars.

Make sure the players know which ones are wounded so they can take +1 against them!

Characters with low Body and Shoot modifiers are not necessarily helpless in a fight. Characters with Soul +1 use other people to do their fighting for them. Sheriffs and Marshals may deputize civilians. Anybody may hire a gunslinger (if they can afford it). The Henchman move is written in such a way that any henchman can potentially be as powerful as a PC, since henchmen roll + the PC's Soul + Skill, or even Fame or Infamy. If the henchman has the Shoot skill +3, that adds another +1 to the roll. Remember that when a Henchman fails a Shoot roll the GM is within his rights to let the PC who commanded the henchman to get shot! The hard move that follows on a failed roll should mostly be against the PC who failed the roll.

Characters with Mind +1 use the Read a Situation move to create an advantage for everyone in the party. A +1 bonus in a fight is really a big deal!

PC's should not always fight when provoked or even when shot at. It is often prudent to run rather than face superior numbers. For that reason encounters in Cowboy World should not be "balanced". ("Balanced" here means that the PC's have a specific statistical chance, say 80%, to beat the opposition in every fight.) Part of the game is to know when to stand, when to call and when to fold. Not balancing encounters will force the players to come up with creative solutions to difficult problems.

Gunfights always have consequences. Most NPC deaths by the hand of PC's should have consequences in terms of Fame or Infamy. Even though Cowboy World lies on the frontier where the law is often miles away and corrupt, the law does exist. And if the law does not get involved, there are always family, friends, gang members or vigilantes to mete out justice or take revenge on the killers.

NERVE

When you face an obviously stronger, famous or infamous enemy in conflict, roll + Soul + Nerve

On 10+, you're full of bravado. Take +1 forward to escalate the conflict.

On 7-9, you're OK.

On 6-, you flinch. The conflict escalates. If you decide to stand your ground, take -1 for-

ward.

Trigger

Antagonists sizing each other up before a fight is an important trope of the cowboy movie genre. The GM should consider this move whenever there is conflict, especially if the PC's antagonist is famous or infamous.

This move is opposed with

Nerve may be opposed with Intimidate, if fictionally appropriate.

Escalating conflict

There are different tiers of conflict. They are as follows:

1. Verbal conflict.
2. Threat of brawling.
3. Brawling.
4. Threat of a gunfight.
5. A gunfight.

Escalating conflict means that the conflict moves from a lower to a higher tier. It does not need to escalate one tier at a time. Conflict may jump straight from verbal conflict to a gunfight, or any other tier in between. **On a 10+, if the player chooses not to escalate the conflict, he does not take +1 forward.**

Describing escalation of conflict in the fiction

"George lifts his fists and says 'Come on big boy, show me what you've got!' (Threat of brawling)

"He draws his knife." (Threat of brawling)

"She swings the shovel at your head." (Brawling)

"He swings an uppercut at your jaw." (Brawling)

"She opens her jacket, exposing her gun." (Threat of a gunfight)

"He draws." (Gunfight)

De-escalating conflict

If the player rolls a success or partial success, she may choose to de-escalate the conflict.

The GM may require an Influence roll. If she fails the roll, the conflict escalates and cannot de-escalate.

On a fail

The conflict escalates. The player character has to take evasive action or take -1 forward.

BRAWL

When you brawl, roll + Body + Brawl

On 10+, you disable your opponent.

On 7-9, you wound your opponent and everybody takes +1 ongoing to Body rolls against him. You are open for attack and may take harm.

On a fail, you take harm.

Note that the move for player vs player action is different, it is described later on.

Trigger

Brawling means any form of combat excluding firearms and Native bows and arrows. A fist fight, throwing chairs or dynamite sticks, super-ninja-kung-fu, knife fighting or sword fighting all count as brawl.

The move only triggers if the opponent actually fights back. Pistol whipping somebody from behind does not trigger the move, you just do it.

If a character has a unique fighting style, you may consider using a custom skill instead of Brawl; see the “Whip” example in a previous chapter.

This moved is opposed by

Brawl is always opposed by Brawl. Unopposed violence does not trigger the move.

Disabled

“Disabled” means the opponent is out of the fight. He may be knocked senseless, winded, grappled and restrained, or just scared and running away.

Wounded

“Wounded” means your opponent has taken a knock that makes it more difficult for him to fight. He may have a broken hand, be stunned from a knock on the head or a bleeding cut on his brow. Everybody now takes +1 to all body rolls against him. Note that the +1’s stack!

You are open for attack...

This means that the GM may make a soft move against you.

...And may take harm

If the GM thinks it is fictionally appropriate, the character may take harm. It should not be the norm, though.

On a fail

The character has to roll for harm.

SHOOT

Tags

Range Point Blank: Within arm's reach.

Range Close: Just beyond arm's reach and a bit more.

Range Near: You can see the whites of their eyes.

Range Far: Beyond that.

Area or effect: Hits several targets at the same time.

Messy: Blood and gore.

Concealable: Can be hidden on the person.

Firearms

Single action revolver: Range Near. +2 Harm.

Lever action rifle: Range Far. +2 Harm.

Derringer: Range Close. Concealable. +2 Harm.

Shotgun: Range Near. +1 Harm. Messy.

Gatling gun: Range Far. Area of effect. No reloading. +0 Harm. Messy.

Native American bow and arrow: Range far. No reloading. +2 Harm.

(Harm modifiers only matter when PC's take harm from these weapons.)

Shoot

When you shoot at a target when you are in danger, under pressure or when the stakes are high, roll + Body + Shoot

If the target is beyond the range of your weapon, take -1 for each tier.

On 10+, you hit your target. If it is a person, you mortally wound your opponent. He is disabled and may die.

On 7-9, you hit your target. If it is a person, you wound your target, and everybody takes +1 ongoing to Body rolls against him. You are put in danger or must reload.

On a fail, you may take lethal harm from enemy fire, or the GM may make another hard move according to the fiction.

Note that the move for player vs player action is different, it is described later on.

Trigger

If you shoot at a can on a fence or hunting deer, there is no danger, pressure or high stakes and the move does not trigger. If you are shooting at cans on a wager of \$100, the move triggers. If it is your last bullet and you are about to die of hunger, then hunting deer would definitely trigger the move.

This move is opposed with

When the target is actively shooting back at you, Shoot is opposed by the target's Shoot skill.

Reload

Reloading simply means you can't do anything else for a few seconds. You lose narrative control. You may also be put in danger, so the GM is within her rights to make a soft move at you while you can't shoot back.

Mortally wounded / disabled

The target is out of the fight. (Disabled.) Mooks and minions are just dead. Important NPC's are mortally wounded, and may still interact with the fiction before they die. They may still be saved if they are healed.

On a fail

You may be shot. It may be your target that shoots you, it may be somebody else. If there is nobody shooting at you, the GM will make another fictionally appropriate hard move at you.

Covering fire and concentrated fire.

When you provide covering fire for someone, roll+ Body + Shoot

On a 10+, you keep them from coming under concentrated fire.

On a 7-9, you keep them from coming under concentrated fire for a few moments.

On 6-, they are under concentrated fire now.

After providing covering fire, you must reload.

When you are under concentrated fire, take -1 to -3 to all Body rolls.

When you are under concentrated fire at Close range, use the shooter's Shoot skill as penalty for being under concentrated fire instead of 1, unless the shooter's skill is less than 1.

When you fail any Body roll while under concentrated fire, you take lethal harm from being shot.

When you fail to take action while under concentrated fire, you take lethal harm from being shot.

When you reload your firearm you cannot do anything else for a few seconds. This means that you lose narrative control.

Triggers

Covering fire means that you continue shooting at the enemy so that they do not get the chance to shoot at the ally you are covering. You are not trying to hit them, you are trying to keep their heads down so that they cannot shoot back.

Concentrated fire means someone (one or more persons) is trying to shoot you.

These moves are opposed by

These are generally unopposed moves.

Take -1 to -3

When only one person is shooting at you, take -1. When one guy with a gatling gun or a

whole regiment is shooting at you, you need to take -3.

GANG FIGHTS

When player characters and their allies fight against a large group of opponents, declare your objective and Roll+Buff

On 10+, The PC's gang succeeds in its objective with very few casualties. The enemy takes heavy casualties and may rout or surrender.

On 7-9, The gang succeeds in its objective with more casualties. There are also other complications.

On 6-, The gang fails its objective with heavy casualties. The NPC members of the PC's gang may be routed or may surrender. NPC's or even PC's may be taken captive or hostage. Important NPC's may die.

Once an objective is resolved, declare your next objective.

Trigger

A Gang is any group of people that fights together against a common enemy. It may be an army unit, a posse under the command of a US Marshall or a gang of outlaws and desperadoes. Use the gang move if there are more than three or four NPC's under the PC's command.

The Gang Fight Move uses a Gang Buff

This is an arbitrary modifier from -2 to +3 assigned by the GM that reflects the PC's gang's chances against the opposing gang. When assigning a Gang Buff, the GM takes into account:

- The comparative sizes of the two gangs.
 - Whether the gangs are the gangs professional fighters (like an army unit) or clueless civilians. A small group of soldiers may take out a much larger group of civilians.
 - PC's individual actions during the fight.
 - Tactical advantages such as a Gatling gun, high ground, cover etc.
 - If the PC leading the gang succeeds a Command or Intimidate roll, consider adding +1
- When assigning the Gang Buff, remember this: For a more or less 50-50 fight, assign a Gang Buff of 0. For an almost assured win, assign a Gang Buff of +3.

A Gang Fight happens as follows:

- Describe the fictional odds.
- The players declare their first objective.
- Describe the start of the battle or phase of the battle in the fiction.
- Zoom in on the PC's actions.
- When appropriate, roll the Gang Fight move.

- Describe the outcome of the battle phase according to the roll: Whether the PC's achieved their goal or not.
- If the battle is not over, the PC's declare their next objective and the current phase of battle flows into the next phase.

Describe the fictional odds. Before the battle starts, be sure that everybody understands the fictional odds. Describe the gangs, terrain and other tactical considerations in detail. The players should be able to guess the Buff from your description. If they succeed a Read a Situation roll, be more specific.

If a PC takes the lead, let him decide if he wants to boost his gang by commanding or intimidating them. On a success add +1 to the Gang Buff (maximum +4). On a miss, subtract 1.

The players declare their first objective. In Cowboy World battles are broken up in phases as defined by specific objectives the PC's may have. Many battles will have only one phase, described by objectives like

- Massacre them.
- Subdue them.
- Capture them.
- Drive them off.
- Escape from them.
- Forcefully take a MacGuffin from them.

Bigger and more drawn out battles will have more phases, defined by consecutive Player Character objectives like

- Get in, Kick ass, Get out.
- Take the barn, Rush the house, Kill the Boss.
- Take the bridge, Storm the wall, Take the fort.

Describe the start of the battle or phase of the battle in the fiction. Narrate how the cavalry unit charges the fort, or how the group of Player Characters and their gang storm from the front door of the bank, breaking the siege.

Zoom in on the PC's actions. Once bullets start flying and things start exploding, like a movie director focusing on the individual heroes' actions, describe and resolve individual PC's' fights against individual high profile enemies according to the normal Cowboy World procedure. Remember that PC actions can swing the battle, for instance if they take down the guy who mans the Gatling gun, or if they blast the enemies' cover with a stick of dynamite. This may have a significant effect on the Gang Buff.

The PC's may command NPC's under their control to do things during the fight using the Henchman move.

When appropriate, roll the Gang Fight move to resolve the battle or battle phase. Don't let it last longer than it should. A good time would be when the PC's have taken out an im-

portant target, or when the PC's have taken or caused significant harm.

Describe the outcome of the battle phase according to the roll: Whether the PC's achieved their goal or not. If they have achieved their objective, describe it, and give them a moment to savor it. If they did not achieve their goal, describe the aftermath: The dead and the wounded.

If the battle is not over, the PC's declare their next objective and the current phase of battle flows into the next phase. Decide now if the battle is over or not. If not, the GM describes the new situation and passes control to the players. The players start a new phase by declaring their new objective.

HARM

In Cowboy World, Harm (being injured) has two components. The first is mechanical, the second is fictional.

Mechanical Harm: The Harm Move

When the GM tells you to take lethal or non-lethal harm, roll + Body + modifiers

Modifiers

- When the harm is caused by a shotgun or explosion, take +0.
- When the harm is caused by a revolver or rifle, take +1.
- When the harm is caused by unarmed brawling, take +1.
- When the harm is caused by an arrow or blade, take +2.
- When the harm is caused by something else, the GM will add a modifier according to the cause. The higher the modifier, the more likely that it will not harm the character much.

Optional rule: When the harm is caused by a firearm at point blank range, take an additional -1.

Types of harm

Lethal harm: Gunshots, explosions, knife wounds, saber wounds, arrow wounds, falling off a cliff etc.

Non-lethal harm: Unarmed brawling, being hit with a chair, falling off a horse etc.

On 10+, the harm is but a scratch or a bruise, but you cannot act for a moment.

On 7-9, you take a wound. Describe it and write it on your character sheet. You cannot act for a moment and take -1 ongoing to Body rolls until you are healed.

Lethal harm heals in a few days. If wounds are not attended to, it will become septic and healing will be prolonged.

Non-lethal harm heals after a short rest. (About an hour.)

-1 modifiers to Body rolls stack as you take more harm. This means that the more harm you take, the bigger your chances are of being disabled.

On 6-, you are disabled and cannot act at all.

Lethal harm: You are mortally wounded and will probably die, the GM will decide when.

Non lethal harm heals after a long rest. (About three hours to a day.)

Fictional Harm

While the fiction is dependent on the mechanical component (the roll), it is more important than the roll. When a player rolls for harm, the GM has to narrate what happens to the character, based on the outcome of the roll.

His fist hits you on the jaw. It hurts, but you shake it off. (10+, non-lethal harm)

You feel sudden pain in your right thigh as the bullet grazes your skin. You realize it is just a superficial flesh wound, you are OK. (10+, lethal harm)

The bullet rips through your right hand, making it useless. You can now only shoot with your left. Take -1 to all Body rolls. (7-9, lethal harm)

As you stand up, a sharp pain shoots through your right ankle. You realize it is sprained. Take -1 to all Body rolls. (7-9, non-lethal harm)

The bullet slams into your chest. It is as if the air is sucked out of your lungs. You cough, and the blood on your hand is the last thing you see before you pass out. (6-, lethal harm)

Your head explodes as the bottle hits you on the right temple. You are out for the count. (6-, non-lethal harm)

If you find it difficult to come up with injuries, use this rule of thumb: For lethal harm, 7-9 wounds are generally flesh wounds or fractured arms, and 6- wounds are broken legs or wounds to the trunk. A shot to the chest could be fatal in hours, a shot to the belly in up to a week. If you want someone to die immediately, make it a head shot.

Then write down the description of the wound in the “Wounds” box on the character sheet and make sure that the wound plays a role in the fiction until it is healed!

Adjusting the lethality of the game

In many Cowboy movies the heroes never get hit, even if a hundred professional gunslingers shoot at them at the same time. If you want to emulate this genre in your game, increase the Harm modifiers with +1 across the board. An explosion would then have a modifier of +1 instead of 0, and so on. If you want your game to be more lethal, decrease the harm modifiers by 1 across the board. An explosion would then have a modifier of -1, and so on. (Beware. It is pretty lethal already!)

In our group we increase the Harm modifier when new people play.

Giving less NPC's Shoot skills also makes the game less lethal.

HEAL

When you heal somebody who is mortally wounded, roll + Mind + Medical

When an NPC heals you when you are mortally wounded, roll + [The healer's skill. The GM decides, it can range from -1 to 3]

On 10+, the mortal wound becomes a wound that will heal in a few days. Describe it and write it on the patient's Character Sheet. The patient takes -1 to all Body rolls until it is healed.

On 7-9, the mortal wound becomes a permanent debility. Describe it and write it on the patient's sheet. The patient's Body modifier is permanently decreased by 1. The player may pay 5 Grit to recover from a permanent debility after she has undergone suitable rehabilitation in the fiction.

On 6-, the patient dies.

Trigger

Only mortal wounds need to be healed with the Healing move. Other lethal harm wounds heal naturally in a few days, and when they are not attended to, they become septic and healing is prolonged.

Healing in the fiction

The Heal move represents a major intervention or operation in the fiction in order to save a dying person's life. It is not something that can be done in the midst of a fight, or in the back of a wagon rolling down a ravine. The dying character has to be in a safe location with instruments and medical supplies available. If a character is mortally wounded and dying, somebody may try to do stabilize the patient with the Use a Skill - Medical roll or even just a Mind roll. The patient will still be mortally wounded, but will have more time before she dies.

Always narrate the procedure in the fiction: Make it as dramatic as necessary. If the character was shot in the head, describe the craniotomy to drain the extradural hematoma. If there is a pneumothorax, describe inserting an intercostal drain.

On 10+

The mortal wound becomes an ordinary wound that heals in a week or so.

On 7-9

The patient gets a permanent debility. Describe it, and write it in the first slot on your character sheet, marking it as a debility. This will usually be a Body debility, but in the case of a head injury, the GM may choose to make it a Mind or even a Soul debility. The Attribute in question is permanently reduced by 1.

The player may pay 5 grit to remove a debility. This represents the result of prolonged rehabilitation.

PLAYER VERSUS PLAYER MOVES

THE RULES FOR PVP ACTION

Player versus player action follows the same rules as any other opposed Moves. This means that the target character's applicable modifiers must be subtracted from the active player's roll. If the target character does not oppose the action, then his modifiers are not deducted. A roll may not even be necessary.

The player who rolls for the move is the player who has narrative control. (The active player, that means the player who initiated the PvP action.) The target player does not roll for the same Move.

On a 10+ the active player succeeds and retains narrative control. On 7-9 the active player succeeds but narrative control passes to the target player who introduces the conditions of a partial success: cost, danger, a worse outcome or an ugly choice. The GM has to agree to these conditions. On 6- the active player fails and passes narrative control to the target player who may make a Hard Move (like a GM) against the active player. The target player does not roll for this Move, it just happens since it follows on the active player's failed roll. The GM has to approve this Move.

When a player character orders a henchman to act against another player character, it is a player vs player Move.

Note that a single Move does not necessarily represent a single action, but a significant outcome. So the Brawl Move may represent an exchange of a series of blows, that ends in the result dictated by the die roll. So if a player rolls 7-9 on a PvP Brawl or Shoot Move, does harm to the target character, and the target character's player rolls a 6- for harm, *the target character can still do harm to the active character before he is disabled*. It is entirely possible that both characters may be disabled.

INFLUENCE (PVP)

When you try to get another Player Character to do what you want by commanding, intimidating or charming him, roll + Soul + the appropriate Skill. You may choose to roll + Bond instead, if it is fictionally appropriate.

On 10+, if the target character's player chooses to comply, he takes 1 Grit.

On 7-9, if the target character's player chooses to comply and demands payment, a promise or a deal, he takes 1 Grit.

On 6-, If the target character's player refuses, he takes 1 Grit.

BRAWL (PVP)

When you brawl with another player character, roll + Body + Brawl

On 10+, you harm the target character (who rolls for harm) and retain narrative control.

On 7-9, you harm the target character (who rolls for harm), but the target player may choose to harm you or to introduce some other complication. The GM has to agree on the complication. Narrative control then passes to the target player.

On 6-, you fail to harm the target character, and the target player may choose to harm you or to make another hard move against you. The GM has to approve this move. Narrative control then passes to the target player.

Only the player with narrative control rolls dice.

SHOOT (PVP)

When you shoot at another player character, roll + Body + Shoot

On 10+, you harm the target character (who rolls for harm) and retain narrative control.

On 7-9, you harm the target character (who rolls for harm), but the target player may choose to harm you (if he is in a position to shoot back) or to introduce some other complication. The GM has to agree on the complication. Narrative control then passes to the target player.

On 6-, you miss, and the target player who may choose to harm you (if he is in a position to shoot back) or to make another hard move against you. The GM has to approve this move. Narrative control then passes to the target player.

Only the player with narrative control rolls dice.

George's player says, "I hit Joe on the chin with a left uppercut!" That's a Brawl move. Joe intends to fight back, so George's player has to deduct Joe's Body + Brawl from his score. George's player rolls a 5. He adds his own Body + Brawl for a total of 8, but has to subtract Joe's Body + Brawl so he ends up with 6, a fail.

Since the action was aimed at a Player Character, Joe's player gets narrative control: "Well, I block, and punch you in the belly!" Because George failed, Joe's counter attack was a success, but he does not roll for it. George's player rolls for non-lethal harm.

Since Joe's player now has narrative control, he gets to make the next move and roll for it if necessary. If George's attack were successful, George's player would have retained narrative control.



EXTRA MOVES

When the session starts, review your Beliefs, Goals and Bonds, and take Grit tokens equal to your Grit in hand.

When you play one of your Character Aspects for a better outcome, explain why it is fictionally appropriate, pay 1 Grit and take +1 to a roll after it is rolled.

When the GM tells you to play one of your Character Aspects for a worse outcome and he explains why it is fictionally appropriate, take -1 to a roll after it is rolled. Alternatively pay 1 Grit to ignore the GM.

When you fail a roll after all modifiers are added, take 1 Grit.

When you achieve your Goal, take 1 Grit and write a new goal.

When you resolve a bond with another character, take 1 Grit and write a new bond with that person.

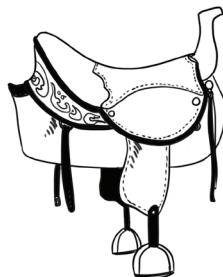
When you get better at what you do, pay 5 Grit to

- Buy a new general skill with a +1 modifier.
- Buy a new specialist skill with a +0 modifier.
- Add +1 to an existing skill to the maximum of 2.
- Permanently overcome your character's Issue, if the fiction allows it. At some stage you will get a new Issue, as the fiction dictates.
- Permanently change the Archetype or Twist of your character's High Concept.

When you buy a new skill, tell the other players why you are good at it, and write it on your character sheet. The GM will tell you when you may start using the new skill. You may have to take time to practice a bit more! If there is no fictional reason why you would have learned the new skill, the GM will veto it.

When you recover from a permanent Body debility, pay 5 Grit.

When the session ends, review your Beliefs, Goals and Bonds, and write down your Grit in hand equal to your amount of Grit tokens. Write a short session report on the back of your Character Sheet.





THE GM'S GAME

THE GOAL OF COWBOY WORLD

...is to tell stories about interesting characters in conflict, set in the Old American West.

The GM has four Imperatives: Things that she must do when playing Cowboy World in order to reach the goal.

THE GM'S FOUR IMPERATIVES

- Make the characters interesting.
- Find the conflict.
- Make it personal.
- Play to find out what happens.

Make the characters interesting

- keep an index card for each Player Character.
- by being a fan of the Player Characters.
- by addressing the characters, not the players.
- by naming all significant Non Player Characters.
- by giving NPC's drives and goals. Often give them hidden motives.
- by giving NPC's relationships.
- by making NPC's react believably.

Find the conflict

- by challenging their beliefs.
- by frustrating their goals.
- by giving NPC's directly conflicting goals.
- by leveraging their issues against them.
- by messing with their bonds.
- by using their fame or infamy against them.
- by involving them in third party conflicts and make them choose sides.

Make it personal

- by placing what they treasure in jeopardy.
- by taking what they treasure away.

Play to find out what happens

MAKE THE CHARACTERS INTERESTING

Keep an index card for each Player Character.

You have four or five players at the table, each with her own character. You need to keep some kind of record on them. You need index cards.

This is what you put on those cards: Player name. Character name. Archetype. Twist. Belief. Goal. Issue. Bonds.

When a player rolls a 7 or 10 after all pre-roll modifiers have been added, grab her character's card. You want a fictionally appropriate and interesting reason to subtract 1 from their roll. Do not subtract 1 just for the sake of doing it, but do it as often as possible!

You also want to keep record of their wounds and other stuff that may have significant effects on the fiction.

Make the characters interesting by being a fan of the Player Characters.

Cowboy World stories are not about the GM. They are not about the GM's preparation or pet ideas. Cowboy World stories are about the players' characters. That means that it is the GM's job to make the Player Characters shine.

How many times have you played a character with an awesome ability in an RPG only to find out that that particular ability will never come into play because it does not really fit the GM's view of the world he created? In Cowboy World it is the GM's job to showcase even the weirdest and far outest Player Character abilities.

Let say, for instance, a player decided her character should have the skill Pie Baking, as actually happened in one of our play test sessions. It is the GM's job to make sure that at some crucial stage that skill is needed. In the play test session, the big bad evil guy came for dinner. The pie baking character baked a pie, laced with laudanum from the Frontier Doctor's bag. She rolled a 10+ on Use a Skill: Pie Baking. The crook overate, fell asleep and woke up in prison with one hell of a headache.

While we do not recommend that you have characters with Pie Baking as a skill (crazy things tend to happen in play testing), it does illustrate the point that the GM can make even pie baking characters shine, if he is a fan of the characters.

Make the characters interesting by addressing the characters, not the players.

Address the character instead of the player. If Annie plays the character Cathy, then do not ask, "Annie, what does Cathy do?" Address Annie's character Cathy directly: "Cathy, what do you do?" The reason for this is that it facilitates the players' immersion into the characters and their stories. If the GM addresses the characters instead of the players, the players will naturally fall into first person narration ("I jump off the train") instead of third person narration ("Cathy jumps off the train."). It will also help them to start role-playing: Saying stuff in character.

Make the characters interesting by naming all significant characters.

In Cowboy World there will always be Non Player Characters that are significant, and others that are just extras that are mentioned to fill the scene. Make it a habit to name all NPC's that do something significant in the game, even if it is a barman who pours just one drink in a session.

Yes, it can be a daunting task, but it is totally worth it in terms of the players' immersion in the story. A good tip is to have a list of names ready when you need to name somebody on the spur of the moment. When you use a name, cross it off the list.

Make the characters interesting by giving NPC's drives, goals and hidden motives.

Why do NPC's behave the way they do? Why does Amos Phelps call Black Bart "Boss"? Is it because he really likes to be a murderous bank robber's minion? It is because he just wants his share of the takings? Or is it because he wants to get close to Black Bart in order to revenge his brother's murder? If Amos has hidden motives of revenge, it will explain why he betrays Bart at a crucial moment, adding an unexpected twist.

With some practice, it takes two seconds to quickly figure out what an NPC's motives are, even on the fly. Remember that the next GM imperative is to "Find the conflict" in all situations. The easiest way to find conflict is to give characters opposing, and often hidden, motives.

Make the characters interesting by giving NPC's bonds.

Note that this does not mean that PC's can have Bonds with NPC's! The word "bonds" is used here in a generic way.

Lets say Black Bart has five cowboys in his gang: Amos, Jasper, Jesse, Luther and Hank. While they may be just gun battle fodder for your next big action scene, take a second to create a relationship or two: What if Hank and Jesse were brothers? The moment the Player Characters start interacting with the gang, this relationship will become obvious and add depth to the scene. And when you do have that big fight scene, make sure one of the brothers survives to take revenge on the player characters!

Make the characters interesting by making NPC's act believably.

If your NPC's have names, motives and relationships, chances are they will act and react believably in the story. NPC's should act like intelligent, adult humans at all times. (Unless they are stupid, or kids, of course.) One of the biggest immersion-killers in a game can be an NPC that acts without apparent motivation.

FIND THE CONFLICT

Find the conflict by challenging their beliefs

If an NPC does something that contradicts the belief of a Player Character directly, there should be conflict.

Examples of Player Character beliefs and challenges to those beliefs:

<i>All men are equal with inalienable rights...</i>	<i>Let the NPC be an ex slave owner with an attitude.</i>
<i>We must bring the light of civilization...</i>	<i>Let the NPC sell liquor to the Natives.</i>
<i>Law and order is everything...</i>	<i>Let the NPC rob a bank and murder somebody</i>
<i>The law is for the weak...</i>	<i>Let the NPC be the law in town.</i>
<i>Money rules the world...</i>	<i>Let the NPC rob him of all his possessions.</i>
<i>I was destined to have this ranch...</i>	<i>Let the NPC take his ranch by force.</i>
<i>I am the fastest gun in the West...</i>	<i>Let the NPC be the fastest gun in the West.</i>
<i>I deserve a better deal in life...</i>	<i>Let the NPC deny him his deserved due.</i>
<i>I will never be humiliated again...</i>	<i>Let the NPC humiliate him.</i>
<i>My sister is vulnerable...</i>	<i>Let the NPC threaten or kill her sister.</i>

The question that must be answered when a Belief is challenged is **“What is the character willing to sacrifice for this Belief?”** A belief is challenged when the character is forced into the decision of making a sacrifice for that belief, or not.

Find the conflict by frustrating their goals

Frustration is when you cannot achieve your goal. When this happens, conflict follows. So give NPC’s conflicting goals.

Examples of frustrated goals.

<i>I will defend the downtrodden.</i>	<i>Let the NPC abuse a helpless person.</i>
<i>I will make peace with the Natives.</i>	<i>Let the NPC incite war against the natives.</i>
<i>I will arrest Black Bart.</i>	<i>Let Black Bart escape from prison.</i>
<i>I will rob the bank.</i>	<i>Let the sheriff hear of his plans.</i>
<i>I will find gold in those hills.</i>	<i>Let his claim be stolen from him.</i>
<i>I will defend my ranch with my life.</i>	<i>Make him do it.</i>
<i>I will challenge Black Bart to a draw.</i>	<i>Bart accepts the challenge.</i>
<i>I will take my share of the claim.</i>	<i>No you won’t!</i>
<i>I will kill Joe Dalton.</i>	<i>Joe Dalton does not agree to this!</i>
<i>I will defend my sister’s life with mine.</i>	<i>The NPC will try his best to kill them both.</i>

Find the conflict by leveraging their issues against them

The Player Characters are flawed heroes. Flaws lead to bad decisions and conflict. Since we want to maximize conflict, we really need to work those flaws!

Examples of leveraging issues:

<i>I am addicted to whiskey.</i>	<i>The PC gets robbed while he is drunk.</i>
<i>I am obsessed with gold.</i>	<i>Tempt him with riches at great cost.</i>
<i>I have a compulsion to gamble.</i>	<i>Make her lose all her money.</i>
<i>I am distracted by blonde women.</i>	<i>The main antagonist is a beautiful blonde.</i>
<i>I am afraid of spiders.</i>	<i>Tarantulas everywhere!</i>
<i>I am afraid of trains, heights etc.</i>	<i>Make him do it!</i>
<i>I lie about my past achievements .</i>	<i>Somebody who knew her way back then shows up.</i>

Find the conflict by messing with their bonds

Player vs Player conflict can produce very interesting stories. Use their Bonds to pitch characters against each other!

GM: “Seamus offers you a drink, Cathy.”

Cathy: “I accept”

GM: “So, George, what do you think of this cowboy flirting with your woman?”

GM: George, Jack just bought a round of drinks for everyone. Doesn't he owe you money, as in a +3 Bond's worth of money?

Find the conflict by using their Fame or Infamy against them

If somebody is Famous, there will be jealous NPC's gunning for them.

If somebody is Infamous, the law will always be there.

Find the conflict by involving them in third party conflicts

There are many reasons why people could be in conflict. Family feuds. Watering rights. Feuds between rival gambling houses or saloons in town. Cowboys moving their herds through farmer's fields. Disputes over mining claims. Make up some local war, and then involve the PC's in it by making it personal. Make them choose sides.

Where to find Conflict in the Wild West

Cowboy and Western stories often revolve around conflict over the most important economic activities.

Ranching

Ranchers war over pasture, water and cattle. Rustlers steal cattle and brand new brands over old ones. Cattle drives take massive herds cross country to railroad heads, so they can be shipped to the big cities for profit. Ranchers are in conflict with homesteaders, who erect barbed wire fences across the prairie, cutting off cattle drive routes.

Mining

Prospectors fight over claims. Illegal mining in Indian territories cause unrest. Mining companies buy tinpanners out, often under the threat of violence. When miners strike it rich, they are targets for outlaws and thieves. Mining accidents happen; mines cave in and get flooded. Labor unrest may turn violent.

Banking

The main purpose of banks in Cowboy fiction is to get robbed. Bankers may be evil loan sharks who are after innocent homesteader's land, or potential employers who hire bounty hunter's to catch bank robbers.

Entertainment

Every boom town in the West has its saloons, gambling houses, theaters and cat-houses. The proprietors are often crime bosses with their own gangs of private enforcers. Think turf wars, protection racketeering, smuggling, and human trafficking. Any trope in the gangster and Mafia genre goes.

Transport

As railroad barons lay their tracks across the continent there is conflict over land, water and destinations. Often different companies compete to be the first to service a mining boom town. Shady deals are struck to give one company an advantage over others. Stage coach and railway lines that service towns are often vulnerable to hold-ups and robberies. The coach line that services a town like Deadwood may carry millions in bullion to the outside world.

The Law

Every town has its sheriff, who may deputize citizens and form posses as needed. US marshals cover bigger areas. Circuit judges come to town when cases have to be tried. There will always be conflict between outlaws and the law. Lawmen hunt the outlaws, and outlaws will be out for revenge. Nobody is above a personal vendetta. Bounty hunters live on the fringes, they are vultures who are probably no better than the outlaws they pursue.

Military conflict

Tensions of the Civil War are still alive, there are veterans who simply refuse to accept it is over. Treaties between the United States and local Indian tribes are fragile. They often only last until gold is found on Native territory. Natives fight a losing guerrilla war against settlers and wagon trains. The army is often called in to protect vulnerable and weak.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Why would somebody get involved in a conflict that could get him killed? One of the reasons may be personal insult or injury. Screen writers call this the Unity of Opposites: The good guys and bad guys are irrevocably bound together by their conflict, because it is personal. No one can just walk away. Two men enter, only one can leave.

Make it personal by putting what they treasure in jeopardy

What do the Player Characters treasure most? A person, a thing, and idea, a dream? Well, find out what it is and put it in danger. Have someone kidnap the little sister. Have the brother shot and injured. Have him run off his farm by a cattle baron with an army of cowboy goons. Have the lawyers come after his gold claim.

Make it personal by taking what they treasure away

Once something they treasure is in jeopardy, it becomes the stake of the story. But often drama is best served if the treasure is taken away. The sibling dies. The harvest is burnt. The claim is stolen by dirty lawyers. Now revenge may be the only path the Player Character can choose, and keep his self respect.

PLAY TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS

In Cowboy World, as in all games that use the Apocalypse World engine, the GM cannot decide what will happen over the course of a session. The GM cannot railroad the story, she can only nudge the players in certain directions. Often the most awesome stories happen when the players nudge back, and push the story in completely different directions.

This may be scary to novice GM's. Believe me, it is not that bad. As long as you follow the rules of the game and say what they tell you to say, improvisation comes easy. And it gets easier and easier every time you do it. Practice makes perfect!

By letting the story have a life of its own, you will be amazed at what will emerge!



**Allan Pinkerton, founder of the Pinkerton National
Detective Agency**

GM MOVES

SOFT MOVES

After every soft move, ask “What do you do?”

- Put something they need or cherish in jeopardy.
- Test their beliefs.
- Leverage their issues against them.
- Put someone in a spot.
- Offer opportunities with cost.
- Show signs of coming danger.
- Show signs of off screen danger.
- Escalate the danger.
- Escalate the stakes.
- Show an NPC’s true colors.
- Reveal the truth about something.
- Present them with dilemmas.

Put something they need or cherish in jeopardy

He grabs your gun from its holster.

He grabs her by the arm: “Is this your woman, George?”

The Native leaps on your horse.

Test their beliefs

If you confront the sheriff now, the town whole town will want to lynch you. You really wanna do it?

You can run over to save your sister, but you will be under concentrated fire the whole way.

Leverage their issues against them

The saloon doors swing open and a stranger walks in. He has a wanted poster with your face on it, Marn.

You freeze as your arachnophobia kicks in. Take -1 to that roll. (And take 1 Grit)

You are drunk, so take -1 to that roll. (And take 1 Grit)

Offer opportunities with cost

Bart is open for attack, but you can't shoot him from there. You'll have to expose yourself to concentrated fire if you want to get to him.

You can get through that ventilation shaft, but you'll have to leave your gear behind.

Show signs of coming danger

The bar girl says, "Bart will be here in a minute. Better get your ass out of his chair."

You hear footsteps coming down the corridor. Somebody speaks, you cannot make out what she says, but you recognize the voice.

Show signs of off screen danger

A girl rushes in, screaming, "They are robbing the bank!"

At dawn you hear a shot echoing through the canyon. It comes from the direction of the Native camp.

Escalate the danger

He takes a dynamite stick from his coat pocket and lights it with his cigar.

A band of Native horsemen appears on the summit of the hill, ready to charge.

Escalate the stakes

He smiles. "A few hundred dollars? We're talking bars of bullion here!"

You hear an explosion, and as you look out the window you see the bridge is blown. You have about a minute before the train full of passengers hits bottom of the ravine.

Show an NPC's true colors

"Sorry, Kid. It's nothing personal. Bart just pays better." He draws his gun.

A woman enters through the door on the left, walks over to Bart and kisses him on the cheek. It's Penny. "Poor Jack. He really thought I loved him..."

Reveal the truth about something

Yup. He sold you a lame horse.

You realize with a shock, the map's a dud.

"I did not kill your father, Luke. I am your father."

Present them with dilemmas

It's the man who killed your father, helpless on his knees. You can kill him now. But then a small girl comes in, her eyes big with fear. "Daddy, who are these people?"

HARD MOVES

Hard Moves

- Inflict harm.
- Turn their moves back on them.
- Capture someone.
- Take something they need or cherish away.
- Reveal the truth about something or someone.

- Make the bad thing happen. With consequences.

Inflict harm

You take non-lethal harm, +2

You take lethal harm, +0

Turn their moves back on them

As you kick him he grabs your boot and twists it. You fall on your face and he is on your back, pinning you down.

“No, you dog. You drop your gun. See Tommy over there with the Winchester aimed at your head?”

Take something they need or cherish away

A bullet slams into her chest, flinging her back into the wall.

You are clean out of ammo.

Your horse stumbles and falls. You manage to roll as you fall, and are unhurt. But your horse has broken a leg.

Make the bad thing happen. With consequences

The “bad thing” is the impending doom the player characters need to stop from happening. They failed, so now it happens.

The train they tried to stop falls into the ravine.

The cavalry unit wipes out the Indian village.

The cowboy gang takes over the town.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

THE RULES FOR NPC'S

- You don't give a damn about them.
- There is always somebody to step up and take their place.
- They have attributes and can evolve.
- Make NPC index cards.

You don't give a damn about them

OK, lets get one thing straight. The first rule of NPC's is not to give a damn about them, whether they are good guys or bad. They are there to be put in jeopardy, to be abused, injured, maimed and killed.

Well, not necessarily. But if bad things need to happen to them, they must. It is as simple as that.

So lets say you have this big bad evil guy called Black Bart that you plan to take through a huge story arch with a massive climax at the end of ninety nine sessions. In the first session George decides to call him out for a draw. You are not going to let George kill your favorite bad guy just like that, are you? Bart starts calling George and his poor deceased mother names, and you give him an Intimidate of +3. George has to roll+Nerve -3 (Bart's Intimidate) just to be able to face him. So George rolls a full success. Now you give Bart Shoot +3, just to show George who is boss. But George draws and rolls boxcars and Bart bites the dust. He ends up in Boot Hill during the pilot episode.

That happens. You just don't give a damn about any of them. You play to find out what happens. When the dice roll, it is out of your hands.

There is always somebody to step up and take their place

So what do you do? Remember that nameless, faceless guy that nobody noticed who sat in the saloon watching the fight through the window? Well, he just turns out to be Bart's second cousin from Minnesota. And he is out for revenge. He is ready to take over Bart's gang.

That brings us to the second rule of NPC's: There is always somebody to take his place. It is like the Imperial officers in Star Wars. Darth Vader kills one guy with his evil dark side force choke, and the next guy immediately steps up and gets promoted.

They have attributes and evolve

NPC's may have the following attributes

- Name.
- Look.
- Drive.
- Goal.

- Skills.
- Bonds.
- Bio.

Fictional characters, like ogres and onions, have layers. NPC's in Cowboy World have levels.

Well, it is more a continuum than levels. You are not going to create an "sixth level gun fighter" to confront your PC's. Cowboy World NPC levels range from zero-th level to top level, if that makes sense. NPC's become more and more complex as the story progresses and demands.

A zero-th level NPC is just an extra, somebody that fills up a scene. He has no name, no drive, no bond, no skills, goals or anything. He is just "A guy with a big sombrero sitting on the veranda, plucking a chicken." Or a "Southern lady stepping from the stagecoach."

Then when you need somebody to step up and do something because the story went south for a moment. The Southern lady suddenly gets a name: Violet O'Hara. You can call her first level now, if you want to. Marv takes notice of her, his player has decided that he is smitten at the sight of her. You realize that she needs a skill. So you give her Charm +3, and while you are at it, you decide that her drive is to Seduce. As the story develops, you decide that she should be an antagonist, so you give her a hidden motive: To con Marv out of his money.

And eventually she ends up with bonds and a full back story to be a top level NPC.

Name: Have a list of names ready, when you use one, scratch it out.

Look: Just one to three words that describe the person. Examples: "Dirty, feral, built like a bear." or "Young, arrogant, seductive."

Drive: The purpose of Drives is to give the GM a handle on role-playing the character.

List of possible NPC drives: Greed, Revenge, Fear, Love, Survival, Domination, Fame, Power, Infamy, Wealth, Redemption, Glory, Death, Respect, Acceptance, Spite, Malice, Philanthropy.

If a character is driven by "Greed" he will speak and act differently than one driven by "Fear". Of course a character may have more than one drive, but in general, keep your Non Player Characters simple, with only one drive. If you complicate things, you just make it difficult for yourself.

Goal: The NPC's goal will generally be at odds with that of the PCs' in order to create conflict. Hidden goals are the source of interesting story twists and reveals.

Examples of NPC's goals: To control the town. To revenge somebody's death. To make money illegally. And so on. For bad guys, remember the Bermuda Triangle that man's morals disappear into: power, sex and money, and you'll be OK. For good guys and allies, make their goals coincide with that of the Player Characters.

Skills: Most NPC's will have no skills or maybe one. Big Bad Evil Guys may have two or three. You may give characters skills on the spur of the moment as fiction demands, but make sure you make a note of it on their index cards!

NPC's have bonds with other NPC's in order to drive the story and create more conflict. Violet O'Hara the grifter has a gunslinger husband. Bart has a cousin from Minnesota who will revenge his death. And so on.

Bio: And finally the NPC's bio is just one sentence to say where the person comes from.

Make NPC index cards

When an NPC comes from nowhere and starts gaining levels, at some arbitrary point in her evolution it is a good idea to create an NPC index card for her.

An NPC index card is simply a card with Name, Look, Drive, Goal, Skills, Bonds and Bio written, each on their own line. When you start the card, most of the lines will be blank. As you play to find out what happens, the lines get filled in. Or not. Violet O'Hara may commit a crime and be arrested, or take a train out of town and disappear from the story. If she dies you simply tear the card up and make a new one for another character. If she leaves town, tuck it away somewhere. She may just feature in a future session. Who knows?

Examples of an NPC index cards

Name: Violet O'Hara.

Look: Young, arrogant, seductive.

Drive: To seduce.

Goal: To con people out of their money.

Skill: Charm +3.

Bonds: Husband: Bill Swift, bank robber and gunslinger.

Bio: Daughter of a banker who was seduced by Bill to rob her father's bank.

Name: Charles Mahaney.

Look: Grizzled, dirty, suspicious.

Drive: Fear (Post traumatic stress disorder).

Goal: Revenge for the death of his wife Poppy two years ago. He blames Dr Glover.

Skill: Shoot 3.

Bonds: Sam Smith, his employee. Rosie, his 16 year old daughter.

Bio: Ex gunslinger. Owner of Mahaney Blacksmith and Undertaker.



FRAMING SCENES: SKIPPING THE BORING STUFF.

A SCENE IS...

...The action at a single location and continuous time.

It is where the interesting stuff happens.

Scenes happen in a specific place.

Generally, when the location changes, it is a new scene, unless the action moves seamlessly from one location to another. Remember that when Player Characters enter a new location, you must always describe it briefly.

Scenes have purpose.

The purpose of a scene is always to advance the story by means of conflict, character development or exposition.

Conflict. A scene without any conflict is boring. A scene with conflict that is unrelated to the story is also boring. If you are writing a book, you would not write those scenes, or you would cut them ruthlessly in the rewrite. But in Cowboy World you play to find out what happens. Things will happen in the fiction that will lead to dead ends, and have no consequences in terms of the story arc.

But here are the principles: If the scene has no conflict, find conflict for it. When there is conflict, make it count in terms of the story arc. It is almost always possible to tie the most insignificant conflict to your main bad guy or boss. If there is a meaningful connection between the conflict and the main protagonist, the conflict will help to advance the story.

Character development. When players first create their characters, they have a rough idea of where they want to take those characters. But to find out who those characters really are, they have to play them, and see what decisions the characters make. So the rule for character development is: Present them with meaningful decisions and see what they do. Any significant decision a character makes tells us more about who that character is. And remember, significant decisions usually arise out of conflict and also usually advance the story!

Exposition. Sometimes characters have to speak to people to find out what the hell is going on. But even in these situations, try to inject some conflict!

FRAMING SCENES

Framing a scene means

- you skip over the boring stuff and cut right to the action.
- you make sure the scene has a beginning, middle and a climax.
- you end a scene exactly when it needs to end, and then go to the next scene.

Skipping the boring stuff and cutting to the action.

Use short transitions in order to move from one scene to the next. Transitions compress long periods of time into short narrative descriptions.

You ride east for two days. On the morning of the third, as you follow the trail into a narrow canyon, a shot rings out from the cliff on your left.

It is about an hour's drive with the buggy to the ravine. When you arrive there, Bart is waiting for you in the shade of an acacia tree.

You don't see any of the cowboys for about a week. Then one morning when you are having breakfast in the canteen, Bart walks in as if nothing happened.

Each scene has a beginning. The Story Hook is the first scene of the session, is set by the GM and always involves conflict, even if the significance of it is not immediately apparent. Subsequent scenes will very often be decided on by the players, when they decide what to do and where to go next. For instance, they may decide to go to the sheriff's office to break a gang member from jail. Or to go to the general store to find out what happened to the owner of the dance hall. Or track a bank robber through the desert.

When you set the scene, describe the location, if necessary, and name the significant characters present. Then decide what your goal as GM for the scene is. The GM's purposes for a scene may differ drastically from what the players had in mind when they decided on the scene. As GM you need to learn how to hijack scenes for your own nefarious purposes, which may include:

- Introducing antagonists.
- Establishing conflict with the antagonists.
- Introducing your Harbingers of Doom.

The middle of the scene is how you reach the goal of the scene. Find the conflict, as dictated by the purpose of the scene, and make sure the conflict is meaningful in terms of the story so far and where you think it may be going.

The climax of the scene is defined as the moment the scene reaches its goal. If the scene's purpose was to progress the story through conflict, it is the climax of that conflict. If it was to develop characters, it is the moment the characters in question make their decisions. If it was to find stuff out, it is the moment the characters get the information.

The scene ends as soon as possible after the climax. Often there will be a few more beats in the aftermath of the climax, but do not let it drag on too long. Scenes that are going nowhere because they have no purpose should also be ended as soon and as gracefully as possible.

To end a scene, simply state what has been accomplished, and ask the players "What do you want to do next?" Players may decide to continue with the same scene for a while, but if the scene has now purpose any more, then cut it short.

So now you know that Violet O'Hara is wanted in Hallelujah for theft. What do you want to do now?

Bart lies dead in the middle of the street. What do you want to do now?



The Dodge City Peace Commission. June 10, 1883. (Standing from left) William H. Harris (1845 1895), Luke Short (1854 1893), William Bat Master-son (1853 1921), William F. Petillon (1846 1917), (seated from left) Charlie Bassett (1847 1896), Wyatt Earp (1848 1929), Michael Francis Frank McLean (1854 1902), Cornelius Neil Brown (1844 1926).

TIME IN COWBOY WORLD

GAME TIME VS REAL TIME

“**Real time**” is the time on your watch as you play Cowboy World.

A **single session** of Cowboy World may last two to four hours.

A **campaign** is a string of sessions strung together to form an overarching story, with the same characters and often recurring villains. Campaigns may last weeks or months over many sessions. Where traditional RPG’s can sustain campaigns that run for years, Cowboy World campaigns will probably last no more than 10 or 15 sessions. The reason for this is that Cowboy World characters may advance only about 5 times before their advancement options run out. And by that time they will have had satisfying story and character arcs anyway. Good advice for authors is: “When you come to the end, then stop.” This is also a good idea for Cowboy World players. When your character has advanced about 5 times, retire her and make another character. Many characters won’t live that long anyway.

When a player brings a new character into an existing campaign, do not worry about the new character being weaker than the other characters in play. In Cowboy World character statistics have very little to do with game balance. Narrative control is much more important. Even weak characters’ players should have a lot to say about what their characters are doing!

“**Game time**” is the passing of time in the fiction.

Sometimes a minute in game time will be more or less a minute in real time.

Expanding game time means that you fit a lot of real time into a moment of game time. Sometimes combat that lasts a few seconds in game time may take many minutes in real time as the players deliberate among themselves how to handle the combat, and the actual combat mechanics play out.

Telescoping game time means that, minutes, hours, days or even weeks of game time are handled in a few sentences narrated by the GM.

Telescoping is used to

- Frame scenes and skip over boring mundane life like eating, sleeping and traveling.
- Give characters time to heal

In Cowboy World it takes many days of game time to recover from wounds, so when your player characters are wounded just give them a week or so of game time to recover. Something like this:

You hide out in Molly’s Boarding House for about week, eating nothing but her baked bean and bacon stew, tending to you wounds with whiskey and bandages torn from her linen. By Friday you can walk around but with some pain. You are as fit as you will be, but that -1 debility means you have a stiff left shoulder.”



IMPROVISING COWBOY WORLD

GM TOOLS FOR IMPROVISING GREAT SESSIONS

- Prepare for the first session.
- Get your NPC's, conflicts and possible story twists from character creation.
- Give the Player Characters reasons to be in the story together.
- Story hooks: Start in media res.
- Ask establishing questions.
- Establish conflict.
- Make the stakes obvious.
- Escalate the danger.
- Escalate the stakes.
- Introduce believable twists.
- Make the climax climactic.
- Write a short session report.
- Prepare for the next session.

PREPARE FOR THE FIRST SESSION

Because Cowboy World is largely a game of improvisation, you will do very little prep before the first session. The most important is to get into the spirit of the Cowboy and Western genre, so watch a few movies.

Then decide where you want your story to start. Will it be a mining town, a ranch on the border of Mexico, an Indian village or a railroad workers camp? Decide more or less what the place looks like. Look at an old map and pictures of the area on the Internet. Get an idea of the landscape, climate and so on. What towns were there in the area hundred and fifty years ago? Were there railway lines? Where were the Indian Territories? What Native American tribe lived there? Which historical figures lived in the area? Of course your Cowboy World does not need to be geographically or historically correct, but it does make it easier if you know beforehand where things are on the map.

Lastly think of a story hook. It will be discussed a bit later.

GET YOUR NPC'S, CONFLICTS AND POSSIBLE STORY TWISTS FROM CHARACTER CREATION

When you play your first session of Cowboy World, you will start with Character Creation. Hand out the character sheets and character creation cheat sheets. Give the players a quick rundown of how it works, and explain to them that since Cowboy World characters share back stories, character creation is a collaborative activity. It is important not to be bogged down with all the details that need to be written on the character sheet. The players may fill in the details during the first session or even afterwards. As they play they will get more ideas about their characters, and make changes and additions where necessary.

When everything except the Bonds are done, start the introductions. Go around the table, and let each player introduce her character in the first person. (Bond creation is done after the introductions.)

Now, listen carefully and take notes! You want the players to give you antagonists and sources of conflict. Look for clues in what the players tell you about their characters, find threads that you can pull on and interrogate those threads. Do not be afraid to ask leading questions!

High Concept and History

Player: I am an orphan, my parents died when I was six.

GM: How did they die?

Player: They were murdered.

GM: By whom, did you see the murderer?

Player: A cowboy with a scar on his left cheek.

So the GM writes down, "Cowboy with a scar on his cheek."

Belief and goal

Player: I believe slavery is wrong, therefore I will bring justice to previous slave owners.

GM: You were a slave.

Player: Damn right I was!

GM: Who was your owner?

Player: (Thinks) Rbett Butler.

GM: Do you know where he is now?

Player: Word has it that he came west after he lost everything in the war.

So the GM writes down, "Rbett Butler, bankrupt ex cotton baron and slave owner."

Issue

Player: I stole some money.

GM: From whom, specifically? And how much?

Player: A guy back East. Lots.

GM: Just a guy? That's not a huge deal.

Player: OK. A crime boss in Chicago.

GM: Is that why you came West? Because this guy has a contract out on you?

Player: Yea, that's right. He has a contract out on me.

The GM writes "Crime Boss in Chicago hired an assassin to track him down."

Try to get at least one major villain and a few supporting bad guys from character creation. Remember that fiction is not like real life, so it is completely plausible that the assassin that was hired to track the one player, has a scar on his face... Rhett Butler is not forgotten, he will play a role in a future session. Or he may appear in this session too, who knows?

It is a good idea to draw a quick conflict map during this part of the game. It only takes a minute. Take a piece of blank paper and write some of the characters' names in bubbles on the paper. Then draw lines between them, and write the relationships between them on those lines.

In the above example: Jesse the PC has a relationship with a scar-faced cowboy. Frank the PC has a relationship with a crime boss (call him McDonald) back in Chicago. The same scar-faced cowboy was hired by McDonald to take Frank out.

NON PLAYER CHARACTERS AND STORY TWISTS

Try to decide early on in the session what possible story twist you would want to introduce later on, and give specific characters hidden motives or an important back story that can be revealed later on.

The scar-faced cowboy introduces himself as Abernath. He seems congenial, and his goals seem to align perfectly with that of the PC's. He wants to find out what Frank has done with the money before he kills him. So he gains Frank's trust over the course of a few sessions, before he finally reveals himself in a big story twist.

GIVE THE PLAYER CHARACTERS REASONS TO BE IN THE STORY TOGETHER

After the introductions, give the players a few minutes to work out their bonds. Then go around the table again so that each player can explain her character's bonds with other Player Characters. It can be very challenging for a GM to get a bunch of disparate characters to be motivated to come together and create a unified story. So tell your players at the start: You guys know each other. **Your group has a theme** - the reason you guys are together. Make sure your bonds and back stories reflect that. And at the end of the first session, there should be no uncertainty about the fact that they are all in this together.

So when you GM the first session, make an effort to provide each player character with a reason to be in the adventure. Use their Character Aspects to force them to be involved. Use

the conflict. And above all, make it personal.

STORY HOOKS: START IN MEDIA RES

Starting “in media res” simply means that you drop the protagonist right into the action as soon as the opening credits roll. In Cowboy World we do this with Story Hooks.

A Story Hook is a conflict situation the GM drops the PC’s in to start the session. Think of it as the opening scene of a movie. It grabs the attention of the audience. It sets the stage for things to come. The significance of the NPC’s and conflict portrayed in the Story Hook may not be apparent to you at all when the session starts, but you will incorporate it into the story line as soon as things become more clear!

You are in a mail coach on you way to Tombstone, about an hour’s drive from town. As you pass through a narrow pass, you hear a gunshot from behind the coach and the next moment the shotgun rider shoots at something to your left. About five riders come over the rise, charging the coach on an interception course. The driver cracks his whip, and the horses accelerate to a mad gallop. What do you do?

You are in the Wells & Fargo Bank in Tombstone. As you are standing in line to do your banking business, six cowboys storm in with guns drawn.

“Everybody down!”

What do you do?

ASK ESTABLISHING QUESTIONS

When you have delivered the story hook, stop right there and ask your establishing questions. The purpose of these questions is to find out why the characters are there at that moment, what they are doing, and other interesting stuff that can be teased out of the fiction. When you interrogate the fiction, always keep the story teller’s workmen in mind: Who? What? Why? When? Where? and How?

- Why are you here?
- What happened in the last day / hour / few minutes?
- Did you see this coming?
- What were your plans if this did not happen?

When all the Establishing Questions have been asked and answered, go back to your story hook, and ask, “OK, so what do you do?”

ESTABLISH CONFLICTS

It is very important to establish characters and conflicts very early in the session.

In *Cowboy World* the GM invests in conflict early in the session that will pay off in the climax. So you have an idea who the bad guys are. As soon as the Story Hook is over, if your main bad guys were not involved, (better if they were) introduce them (or their minions) to the PC's now. Create conflict between them and the PC's.

MAKE THE STAKES OBVIOUS

- Stakes must be clear.
- Stakes must be concrete and immediate.
- Stakes must be personal.
- Use stakes characters.

Why are your Player Characters involved in the conflict? Of course their beliefs, goals and histories are important. But that is not what is important here and now, when the finger is on the trigger. Stakes are what makes conflict significant. Stakes are what will be lost or gained because of the outcome of this conflict.

On the most basic level, it may just be survival of the character. It may be the character's respect. It may be a lot of money. It may be the life of a loved one. It may be anything that the PC's value.

Stakes must be clear.

Players must always know exactly what their characters are fighting for.

Stakes must be concrete and immediate.

This means that it is OK to fight for “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness”, but what is at stake *now*? The idea you are fighting for has to manifest itself in something concrete at this moment in the fiction. It must be immediate: If this battle is lost, what will be lost immediately? If this battle is won, what will be gained immediately?

Stakes must be personal.

Stakes must matter to the characters because they affect them personally; they must be something the characters care about.

Use stakes characters

In fiction writing, story gurus talk about “stakes characters”. It is that one person who needs to be saved and alive at the end of the movie. It does not matter how many other characters die in the process, if that one character survives, the ending is happy. Think of Newt in “*Aliens*” or private Ryan in “*Saving Private Ryan*”. If you decide to have a stakes character, make it an NPC with a strong personal relationship with one or more of the PC's.

ESCALATE THE DANGER

Where there is conflict, there is danger. Even if the danger is just losing respect, it is still danger. As the scene progresses, make sure that the conflict gets more dangerous. Start out with a brawl that causes only non-lethal damage. Then someone draws a knife. And then somebody starts shooting. The same principle goes for the whole session: As the session progresses, put the player characters and their allies in increasing danger.

The way to increase the danger is to increase the fictional odds of the characters failing. (Note that I said fictional odds, not mechanical odds!)

ESCALATE THE STAKES

Make sure that the stakes are turned up to eleven before the climax!

The sheriff's daughter was in danger in the beginning. Now it is her and her whole school full of children.

At first the player characters were in it for the gold. Now they are fighting for their lives.

It started as a riot over wages at the mine. Now dozens of men are trapped behind a cave in caused by the mine boss.

It was a dispute with a Native chief over a few cases of trading goods. Now a full scale war is threatening.

INTRODUCE STORY TWISTS

It is not always necessary to have story twists, but they can be fun. The best place to introduce story twists is just before the climax. **A story twist is always a reveal.**

- Show an NPC's true colors.
- Reveal a truth that eluded the characters.

Story twists must follow from the fiction. This means that early in the session you must already anticipate possible story twists and seed them. The best way to do this is to give NPC's hidden motives or back stories. If you plan to have a story twist, identify more than one early in the session, and then use the one that fits the current fiction as it has played out the best.

The scar faced cowboy who killed your parents is your real father.

The bank robbers worked for the bank owner, it was an insurance scam.

There is no gold in the mine. The claim you paid a fortune for is worth nothing.

The convicted killer had an affair with the judge's wife, and is actually innocent of the crime. You fought the wrong guy.

MAKE THE CLIMAX CLIMACTIC

The rule here is go big or go home. You have escalated the stakes. You have escalated the danger. Now the Player Characters have to go all in for the win. There are epic gun battles and big explosions. Whole towns go up in flames and trains go over blown up bridges into gorges. Native hordes attack and whole armies get massacred.

Or not.

The climax could also be a quiet emotional train wreck such as

Scarlett: Rhett, Rhett... Rhett, if you go, where shall I go? What shall I do?

Rhett Butler: Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

Gone with the Wind (1939)

... and be just as satisfying.

And remember the cliffhanger. If you plan to have a next session, it may be a good idea to forgo the climax in favor of a cliffhanger.

To bring them back next time.

WRITE A SHORT SESSION REPORT

The last thing you tell your players after the session is over is to write their own session reports. A session report that is longer than five lines is probably too long, unless they have a creative urge to become amateur writers.

Make sure you also write up a short report. The most important aspects are the characters, the conflict map, and the stakes. Also write down an idea or two for future sessions, for instance if Violet O'Hara left town, make a note that she may catch up with George in the next town.

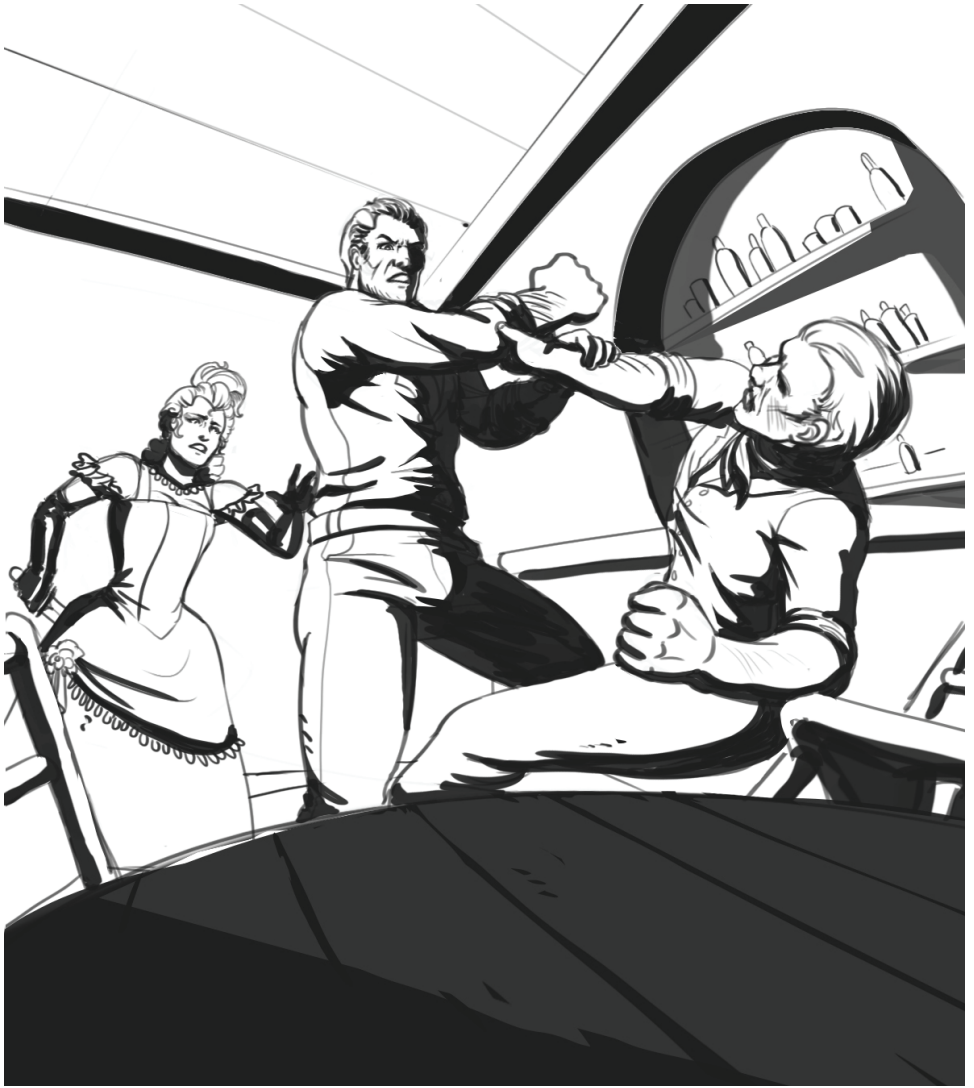
PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

When you prepare for the next session, go back to your session notes, the players' character sheets and the conflict and relationship maps you drew during the session. Look at all the Player Character's Character Aspects: These should be the fuel for coming sessions. Imagine back stories for the villains that have emerged from the session. Give them bigger and more evil schemes to hatch. Think of ways to create more conflict. Then decide on possible settings.

If you are easy with improvising, dreaming a bit about your characters and villains may be enough prep. But if you want a more structured framework to build your next session on, we will discuss that in the next chapter.



Billy the Kid



LESS IMPROV

MORE PREP

LESS IMPROV. MORE PREP

Right, sometimes you need to prep a bit more than I described in the previous chapter. If you have played games Powered by the Apocalypse before, this will be old hat to you. If you have played other RPG's like Pathfinder or Dungeons and Dragons before, this will be new to you. You may have to be re-educated.

Traditional RPG's fall in two categories: Map driven and encounter driven. In map driven sessions players move on a map, from room to room or from hex to hex, and then find whatever needs to be found and do whatever needs to be done in each location. In encounter driven sessions the GM has a pre-planned story that consists of encounters. Instead of moving from location to location on a map, the PC's now move from encounter to encounter on a pre-planned story line. Both map and encounter driven sessions may be "linear", "multi-path" or "sandbox" but the principles are basically the same: The GM decides beforehand what will happen, and the players have to conform to that. Even in sandboxes, the GM often has decided beforehand what will happen at a specific location or encounter. The players are railroaded down a specific path. The fact that the GM may use misdirection to make the players think they are not railroaded, really does not change the fact that it happens.

Cowboy world is not like that. In Cowboy World, as with all other Powered by the Apocalypse games, you have to play to find out what happens. No planned encounters. (Except for the first one of the session, the Story Hook.) **No story planned.**

Prepping for a Cowboy World session is like doing amateur chemistry in your garden shed. You may have an idea of what may happen when you mix certain volatile substances together, but there is only one way to find out: Do it and see.

Hopefully the result will be spectacularly dangerous and memorable.

Remember that Cowboy World is about Interesting Characters in Conflict? So the volatile substances you mix together are interesting (actually interestingly dangerous) characters with conflicting goals. While most of the ingredients in your mix will be people, you may also add forces of nature: Droughts, wild fires, hurricanes and so on. And of course the bad guys always have resources at their disposal to make life hell for the characters.

IMPORTANT COWBOY WORLD CONCEPTS

- Setting.
- Bad Guys.
- Stakes.
- Dangers.
- Harbingers of Doom.
- Impending Doom.
- Locations.

SETTING

The Setting is where your game session is going to take place.

A small town south of the border.

A thriving miner's settlement during a gold rush.

A homestead somewhere on the prairie.

A historic town, like Deadwood, Tombstone or Dodge City.

BAD GUYS

A Bad Guy is anybody that makes life dangerous for the characters. In Cowboy World, Bad Guys (or gals) are people who have their own goals. These goals are so important to them that they will stop at nothing to achieve them. They have specific plans of action to reach those goals. And they will do whatever is necessary to reach those goals.

If left to themselves.

The character's goals are usually in direct conflict with that of the bad guys.

STAKES

Stakes are those things that bind characters to their goals. The reasons why they cannot just shrug and walk away. Stakes are what makes risking their lives worth while. Nobody puts his life on the line just for a lark. It may be Money. Fame. Redemption. Saving a loved one. Reclaiming their honor. Saving the World. Revenge. Like stags with locked horns have to fight to the death, the Stakes bind the Player Characters irrevocably to the Threats in a conflict to the death.

Stakes may be formulated as questions, for example:

Will Marv survive this battle?

Will Bart kill the mayor?

Will Cathy marry me?

Will George find the gold?

Will Bart be avenged?

DANGERS

Dangers are the resources that the Bad Guys have at their disposal to reach their goal and to destroy those in their way (including the characters). It may be the bad guy's henchmen. It may be a trap that protects his safe.

A gang of cowboys

A regiment of deserters.

A crate of dynamite.

A war band of natives.

A beautiful seductress.

A gun for hire.

A master card sharp.

A Gatling gun.

HARBINGERS OF DOOM

Harbingers of Doom are the signs that the characters see that tell them that the Bad Guys are busy doing their thing. If the Bad Guy wants to start a ranch war, a few dead cattle at a poisoned water hole may be a harbinger of doom

Dead cattle at a watering hole.

A pioneer family killed and scalped.

A gang of cowboys harassing the general dealer.

A homestead burnt down.

A missionary hanged from a tree.

IMPENDING DOOM

The Impending Doom is what will happen if the Bad Guy gets what he wants. It is what the Characters must stop from happening at all cost. Usually the Impending Doom would mean that the characters lose their Stakes.

The bank gets robbed.

The sheriff's daughter is killed.

The cowboys take over the town.

A character loses his respect.

The gold is lost.

War with the Natives.

LOCATIONS

Locations are where the action happens. In Cowboy World, Locations have Impressions, Areas, and Tactical Elements. Locations may or may not have maps associated with them.

Impressions are what the characters experience when they first enter a location. These may be sights, sounds, smells or the background action in the location. Impressions are important to set the mood and immerse the players in the story. Write a few down for each planned location.

Sam's General Store and Saloon: Impressions

The smells of chewing tobacco, raw hides, whiskey and sweat.

A few trappers sit by the bar counter, drinking cheap whiskey. A dirty urchin is pedaling the pianola, playing Dixie.

Cheap tables, rickety chairs and a saw horse bar counter.

Pelts hanging on the walls. Dry goods for sale on dirty shelves.

Areas are simply a smaller parts of a location that have an impact on the action. For instance, a pub may have three areas: The public area, the area behind the bar and the balcony. During a scene characters will interact with these areas to create the fiction.

A storeroom to the left with more animal hides, and a few crates.

The kitchen that is accessed through a door behind the bar counter.

Tactical Elements are those things in a Location that the character may use to their advantage during conflict. It may be tables that can be overturned, a chandelier that one may swing on, a row of bottles behind the bar counter. Tactical elements may be made up on the spur of the moment by the GM or the players as the fiction demands it.

The bar counter should provide some cover during a fight.

Guns for sale in a glass display case.

Shovels and trapping equipment on the shelves.

PLAY TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS!

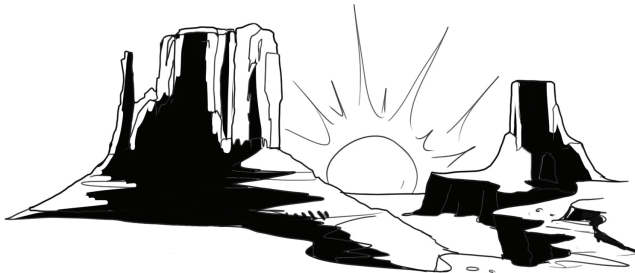
Once all these elements are on the table, the GM has no more power to drive the fiction in a specific direction than any other player. Anything can happen!

TO SUM IT UP

So to build a Cowboy World session you need these elements, or at least make them up while you play:

- A Bad Guy with a Goal, Plan of Action, Dangers, Harbingers of Doom, and an Impending Doom.
- Characters with Goals in direct opposition to that of the Bad Guy, and Stakes that bind them irrevocably to their conflict with the Bad Guy
- Conflict. This follows naturally from the Bad Guys and the Characters. It may go without saying, but it is extremely important that the GM and the players know what the conflict is about. They have to know why they fight.
- Locations. It is clear from the above that where something happens is not as important as why it happens. For this reason locations in a session may be fluid. Locations have Areas, Tactical Elements and Impressions.
- A Story Hook with Establishing Questions.

Of course you will not use all these elements when you prepare for a session. But knowing which tools are available and how to use them makes the job just so much easier.







STEALING FROM THE MOVIES

CHEATING YOUR WAY TO GM SUCCESS

Published adventures and modules have been the staple of RPG's since Gary and Dave produced the first edition of Dungeons and Dragons way back when. Many GM's pride themselves in the fact that they produce their own settings, but it is also a fact of life that we cannot always be super creative. GM's block is a very real thing!

While there are no published modules for Cowboy World, there is good news: **Every single Cowboy flick ever produced is a potential Cowboy World module.**

So here are the tools for stealing from the movies:

- Watch the movie. (See, even prepping for Cowboy World is fun.) Internet streaming is the best thing for Cowboy World GM's since sliced bread.
- Remember that if you port a movie to Cowboy World, you do not need a hero because Cowboy World comes with its own heroes, the Player Characters. So you have to make a decision: Dump the hero or demote him to a Bad Guy or even just an ordinary NPC.
- Remember also that in Cowboy World, you have to play to find out what happens. So along with dumping the hero of the flick, also dump his story. You will not dump the complete story, but more about that a few bullets down.
- Make a few notes about the setting: Geography, climate etc. When you describe the settings to your players, just tell them vividly what you saw in the movie.
- Make a list of the locations in the setting. Again, when you describe the locations, you will just be telling the players what you saw in the movie.
- Make a list of the Bad Guys: Villains, rivals and opposition to whatever your PC's goal in the story will be.
- Make a list of the most important characters in the movie, primarily as they relate to the Bad Guys, but also those NPC's who will be possible allies.
- Now the million dollar question: What would have happened in the movie if the hero did not show up? The answer to this will be the Impending Doom. Sometimes, however, the answer will be "Nothing". If it is "Nothing", then you should probably find a different movie, or be creative.
- When you have the Impending Doom, it is easy to work backwards and find the Stakes and the Habringers of Doom. The countdown to Doom will be the only bits of the plot that you will use. *It is the movie plot as it would have been if the hero of the movie did not show up when he did.*
- Lastly, you have to find a Story Hook. Since you have taken the hero out of the story, and most of the plot also, the inciting incident of the movie is probably not the best source for a Story Hook. Find a scene in the movie's first act that seems appropriate to drop the PC's into the adventure. Or make one up yourself. (The screenwriter did the rest of the work for you, so writing a Story Hook is not too much to ask, is it?)
- If it is necessary, disguise the fact that you stole the movie by changing the setting's name and description, and also the character's names. If you are confident that your players did not watch the movie (which will probably be more than 50 years old, if you are a Cowboy movie nut) you do not even need to do it.



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STEALING FROM THE MOVIES: A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS

A Fistful of Dollars is the 1964 Sergio Leone Spaghetti Western that propelled Clint Eastwood to stardom. It is worth watching both A Fistful of Dollars and Yojimbo, the Japanese movie it is based on, for both are masterpieces.

SETTING

San Miguel, a small town south of the Mexican border.

IMPRESSIONS

It is hot. And dry. And dusty. Whitewashed hovels line the street, women and children watch from behind closed shutters. The church bell rings. A horse walks out of town with a corpse strapped to the saddle, a piece of paper with the words “Adios Amigo” pinned to his back.

LOCATIONS

A bridge over the Rio Grande.

A sandy beach. The river is shallow and fordable.

The Rojos’ hacienda.

A whitewashed building built around a courtyard with a porch and balcony around. Large double wooden gates. White arches and clay roof tiles. Living rooms downstairs, bedrooms opening from a balcony above. A stone barn with store rooms full of barrels.

John Baxter’s house

A large, double storied wooden building. The sheriff’s office in front. A large stone fireplace. A polished wooden staircase. Elegant wallpaper and artworks. A lookout platform on the roof.

Silvanito’s cantina

A run down building built of adobe bricks with a wooden porch. Abandoned saloon. A piano under sheets, it has not been played for a while. A broken roulette wheel. No whiskey in the cantina – only water. A kitchen and bedroom at the back. A balcony overlooking the main street.

The church

Small. Empty. Broken pews.

The cemetery

Some way out of town, halfway up a hill. A white arch spanning the gate. Broken fences. Large boulders around. Poorly tended graves. A few fresh ones.

BAD GUYS

The town is dominated by two rival gangs trying to wipe each other out: The Rojos and the Baxters.

The Rojos

Three brothers, Don Miguel, Esteban and Ramon Rojo run a gang smuggling liquor to Native territories north of the border.

Don Miguel Rojo

- Drive: Greed.
- Goal: To be rich, and drive the Baxters out of town.
- Skill: Shoot +2. Command +1.
- Bonds: Brothers Esteban and Ramon. Gang boss of about twenty gang members.

Esteban Rojo

- Drive: Cruelty.
- Goal: To kill the Baxters.
- Skill: Brawl +3. Shoot +1.
- Bonds: Brothers Don Miguel and Ramon. Gang members.

Ramon Rojo

- Drive: Lust.
- Goal: To dominate women.
- Skill: Shoot +3 (With his Winchester rifle). Intimidate +2.
- Bonds: Brothers Don Miguel and Esteban. Gang lieutenant.

Rojo gang members

Chico, Rubio, Manolo.

The Baxters

John Baxter is the town sheriff and runs a gang that smuggles guns.

John Baxter

- Drive: Greed. Power. Fear.
- Goal: To be rich, and to drive the Rojos out of town.
- Skill: Command +3.
- Bonds: Wife, Dona Consuelo Baxter. Son, Antonio Baxter. Gang boss of about twenty gang members.

Consuelo Baxter

- Drive: Ambition. Intrigue.
- Goal: To dominate everybody, including her husband.
- Skill: Bluff / Deceive +3.
- Bonds: Husband, John Baxter. Son, Antonio Baxter.

Antonio Baxter.

- Bonds: Father, John Baxter. Mother, Consuelo Baxter.

OTHER NPC'S

Marisol, the lady in distress.

- Bonds: Husband, Julio. Son, Jesús (6 years old). Ramon Rojo.
- Goal: To escape from Ramon.
- Bio: Julio owed Ramon gambling money. Ramon took Marisol as payment and ordered Julio to leave town.

Julio

- Bonds: Wife Marisol. Son Jesús.
- Goal: To kill Ramon Rojo.

Piripero the undertaker.

- Goal: To profit from the ongoing gang war in town.

Silvanito the innkeeper.

- Goal: To rid the town of both the Rojos and the Baxters.

The bell-ringer

- Goal: To keep the townspeople informed.

STAKES

- Will the Rojos be held accountable for the massacre of the American and Mexican soldiers and stealing the gold and weapons?
- Will Marisol escape from Ramon Rojo?
- Will Julio and Jesús survive?
- Who will win the gang war: The Rojos or the Baxters?
- Will the town finally be freed from gang tyranny?
- What will happen to the Mexican army's gold?

DANGERS

- The Rojo and Baxter gang members.
- A Gatling gun.

HARBINGERS OF DOOM

- Townspeople hiding in their homes.
- Cowboys harassing townspeople and the PC's.
- Shoot-out between rival gang members.
- A gang member dragging a screaming woman down the road to the Rojo hacienda.
- Piripero making coffins, whistling while he works.
- A funeral procession.
- The church bell tolling as yet another victim of the gang war dies.

IMPENDING DOOM

All out gang war with destruction of the town.

STORY HOOK

Background for the GM

An American army unit is selling guns to the Mexican army for gold. The Rojo gang ambushed the Americans, killed them all and put on their uniforms. When the Mexicans arrive at the rendezvous with the gold, they massacre the Mexicans and take the gold and the guns. The plan is to set up the scene afterwards so that it looks as if the two army units wiped each other out.

Story Hook

The PC's are crossing the Rio Grande when they hear the sound of a Gatling gun and men and horses screaming.

ESTABLISHING QUESTIONS

- Why are you going to San Miguel?
- Who do you know in San Miguel?
- Why is it important?

Make it personal: Use the answers to involve the Player Characters personally in the conflict. (In the movie, the hero is simply a drifter who passes through. You can do better than

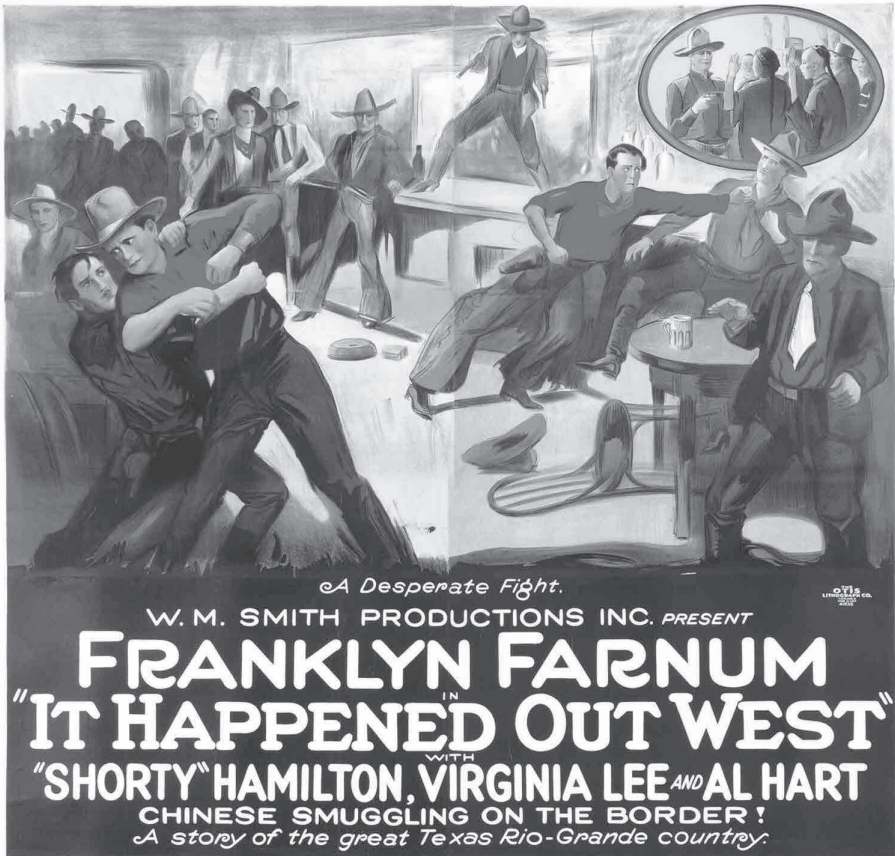
that!)

If the PC's follow the sound of the Gatling gun, they will come upon the massacre in progress: Rojo gang members in the uniforms of American soldiers mowing down Mexican soldiers with rifles and a Gatling gun. When all the Mexicans are dead, they load a chest (the gold) from the Mexicans' wagon onto a wagon that is loaded with guns. They move off in the direction of San Miguel.

If they do not follow the sound immediately, they will later come upon the aftermath of the massacre, with the corpses of the Mexican and American soldiers arranged in such a manner that it looks as if they killed each other.

What happens next? I don't know, but...

Do not try to follow the plot of the movie. You have to play to find out what happens!





GOING WEIRD

COWBOY WORLD WEIRD

*Henry Sturgess: There is darkness everywhere! You are not the only one who has lost everything.
Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter (2012)*

The dark man in the leather coat comes over to your side of the bar. He sits down, and places his glass of rot-gut whiskey in front of him on the counter, studying it intently.

"You're Calvin Dumas," he says after a long silence.

"What's it to you?"

"Nothing. Names don't matter."

He dips his finger in his whiskey and draws something on the stained countertop. A cross. "I hear Mortdecai Bozeman doesn't like you. I'd say you're a dead man walking."

You shrug. Twelve gunfights, and still kicking. "I can help myself." The gears in your prosthetic right arm hum as you slap your six shooter on the counter top. "In fact, this here Peacemaker's for hire."

The stranger is amused. "It won't help you in this fight. You've got no idea."

A spark of anger rises in your chest. "Get to the point, man."

He thumbs five dollars off a wad of notes and places them next to the Colt. "I need a body guard. Will that cover tonight?"

"I thought you said guns won't help," you say as you pick up the notes and count them.

He shrugs and gets up.

"If there's a fight, you'll owe me twenty."

"Only if you help." He turns and walks out the bat-wing doors.

You swear, and follow him out into the cold night, crossing the street to the Colorado Saloon. Bad piano music and a woman's laughter spill out the front door. For a moment you think that's where he's heading, but then he makes a sharp right turn and slips into the alley next door to the undertaker's. He stops, and backs into a shadow.

"We wait here," he whispers and pulls you in beside him.

Minutes pass.

Then a woman screams behind the Colorado.

The stranger leaps over a barrel and races around the corner. You run after him, the butt of your Peacemaker firmly in your right hand.

Light spills from the Colorado's scullery door, illuminating someone stooping over a fallen body. It's a woman, her long black hair cascading down her back.

The stranger stops. "Get away from her," he growls.

She gets up and stands with her back to the stranger. When she speaks, it is like honey.

"Why Obadiah. You found me at last."

“Step away from her. Now!”

She turns and flies at him with animal ferocity, her eyes blazing with hellfire and her lips curled back to reveal impossible fangs. Fresh blood drips from her chin onto her white dress.

Your response to the horror of the demon’s face is instant, a survival reflex: You fire. Three bullets rip into her left breast, flinging her back against the wall. But then she snarls and leaps forward at Obadiab, clawing at his throat.

He sidesteps and grabs her by the throat with his right hand.

“Tell Mortdecay I am coming for him. His time is up. Then go kill yourself, before I find you again and make you wish you did.”

She screams in fury as he shoves her away. Then she turns and runs, disappearing into the night.

Obadiab kneels next to the body lying in the dust. He gently turns it over. It is a young girl, one of Bullshit Mary’s new recruits.

Her throat is ripped out.

Essential research:

- Anything by HP Lovecraft.
- The Dark Tower series by Stephen King.
- Wild Wild West (1999).
- Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter (2012).
- The Sixth Gun by Cullen Bunn and Brian Hurtt.

Cowboy World Weird is an homage to the weird tales and pulp fiction of the first half of the previous century. It combines the cowboy genre with weird horror and steampunk. Enter a world of vampires, skin walkers, demons, ghosts, empty men, elder gods and steampunk gadgets. The land itself is blighted by wandering spirits. Evil reigns. Characters have a Sanity stat, if it is reduced to 0, they go insane and are removed from the game.

“Horror” is a feeling of overwhelming despair because of seemingly invincible evil forces hunting you. At first your only hope of survival is to run. Then you realize that your only chance is to turn, face the evil, and fight. But the odds are stacked against you. The things that go “bump” in the night really are going to eat you.

When you do horror, remember the following principles.

- Cultivate the feeling of despair, but don’t overdo it to the point where the players lose interest. Make them roll for Sanity as often as possible!
- The evil Bad Guy must have a personal interest in the player characters, it must hunt them specifically, not just people in general.
- Use the environment to set the tone. Bright and sunny cornfields with cowboys singing as they drive fringed surreys to harvest balls do not generally set the tone for horror.
- Unknown dangers are more scary than known dangers. That is why horror movies only reveal the monster in the middle of act two, and even then you only get quick glimpses. Do not reveal your monsters early on. Show the remains of the victims, show the fear of

survivors. And when at last you do reveal the monster, do it gradually.

- Build suspense.

People go Weird to do weird stuff like causing harm or reading minds.

Weird users have the **Weird Skill** and can cause Weird effects at a **Weird Level**. The more powerful the Weird effect, the higher the level. These levels must not be confused with the Weird skill. You roll + Soul + Weird (your **skill**) to see if you succeed at doing something at your **Weird level**. In other words:

- **Whether you succeed or fail is dependent on your Weird skill.**
- **The magnitude of the effect is dependent on your Weird level.**

You may have Weird +2 but be a first level Weird user, or Weird +1 and be a fifth level Weird user.

All characters with Weird as a specialist skill start at Weird level 1. The maximum Weird level a character can have is 5th. So doing something at 7th level always carries at least a -2 penalty.

Weird users can buy Weird levels at the cost of 5 Grit.

GOING WEIRD

When you go Weird, roll + Soul + Weird

If you attempt to go Weird at a level higher than yours, subtract the difference between the level you want to go Weird at and your Weird level from your roll. So if you are level 1 and attempt to go Weird at level 3, you have a -2 penalty. (Using Weird at a level lower than your own does not make it easier.) Subtract the Weird skill (or Soul + Weird for a PC) of an opposing Weird user from your roll if appropriate.

On 10+, you are successful. If you cause harm, you disable the target.

On 7-9, the GM adds cost, danger, a worse outcome, or an ugly choice. If you cause harm, the target is wounded and everybody takes +1 on all body rolls against it.

On 6-, The GM makes a Hard Move. In addition, if you went Weird at level 3 or more, roll for Sanity and subtract the Horror rating of the level you went Weird at from your roll.

Level	Cause Harm using Weird	Weird mind stuff
1		Communicate with a raven.
2	A creature smaller than you. Harm modifier: +2	Influence a creature with human intelligence. Feel the presence of Weird users you share a Bond with. Sense their emotions.
3 Horror +0	A creature your own size. Harm modifier: +2	Feel the presence of Weird users or Weird creatures you do not share a Bond with. Sense their emotions. See short, vague visions of the past, present or future.

4 Horror +0	A creature double your size, or two creatures your size. Harm modifier: +2	Communicate telepathically with Weird users you share a Bond with.
5 Horror +1	A creature the size of a horse. Harm modifier: +1	Read the mind of a creature with human intelligence against their will. Communicate telepathically with Weird users or Weird creatures you do not share a Bond with. See short visions of the past, present or future.
6 Horror +2	A creature the size of a wagon. Harm modifier: +1	Influence a creature with superhuman intelligence. Read the minds of Weird users or Weird creatures you do not have a Bond with, against their will.
7 Horror +3	A creature the size of a locomotive. Harm modifier: 0	See short but detailed visions of the past, present or future.

Trigger

When you cause harm using Weird, remember that Weird is not a physical force. It is a spiritual force that may harm the physical body. So describe it like that. It may be a feeling of cold, despair, being forsaken, terror, abandonment, hate, desperation and so on. It may also be an excruciating headache or chest pain. But the ultimate effect is physical in that it may have the same effects as a physical wound. It's like a heart attack: It is a real physical wound, just not visible on the surface.

Influencing people is similar to the Influence move, except that it is done telepathically (although it is often accompanied by speaking to the subject).

This move is opposed with

Going Weird is opposed with the Weird skill of the target.

GM: She bares her fangs at you and growls, "I will have you as a midnight snack!" You feel something invisible grab your throat and starts squeezing the life out of you. What do you do?

George: I go Weird. I'm going to fry this undead bitch's brain.

GM: That's Weird level 2. She has a Weird skill of +1

George rolls 9, adds his Weird (+1), subtract the difference between his weird level and the level he has to go Weird at (-1) and the vampire's Weird (-1). His total is 8.

George: Eight! I focus all my anger and hatred at her rotting brain.

GM: She grabs her head, screams in pain and the invisible fist around your throat dissipates. You can breathe again. She's wounded, so take +1 to Body rolls against her.

RITUAL

When you perform a ritual to do something massively weird the GM will tell you what you need in terms of time (minutes to weeks) and resources (mundane or weird), depending on the desired effect. The effect only happens after all the GM's conditions have been met

and you **Roll to go Weird at at least level 5**. The GM decides the level.

On 10+, you succeed.

On 7-9, you need more time and resources, or the GM adds danger, a worse outcome, or an ugly choice. The effect only happens after all the GM's additional conditions have been met.

On 6-, The GM makes a Hard Move. In addition, roll for Sanity and subtract the Horror rating of the level you went Weird at.

Trigger

Examples of rituals are: Summoning Weird beings, like spirits or demons, or binding them to places or objects. Cursing or breaking curses. Finding or hiding things. Causing harm to people or property over long distances. The important principle for rituals is that you should allow the players to do almost any ritual, but to balance the effect with the cost and danger.

This move is opposed with

If there is somebody who actively performs a counter ritual to cause the ritual to fail, subtract that person's Weird from the roll.

Resources

Examples are: Physical stuff, like the heart of a vampire, the pelt of a skin walker, water from a cursed Native spring, eye of newt and wing of bat and that sort of thing. It may also be non-physical, like a secret revealed, a spell learned or an incantation chanted. The resources needed are always in proportion the intended effect of the ritual.

On 6-

The hardness of the move is in proportion to the intended effect of the ritual. It may be instant death. It may even be the apocalypse, if appropriate. It is important that the players will have a good, but not exact, idea of what the severity of the consequences of failure will be, before they attempt the ritual.

Cathy: We need to banish this demon forever.

GM: That's going to be a ritual. You need a holy symbol, personal belongings of all the victims it killed, strawberries, and about two hours to do the ritual.

PRAYER

When you pray, the GM chooses one

- Nothing happens (for now).
- The GM allows you to use +3 instead of a PC's Mind + Medical or an NPC healer's skill when somebody is healed.
- The GM allows you to pay 1 Grit to change any die roll to a 10+ result.

- The GM causes something to happen providentially that helps the PC's in their righteous cause. Examples: It starts raining, the cavalry arrives, there is a tree growing out of the side of the cliff or a wagon load of hay that breaks your fall, etc.

Then, if it worked, permanently decrease your Weird skill by 1.

Trigger

Anybody can pray at any time. Whether it will work or not, depends on the rules of Prayer and the GM.

This move is opposed with

Prayer is never an opposed move.

Rules for Prayer

The forces of Weird are dramatic and generally destructive. In contrast, Prayer often works subtly and in the background.

Preconditions for Prayer to work

- It must be at a dramatic turning point in the fiction.
- It must be in support of a righteous cause.
- It only works once or twice per session, at the GM's discretion.

If these conditions are met, then Prayer should work.

How Prayer works

- Strife and suffering are not inherently bad, because it builds character. So prayer will not necessarily make the characters' lives any easier.
- Prayer seldom works directly, but mostly indirectly through providential means. For instance, if a PC prays for a monster to die, something may providentially happen to help him kill the monster, or at least survive the battle. The monster will not just drop dead.
- Prayer often does not have the exact effect that the PC hopes for, but **if it works it always has a beneficial effect for the PC**. It is up to the GM to choose the effect.
- **Prayer is not deus ex machina**, and cannot be used to produce easy solutions or ruin a good fight or story line. .

Nothing happens (for now)

Prayer will fail when the conditions are not met: It is not at a dramatic point in the story, it is not in a righteous cause or one or two prayer requests have already been granted during the session. The GM may also decide to delay the effect for a later, more dramatic moment.

Healing

Rolling with +3 instead of +Mind +Medical means that somebody who does not have Medical as a specialist skill may still try to heal somebody with Prayer.

Permanently decrease your Weird skill

Prayer and Weird are opposing forces, so they cannot co-exist. Players may pay 5 Grit to buy Weird skill points again, of course. Because the cost of Prayer is high, the GM should make the effect worth the cost.

SANITY

All Player Characters start with 3 Sanity.

When you are confronted with horrifying Weird stuff, when someone else loses sanity, or when you fail a Weird roll at level 3 or higher, roll + Soul + Nerve. Subtract the Horror rating of the monster that triggered the move or the level you went Weird at from the roll.

On 10+, you are full of bravado, take +1 forward.

On 7-9, you are OK.

On 6-, things happen to you according to your Sanity. Then lose 1 Sanity.

- **3 Sanity:** You experience irrational terror. If you choose to stand your ground, take -1 ongoing to all rolls as long as the situation lasts.
- **2 Sanity:** You are disabled by abysmal despair, paranoia and hallucinations. You may recover once the situation has been resolved and you have rested for an hour or so.
- **1 Sanity:** You feel an overwhelming sense of allegiance to the horror you are facing, and experience paranoia against your friends and allies. The GM uses your character as an NPC for his own nefarious purposes for one move only to attack or thwart the other Player Characters, then you are disabled. You may recover once the situation has been resolved and you have rested for a few hours.
- **0 Sanity:** You go insane and are removed from the game. The GM may use you as a monster, if she so chooses.

To recover all lost Sanity, perform some act of redemption or purification and pay 5 Grit.

Trigger

There are two triggers for the Sanity move: If a player character experiences something horrific like being attacked by a Weird monster, if another player character loses sanity or when a player rolls a fail when going Weird at level 3 or higher.

This move is opposed with

Subtract the Horror rating of the monster that triggered the move or the level you went Weird at from the roll.

On 6-

Note that the negative effects of failing happen before Sanity is decreased. This means that when a character drops to 0 Sanity, he only goes insane the next time he fails a Sanity roll.

GM: *You realize you are staring through a portal into another dimension. You see eyes staring back at you - the cold, unblinking eyes of something that looks like a gargantuan mutating spider. Roll for Sanity, Horror +3*

George rolls, the total is 6.

GM: *What is your sanity?*

George: *One...*

GM: *You mind goes numb with fear as the monster forces its will into your brain. It is as if you can hear a million doomed souls screaming. Then you suddenly see the light - you realize that this monster is the ultimate good, you have been deceived. Everything you thought you knew up till now was a lie. You look at Cathy, and know instantly what your have to do.*

Cathy, you see that George suddenly gets very calm, he seems totally at peace. Then he draws his knife, and lunges at your throat. What do you do?

Recovering Sanity

Then Frodo stirred and spoke with a clear voice, indeed with a voice clearer and more powerful than Sam had ever heard him use, and it rose above the throb and turmoil of Mount Doom, ringing in the roof and walls.

'I have come,' he said. 'But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!' And suddenly, as he set it on his finger, he vanished from Sam's sight.

The Lord of the Rings, JRR Tolkien

Losing your Sanity in Cowboy World Weird is not just a question of mental instability. It is spiritual corruption. Evil is seductive, it destroys the mind by enslaving the will with promises of power and delight. That is why simple pharmacotherapy, electroconvulsive therapy or frontal lobotomies won't work.

The nature of the "act of redemption or purification" is up to the GM, but should be difficult. The essence of the horror genre is the despair that flows from the seeming inevitability of destruction. If recovering Sanity were too easy, the whole point of the mechanic would be lost. But it is also important to balance the difficulty of regaining Sanity with the rate at which characters lose their Sanity in your specific game. If characters regularly go down to 1 or 0 Sanity, recovering it should be easier. If they seldom lose Sanity, it should be more difficult to recover.

Redemption or purification should always involve some personal sacrifice. Examples are: Saving someone innocent, being involved in a great cause, standing up for justice, making peace, righting a great wrong, etc. Always let all the other players give their opinion on whether an act of redemption or purification was adequate or not.

Adjusting the difficulty of the game.

If your group feels that people go insane too often, do not give monsters Horror ratings of more than +1 and decrease the Horror rating of the Weird levels across the board by 1. After a session or two, you will have a good idea what Horror ratings are suitable for your game!

WEIRD MONSTERS

The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?

Edgar Allan Poe

They were the first, fully two hours ahead of anyone else and four hours before the hanging, so Gallows Hill stood deserted – except for the rooks and ravens. The birds were everywhere. They roosted noisily on the hard, jutting bar that overhung the trap – the armature of death. They sat in a row along the edge of the platform, they jostled for position on the stairs.

Dark Tower I: The Gunslinger, Stephen King

Abraham Lincoln: Vampires are just myths.

Henry Sturgess: Myths don't beat you senseless after you've put a bullet in their brain!

Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter (2012)

MONSTER STATS

Fight: Boss monsters have the Fight skill: PC's have to deduct it from their Shoot and Brawl rolls when they are in combat with monsters.

Armor: Monsters may have Armor points. A monster will pay 1 Armor point to negate one hit against it.

Horror: Some weird creatures have a Horror rating. If a creature has a Horror rating, Player Characters must roll for Sanity when they are first encountered, and when they are in combat with one. The player must deduct the creature's Horror from his Sanity roll.

Monsters have Moves that describe what they do and how they fight.

VAMPIRE

When in human form:

Drive: Hunger. Power.

Goal: According to the fiction.

Skills: Weird 3. Goes Weird at level 3 to 7. When in human form it has skills like any other human.

Bonds: According to the fiction.

Bio: According to the fiction.

Will never go into direct sunlight. Avoids holy symbols and hallowed ground.

When it is in direct sunlight or on hallowed ground: Take +1 against it.

When manifest:

Skills: Horror 0 – 3, Weird 3. Goes Weird at level 3 to 7.

Will never go into direct sunlight. Avoids holy symbols and hallowed ground.

When it is in direct sunlight or on hallowed ground: Take +1 against it.

When killed, it will come back to life within minutes. It can only be permanently killed by a stake in the heart or if the whole body is burnt to ash.

Attacks with fangs, claws and available weapons. Harm +2 to +0.

Feeds whenever possible.

May turn human victims into vampires. Good humans cannot be turned into vampires.

WEREWOLVES / WERE CREATURES / SKIN WALKERS

When in human form:

Drive: According to the character's fiction.

Goal: According to the character's fiction.

Skills: When in human form it has skills like any other human.

Bonds: According to the fiction.

Bio: According to the fiction.

They can only be harmed with silver.

Skin walkers change into animal form at will. Werewolves change when the moon is full.

In animal form:

Skills: Horror 0 – 3, Fight 0-3, Harm +2 or +1

Can only be harmed with silver.

Hunts relentlessly. Attacks ferociously with fangs and claws.

DEPARTING SPIRITS

When a person dies, his spirit still lingers around for a few hours or until the corpse is buried. Departing spirits are carried off to hell by ravens.

One may communicate with a departing spirit by going Weird.

Skill: Horror 0.

It can only be harmed with Weird.

GHOSTS

A ghost is an undeparted spirit. There is always a reason why a ghost has not left. It may be spite, greed, or revenge that drives it to stay. Or it may have been bound by unholy energy.

One may communicate with a ghost by going weird.

Skills: Horror 0, Weird 1, Goes Weird at levels 3-5.

Will attack with Weird if angered.

ZOMBIES

Corpses reanimated by Weird energy.

Skill: Horror 0.

Move in hordes. Shamble forward relentlessly. Tear apart with claws and teeth.

EMPTY MEN

These are living people who have had their spirits ripped from their bodies by powerful Weird forces. They are often used as slaves, are controlled by the person who created them, and cannot do anything unless they have been commanded. They do not speak.

Skill: Horror 0

Attack with available weapons, but only if commanded by their master.

DEMONS

Demons are the spawn of the elder gods. When they break through to the material universe, they may manifest in corporeal form and may take on any of the following: Fangs, claws, hooves, horns, tentacles, chaotic forms, darkness, fire, frost, lightning etc.

Describe every demon in detail.

Demons may possess corpses or empty men. When they do that, they may fool some people into thinking that they are human. Demons cannot enter hallowed ground. They avoid contact with holy symbols at all cost. Their physical bodies can only be harmed with cold iron or salt.

When killed, they may possess any available corpse and keep on fighting.

Demons may be summoned, banished, contained within containment circles, or bound to objects with Weird rituals.

Skills: Horror 0-3, Weird 3, Goes Weird at levels 3-7, Fight 0-3, Harm +0

Attack ferociously with fangs, claws, tentacles, horns or fire, and Weird.

May cause Blight: Plants wither at their touch, and animals flee in terror before them, or die.

Some examples of demons known to the Indians.

The Wendigo is a ravenous cannibalistic demon that possesses humans, animals or corpses. When killed, the Wendigo spirit will simply possess the next host.

Two-face has blades instead of forearms. She uses them to slice up her victims before devouring what is left.

Uktena, the horned water snake lives in creeks and rivers. It can only be killed if shot in its weak spot, a broken scale on its head.

Katshituasku, the man eating giant bear.

Flying severed heads of murder victims, will rip flesh from your body with their unnaturally sharp teeth.

Camasotz, the undead man-bat.

RAVENS

These carrion birds are the heralds of death, they can sense when something is going to die. They carry departing spirits off to hell.

One may communicate with a raven by going Weird at level 1.

CHUPACABRA

They say it is as big as a dog, dark as night and has eyes that reflect the fires of hell.

Skill: Horror 1

Hunts at night. Attacks sleeping prey and feeds on its blood. Harm +1.

Blinks away into the dark.

It can only be harmed with silver, if you can hit it before it blinks away.

THUNDER BIRD

The thunder bird is a giant bird that causes thunder storms and lightning with the flap of its wings. It will destroy those who defile the land, with bolts of lightning from the sky.

It can not be harmed with mundane weapons.

BLOODY MARY

When you call on her, she may appear in a mirror to tell your future. But beware, the future has a way of folding in on itself. And you may just open a portal for other things to step through the glass...

HALLOWED GROUND AND HOLY SYMBOLS

HALLOWED GROUND.

Churches and churchyards are examples of hallowed ground. Some monsters, including all demons, cannot enter it. Other monsters like vampires are weakened when they are on hallowed ground. Player Characters take +1 on all rolls against weakened monsters.

HOLY SYMBOLS

Vampires, demons and some other Weird monsters will avoid contact with holy symbols at all cost. It causes them excruciating pain.



GADGETRY

In Cowboy World Weird, steam technology is far more advanced than what it was in the real Victorian era. There are steam driven gadgets of all kinds, including prosthetic body parts and robots. Some of these gadgets are driven by Weird energy, or may even be possessed with demons.

PROSTHETIC BODY PARTS

Mechanical eye

The mechanical eye is usually not for sale. If you find one on a dead body, good for you. When you have lost an eye in battle (or otherwise), you may install (with the help of weird healing to splice gears to nerves) a mechanical eye in your eye socket. The mechanical eye consists of two parts: One part is fixed to your eye socket. The other part can be removed. When you remove your mechanical eye you can still see with it even if it is miles away. As an upgrade, your mechanical eye can see in the infra-red spectrum. You can see the heat signature of living creatures in total darkness.

Prosthetic clockwork arm

When you have lost an arm in battle or otherwise, you may graft a mechanical arm on the stump, using weird healing to splice minute gears to nerve endings. Choose 2 upgrades

- Whirring blades (messy).
- Spring loaded (forceful).
- Built in double barreled shotgun.
- Telescopic.
- Multi-tool: You have a whole set of tinkering tools attached to your prosthesis. Always have what you need!
- Grappling gun: Your arm shoots a grappling hook on a thin wire that retracts automatically. It can carry your own weight.

Prosthetic legs

Run short distances almost as fast as a horse. Jump a story high.

TRANSPORT

- Horseless steam carriages that walk on legs like spiders.
- Steam powered dirigibles.
- Steam powered horses and mechanical men: The purely mundane ones are not very useful. If they are possessed by demons, they are very intelligent, very dangerous entities. Possessing a possessed automaton is a hanging crime.

GADGETEER

When you build a new gadget, describe its function. The GM will tell you if it is feasible, and how much time, money and other resources you must spend.

Then roll + Mind + Engineering.

On 10+, the gadget works more or less as planned.

On 7-9, it does not work quite as planned, and tends to break down.

Examples of gadgets

- Sleeve gun: A derringier that automatically extends from its hiding place in your sleeve.
- Disguised guns: Guns disguised as pens, flower pots etc.
- Exploding devices: Gas grenades that deliver various type of drugs. Flash grenades.
- Self returning throwing knives.
- A pocket welding torch.
- A doomsday weapon.
- Mind altering drugs that turn people into mindless killing machines.
- A clockwork exoskeleton that gives the user special abilities.
- A device that freezes time.

AUTOMATON

An independent clockwork agent, as small as a bug or as big as a horse. Its artificial intelligence is based on clockwork mechanisms harnessing Weird energy. It is roughly as smart as a trained monkey.

Choose its form: arachnoid, insectoid, reptiloid etc.

It has a mechanical eye and can record everything it sees, to be read later by anybody with the technological know how.

Choose 2 upgrades

- It is stealthy.
- It can squeeze through very small openings.
- It can fly with mechanical propellers or wings.
- It is waterproof and can move under water with no problem.
- It has mechanical ears and can record sound also.
- It has a built-in derringier pistol and can deliver one shot at close range to a predetermined target.

When you have wound the automaton you may send it to scout, it will come back a bit later with information. It can retrieve small objects. It must be wound up for a few minutes

before it can be used again.

Demons may be bound to automatons, in which case they become highly intelligent, malevolent and independent agents.



**Corpse of John Shaw, two-bit bandit killed in the Canyon Diablo
shootout**

CANYON DIABLO



John Shaw in hell (street)

SETTING

Canyon Diablo, Coconino county, Arizona, was founded in 1882 when the Atlantic Pacific Railroad company needed to build a bridge over the canyon, and the one they ordered was too short. So pending the building of the bridge, a small town sprang up and the end of the railway line. The town is the railway head for Flagstaff, the closest town to the west. There is a daily coach and wagon service to Flagstaff.

IMPRESSIONS

The town is dry and wind-swept, with desperately shabby shacks, false fronted buildings, shotgun houses and tents lining Hell Street, the main road that stretches for a mile east from the yellow railway depot. Canyon Diablo never sleeps: There are fourteen saloons, ten gambling houses, four brothels, two dance halls, no churches and no law. The 2000 or so railroad construction workers, cowboys, prospectors, hunters, gamblers, prostitutes, ex-Civil War soldiers, thieves, and cutthroats are suspicious, ready to attack weaker prey, ready to kill at the slightest affront.

LOCATIONS

Meteor Crater

There is a meteorite impact crater 2 hours by horse south of Canyon Diablo. The Indians have always known that it is an unholy place. They whisper about dark creatures that stalk the region at night, and humans who have been changed beyond recognition by the dark power of the sky-rock that the gods cast there. These things-that-once-were-men crave for the warm blood and soft flesh of the living and go hunt for it in packs driven by their ever growing hunger.

Only the most powerful shamans visit the place, in ancient times some built their pit houses on the rim of the crater to have easy access to the source of power below. It is said that a shard of the sky-rock will make you immortal and powerful; with such a shard you may control the things from the pit.

The railway depot

The main building of the railway depot is painted bright yellow, so you can't miss it. It is the first thing you see when you get off the train, and marks the start of Hell Street. It consists of offices, including the telegraph and post office, a warehouse, coal store, lumber yard, and several cattle and sheep corrals.

Keno Harry's Poker Flat

Keno Harry's: The place to go when you're feeling lucky. It is a well known fact that Harry makes his own luck - He paid for the establishment with a piece of hot lead deposited in the previous owner's chest. Some say Harry himself is headed for Boot Hill soon, self made luck can only last so long. But then, he pays Scurry a percentage of the house takings to protect him, so who knows?

Harry runs two crooked faro tables twenty four hours a day, and at least five poker games at any given time.

Impressions: False wooden front, the back is greenwood frame and canvas. Bad light, clouds of tobacco smoke, players at the shabby green poker and faro tables. There is a dark smudge on the green velvet of the one faro table, a grim reminder of how Harry came into his fortune. Two of Scurry's thugs sit at the bar, idly watching the dealers and patrons. Harry himself serves the rotgut, his Winchester always within reach on the counter.

Areas: The shotgun house has only three rooms, the front serves as main poker room and bar, the second as a private poker room for the higher stakes players, and the store room is at the back.

Colorado Saloon

The grandest establishment in town. It is one of the few permanent buildings in town; it is a double storied wooden structure. It is the headquarters of Mortdecay Bozeman.

Impressions: Honky-tonk music, and the buzz of conversation. Polished wooden floors and expensive rugs. Works of original art on the walls. A crystal chandelier. Large mirrors. A selection of expensive drinks behind the bar. A faro table and a few poker tables.

Areas: Downstairs: The main saloon with staircase and balcony. Gambling room at the back. Bozeman's office with luxurious furniture and an iron safe. Kitchen and store room. The cellar door is in the store room. A staff room with six bunk beds.

Upstairs: Six bedrooms that are rented out by the hour.

Cellar: A storeroom with a secret door to stairs down. It opens up in a room, lit by tallow candles. There is a blood stained altar and a few iron cages. One has a fresh corpse inside.

Texas Saloon

The Texas Saloon belongs to Gordon Scurry, a small time crime boss on his way up.

Impressions: The smell of tobacco smoke and cheap liquor. Patrons drinking bad whiskey. Cheap furniture, a rough bar counter. A few poker tables. The far end of the saloon has a small stage for dancing girls. The piano is out of tune with a few dead notes, but nobody cares. Scurry's cowboys are always loitering around.

Areas: The main saloon. Storeroom and kitchen. Scurry's office. His enforcers sleep in a bungalow in the back yard.

Bughouse Joe's

Bughouse Joe's was formerly known as Joe's. Then Joe went mad. Some say that it was after a romantic visit by Clabberfoot Annie. Others think that he spent too much time at Wong's den. Whatever the case may be, Joe went raving through town one Sunday afternoon, wild eyed, screaming and shooting wildly at invisible monsters. Eventually he ran as if chased by a legion of demons to the canyon and threw himself off the cliff. Since nobody felt like climbing down to retrieve his corpse on a Sunday, it was eaten by the coyotes that night. On Monday morning Rob Grub, a friend of Mortdecay Bozeman, moved in as the new proprietor.

Impressions: A rickety plank and canvas shotgun house. It is cheap. And grubby.

Areas: Only two rooms: The saloon in front and storeroom at the back.

Other saloons

There are quite a few more saloons on Hell Street that are similar to Bughouse Joe's: Two of them are The Last Drink Saloon and the Road to Ruin

Cootchy-Klatch

Cootchy-Klatch is Scurry's dance hall. A few cents for a few minutes with one of the ladies. For a few dollars you can take her next door to Bullshit Mary's for serious business.

Bullshit Mary's

Mary herself is a landmark in town, with a body that could pull planets out of orbit and appetites and a temper to match. She runs her cat house like a general runs his army, and only called on Scurry for protection when her girls started disappearing. It was about the same time Clabberfoot Annie opened her competing establishment right across the road.

Impressions: Dimmed lamplight, crummy red velvet and cheap perfume.

Areas: Downstairs: Small reception area. Office. Several small booths. Kitchen and store room. The more expensive rooms are upstairs.

Clabberfoot Annie's

More classy but more expensive than Mary's, and right across the street within cursing distance.

Impressions: Dimmed lamplight, slightly less crummy red velvet and slightly better perfume.

Areas: Downstairs: Reception area with a small saloon with a well stocked bar. A few poker tables. An office with a safe. Several private rooms. A kitchen, with stairs down to the cellar.

Upstairs: Several suites.

Cellar: One storage area. Secret door and tunnel to the Colorado Saloon.

Ching Wong's beef stew counter

Ching Wong pretends that he does not understand much English. But don't be fooled. He knows exactly who did what last night and what they are going to do tonight. And he will tell you for the right price. If you are not there for the information, you can have some of his beef stew. Which is quite good, if you ignore the rumors that Wong attaches a wide range of

meanings to the word “beef.” For a few dollars you can step behind the curtain and bunk up with an opium pipe for the rest of the day. Ching Wong has three or four Chinese gentlemen working for him. They know Kung Fu. (Brawl +3)

Impressions: Saw-horse counter. The customers sit on three legged stools eating stew from wooden bowls. Smells of eastern food. A cloud of opium smoke fills the den at the back. Opium burners on the floor. Several people lying on bunks with their pipes in the opium burners. Some are unconscious, still clutching their pipes.

Areas: The veranda with the counter and three legged stools. Opium den and kitchen at the back.

Marvelous Hot Bath and Shave 50 cents

Marvelous Hot Bath is run by Chun Li, a cousin of Ching Wong. Chun Li also provides Chinese herbs and medicines, and an assortment of amulets and crystals that are supposed to make you lucky in love and poker, or protect you against evil.

BAD GUYS

Mortdecay Bozeman

Vampire.

When in human form:

Look: Young and charming with a winning smile and cruel eyes.

Drive: Power. Revenge.

Goal: To find a powerful meteor shard, and become a vampire prince.

Skills: Weird +3. Goes Weird at level 5.

Bonds: Clabberfoot Annie. His gang members (All human).

Bio: He was bitten and became a vampire in Boston during the rebellion, and joined the local vampire clan fighting for the king. He was excommunicated decades later for personality clashes and insubordination to the prince of Boston. He moved to Canyon Diablo after he heard rumors of the Weird power of the crater. He owns several of the gambling houses, dance halls and brothels in town. He has a gang of enforcers who collect protection money from the businesses on Hell Street and conduct his human trafficking business. He feeds on the most desperate prostitutes and drunks in town.

Bozeman has registered a mining claim in the center of the crater – a cause for speculation among the townspeople since there has been no reports of gold, or anything of value, found in the area. And miners who work for him seem to disappear one after the other...

Bozeman will never go into direct sunlight and avoids holy symbols and hallowed ground.

When manifest:

Horror 3. Brawl +3. Weird +3. Goes Weird at level 5.

When he is in direct sunlight or on hallowed ground: Take +1 against him.

When killed, he will come back to life within minutes. He can only be permanently killed by

a stake in the heart or if the body is burnt to ash.
Attacks with fangs, claws and available weapons.
Feeds whenever possible. Escape as a bat when injured.
May turn human victims into vampires, if he so pleases.

Clabberfoot Annie

Vampire and cat-house madam.

When in human form:

Look: Past her sell-by date, but desperate to still look the part.

Drive: Vanity. Explosive temper.

Goal: To destroy Bullshit Mary, and be the only madam in town.

Skills: Weird +1 She goes weird at level 3. Charm +3.

Bonds: Mortdecay Bozeman.

Bio: She was only the madam of a house of ill repute, till she met Mortdecay. He changed her life...

When manifest:

Skill: Horror +0

When she is in direct sunlight or on holy ground: Take +1 against her.

When killed, she will come back to life within minutes. She can only be permanently killed by a stake in the heart or if the body is burnt to ash.

Attacks with fangs, claws and a double barreled shotgun.

Feeds whenever possible. Escapes as a bat when injured.

May turn human victims into vampires, if she so pleases.

Hoyee Awoo, also known as Scary-Tooth

Navajo shaman and mountain lion skin-walker.

When in human form:

Look: Like an old piece of beef jerky. He has sharp canine teeth – a tell of his mountain lion form.

Drive: Power. Navajo tribalism.

Goal: To get Bozeman out of his back yard.

Skills: Weird 3 . He goes Weird at level 3.

Bonds: Dances-with-Lions, his woman. Herman Wolfe, trader at Wolfe's crossing, about ten miles north of Canyon Diablo on the Little Colorado river.

Bio: He grew up on the edge of the crater, the last of a long line of shamans and skin walkers. He received a shard of sky rock from his father when he died. When the railway line and the town arrived, he kept his distance at first. But when Bozeman started prospecting in the crater he attacked Bozeman and his miners with a band of empty men to protect his heritage. Bozeman destroyed one of his empty men, and the others turned on Scary-Tooth.

They almost killed him and left him to die.

Scary-Tooth lay under the burning desert sun, dying, with ravens quietly watching and buzzards circling, when he was found by Herman Wolfe, the trader. Wolfe nursed him back to life, and a deep friendship developed between them. Scary-Tooth gave Herman the power to skin-walk, and since the battle with Bozeman, he has learned how to control empty men better.

He can only be harmed with silver or Weird. He changes into a mountain lion at will.

In animal form:

A mountain lion.

Skill: Fight 3.

Can only be harmed with silver or Weird.

Attacks with fangs and claws.

Herman Wolfe (Navajo name: Hastiin Chaa, or Mr Beaver)

Trader and wolf skin walker.

When in human form

Look: Old, wild and hairy, with a few missing teeth.

Skills: Tracking / Survival 3. Business 1.

Bond: Scary-Tooth.

Bio: Wolfe is an old timer from Germany, and one of the first white men to live in the area. He started out as a beaver trapper, earning him his Navajo name Mr Beaver. After the civil war he settled near the mouth of Canyon Diablo at Wolfe's Crossing on the Little Colorado river and set up a trading post. After he saved Scary-Tooth's life, the old Indian used the Weird power of the sky stone shard to turn him into a skin walker wolf.

In animal form:

An old, gray wolf.

Can only be harmed with silver or Weird.

Attacks with fangs.

Gordon Scurry

Confederate army veteran turned businessman.

Look: Powerful, commanding. He has a right prosthetic arm with a built-in shotgun, and a left mechanical eye.

Drive: Greed

Goal: To make every dollar he can out of Canyon Diablo by protection racketeering, human trafficking and gambling. To get rid of Bozeman, who threatens his income.

Skills: Intimidate 3. Business 3.

Bonds: Obadiah Grimm. His gang of enforcers.

Bio: He lost everything in the war, including a limb and an eye. A boom town without any law seemed to be the fastest way to make money. When Bozeman arrived a turf war erupted between them. Bozeman tried to kill him, and Scurry recognized him as a vampire – he had seen weird shit during the war. He promptly wired for a vampire hunter from back east.

Scurry has about ten different mechanical eyes that he has installed all over town, he can see through any one of them at any time.

Obadiah Grimm

Vampire hunter for hire. Poses as a Faro dealer.

Look: Obadiah is unremarkable. Mid thirties, or maybe older? You can't remember. What color is his hair? You think it was brown... Or maybe not...

Drive: Survival. Revenge.

Goal: To rid the world of vampires. To not be noticed. To find his undead wife.

Skills: Weird 2. He goes Weird at level 3. Shoot 3. Brawl 3. Awareness 3 (His absent mindedness is an act.)

Bio: His wife and children were killed by marauding vampires during the war.

He has a cross tattooed in each palm; touching a vampire with his palms cause them severe pain.

He has two Colt Peacemakers, and a double barreled shotgun that shoots a wooden stake from the left barrel. (Range close).

Catherine Grimm

Vampire, and wife of Obadiah Grimm.

Look: Beautiful, seductive, in her mid twenties.

Drive: Hate.

Goal: To destroy Obadiah Grimm.

Skills: Charm +3. Bluff +3. Weird +1. She goes weird at level 3.

Bond: Obadiah Grimm.

Bio: Her father was an abusive drunk. She married Grimm to escape, and always hated him for it. The best thing that ever happened to her, was being bitten by a vampire. She works for Bozeman.

STAKES

- Who will win the turf war between Scurry and Bozeman?
- Will the skin walkers get revenge on Bozeman?
- How many people will be slaughtered by the vampires? Will the vampires take over the town?
- What will Grimm do when he finds his wife?
- Will Bozeman find a shard of the sky stone in the crater? If he does, how great will his

power be? Will he become a powerful vampire prince and become a tyrant?

- Will Bozeman unwittingly create a portal to the demon dimensions and unleash a demon plague on the land?

DANGERS

- Cowboys.
- Vampires.
- Skin walkers.
- Demons.
- Empty men.

HARBINGERS OF DOOM

Harbingers of Doom may be used to craft Story Hooks.

- People disappearing from town.
- Shoot-outs between Scurry and Bozeman's cowboys.
- Dead victims of monster attacks. Their throats are ripped open and their blood drained.
- The Flagstaff coach is robbed, and the driver and passengers disappear.
- Mangled horses and farm animals found at watering holes.
- Rumors of dark monsters coming from the meteor crater.
- The new sheriff is murdered a few hours after he is sworn into office.
- A well known person dies of an opium overdose, then his corpse comes alive again and murders one of Scurry's men by tearing his head off.
- A train derails, and passengers disappear. There are eye witness accounts of a massive horned beast carrying people off in the dark.

IMPENDING DOOM

- Bozeman finds the source of unlimited power in the meteor crater. He becomes a powerful vampire prince, and eventually president of the United States of America.

Or

- Bozeman unwittingly opens a portal to the demon dimensions, and an elder god enters into this world. He causes the apocalypse and destroys the continent.



HANDOUTS

COWBOY WORLD

Name: _____ Age: _____
 Look: _____ Gender: _____

High Concept	Attributes	Wounds <small>(Lethal or Non-Lethal)</small>	Earned
Archetype:	Body:	-1	Grit:
Twist:	Mind:	-1	Fame:
History:	Soul:	-1	Infamy:
			Permanent Debility
Group theme:		-1	

Starting skills	Points	+ Attr	I am good (or bad) at this because...
	+2		
	+2		
	+1		
	+1		
	+1		
	-1		
	-1		

New Skills	Points	+ Attr	I am good at this because...

Beliefs, Goals and Issues

I believe that: _____

Therefore my goal is to: _____

My issue is: _____

Bonds: Name	Points	My bonds with them are:

Gear and Wealth

Gear: _____

Wealth: _____

Player Moves

- Use a skill:** Roll + Attribute + Skill. 10+: Success. 7-9: Add complications.
- Influence:** Roll + Soul + Command or Intimidate or Charm. Or (For PVP) Roll + Bonds. Or (For NPCs) Roll + Fame or Infamy. 7-9: Demand payment or a promise.
- Henchman:** Roll + Soul + Command, Intimidate or Charm. Or Roll + Fame or Infamy. If the henchman has the appropriate skill +3; take +1.
- Read a situation:** Roll + Mind + Awareness. 10+: Ask 3 questions. 7-9: Ask 1 question.
- Read a person:** Roll + Soul + Empathy. 10+: Ask 3 questions. 7-9: Ask 1 question.
- Investigate:** Roll + Mind + Investigate 10+ Learn 3 facts. 7-9: Learn 1 fact.
- Teamwork:** Everybody participating rolls + Attribute + Skill. The highest roll counts.
- Nerve:** Roll + Soul + Nerve. 10+: Take +1 forward. 6-: Take -1 forward.
- Brawl:** Roll + Body + Brawl or Plasma Bladesmanship. 10+: Disable. 7-9: Wound. (Take +1 on all body rolls against target.)
- Shoot:** Roll + Body + Shoot. 10+: Disable. 7-9: Wound. (Take +1 on all body rolls against target.)
- Covering fire:** Roll + Body + Shoot. 10+: They do not come under concentrated fire for a short while. 7-9: They do not come under concentrated fire now. 6-: They are under concentrated fire now.
- Concentrated fire:** Take -1 to -3 to all Body rolls.
- Gang fight:** Roll + Gang Buff. 10+: Victory with few casualties. 7-9: More casualties. 6-: Defeat, major casualties.
- Harm:** Roll + Body + Harm modifier. 10+ Lose narrative control. 7-9: Wounded (-1 to all body rolls) 6-: Disabled.
- Heal:** Roll + Body + Mind + Medical (PC) or Roll + medical skill (NPC) 10+: Mortal wound becomes a wound. 7-9: Mortal wound becomes a debility. 6-: Patient dies.

CHARACTER CREATION CHEAT SHEET

Choose an Archetype from the list or invent your own:

The Cowboy / Cowgirl	The Rancher	The Barber	The Music Man
The Drifter	The Cattle Baron	The Blacksmith	The Indian Maiden
The Gunslinger	The Railroad Baron	The Frontier Doctor	The Magical Indian
The Outlaw	The Homesteader	The Schoolmarm	The Medicine Man
The Bandito	The Chinese railroad worker	The Southern Gentleman / Belle	The Half-Breed
The Retired Outlaw	The Medicine Showman	The Undertaker	The Savage Indian
The Bounty Hunter	The Prospector	The Preacher Man	The White Man Gone Native
The Circuit Judge	The Pony Express Rider	The Cat-house Madam	The Army Scout
The Pinkerton Detective	The Gambler	The Mountain man or woman	The Cavalry Officer
The Sheriff	The Tenderfoot	The Pioneer	The U.S. Marshall

Twist and History

Twist: What makes your character unique, interesting and awesome?

History: How did your character get here?

Attributes and Skills

Allocate the modifiers -1, 0 and 1 to the three attributes Body, Mind and Soul.

Rules for skills:

1: All the starting skill slots on the character sheet must be filled.

2: Each skill must be tied fictionally to the character's High Concept

3: Negative skills must come from different attribute groups.

4: Custom skills (that are not on the list) are encouraged.

5: Negative skills may not be custom or specialist skills.

Choose your skills from this list:

Body skills:

Shoot
Brawl
Ride / Drive
Rope
Athletics / Acrobatics
Strength
Stealth
Sleight of hand

Mind skills:

Awareness
Investigate
Gambling
Mechanics
Business
Medical*
Engineering*
Tracking / Survival*

Soul skills:

Nerve
Charm
Command
Intimidate
Bluff / Deceive
Empathy
Provoke
Music*

Asterisked skills are specialist skills.

Beliefs and Goals

Beliefs: Look at the examples and then write your own belief. It has to be anchored in the game fiction.

Your Goal is the direct consequence of your belief: "I believe X therefore I will do Y." Your goal must be concrete and attainable in the game. Look at the examples, then write your own goal.

Belief examples:

All men are equal with inalienable rights...
We must bring the light of civilization...
Law and order is everything...
The law is for the weak...
Money rules the world...
I was destined to have this ranch...
I am the fastest gun in the West...
I deserve a better deal in life...
I will never be humiliated again...
My sister is vulnerable...

Goal examples:

therefore I will defend the downtrodden
therefore I will make peace with the _____
therefore I will bring outlaws to justice
therefore I will rob Wells & Fargo
therefore I will find gold in those hills
therefore I will defend it with my life
therefore I will challenge Black Bart to a draw
therefore I will demand my share of the claim
therefore I will kill _____
therefore I will protect her with my life

Issue

Choose your Issue from the list, or write your own:

I am addicted to _____	I made an enemy of _____	My rage is triggered by _____	I freeze when _____
I am obsessed with _____	I am haunted by _____	I am lazy when _____	I owe _____
I have a compulsion to _____	I am hunted by _____	I hate _____	I am on the run from _____
I am distracted by _____	I betrayed _____	I am a loose cannon	I envy _____
I am afraid of _____	My skeleton in the closet is _____	I am naive about _____	I was found guilty of _____
I lie about _____	I get nightmares about _____	I am intolerant of _____	I am in trouble with _____

Bonds

Distribute 4 Bond Points among one to four other Player Characters, and describe those bonds. A Bond may not have more than 3 points.

Gear and wealth

You have a horse and a saddle. You have a firearm. Choose one: Revolver, Rifle or Shotgun. If you have the Shoot skill, you have two firearms. If you have the Brawl or Tracking / Survival skill, you have a bad-ass knife. You have all the stuff that is necessary for your occupation, for example mining tools, medical kits, etc.

You are either Rich, Comfortable, Poor or Broke, according to you High Concept and history.

Rich: You can buy property and pay workers or henchmen.

Comfortable: You can buy an extra horse, a cart, or farming or mining tools.

Poor: A simple roof over your head and a decent meal a day.

Broke: You probably have to sleep under a tree, but you can still buy some beans and stale bread. For anything more than that, you'll have to beg or steal.

COWBOY WORLD PLAYER MOVES

Basic Moves

Use a skill

When you use a skill when you are in danger, under pressure or when the stakes are high, roll + Attribute Modifier + Skill Modifier
 If you do not have a general skill (a skill without an asterisk) you may still use that skill with a skill modifier of +0.
 If you do not have a specialist skill (a skill with an asterisk) you cannot use that skill.
On 10+ you succeed. You describe the successful outcome of your action.
On 7-9 you succeed but the GM adds one or more: Cost, danger, a worse outcome or an ugly choice.

Henchman

When you order a henchman to do something by commanding, intimidating or charming him, roll + Soul + Command, Intimidate or Charm. Fame or Infamy may be used instead of Soul + Skill if fictionally appropriate.
 If the henchman has the appropriate Skill = +3, take +1.
 If the henchman is commanded to Shoot or Brawl, the results of the roll is equal to that of the Shoot or Brawl move. Otherwise:
On 10+, the henchman is successful.
On 7-9 he is only partially successful, or causes you cost, danger, a worse outcome or an ugly choice.
On a fail the henchman fails, refuses or quits. The GM may make a hard move against the Player Character.

Read a person

When you read a person in a charged interaction, roll + Soul + Empathy
On 10+, ask the GM or the PC's player three of these questions.
On 7-9, ask the GM or the PC's player one of these questions.
 Take +1 forward when you act on the information.

- is your character telling the truth?
- what is your character really feeling?
- what does your character intend to do?
- what does your character wish I'd do?
- how can I get your character to ___?

Teamwork

When you work together as a team to help one another, each helping character rolls + Attribute + Skill.
 The highest of all the rolls counts.
On 10+, you do it faster, more efficient and with a better outcome as a group than you would have on your own.
On 7-9, you succeed but with cost, danger, a worse outcome or an ugly choice. If anybody rolled a fail, that person causes the complication.

Combat Moves

Nerve

When you face an obviously stronger, famous or infamous enemy in conflict, roll + Soul + Nerve
On 10+, you're full of bravado. Take +1 forward to escalate the conflict.
On 7-9, you're OK.
On 6-, you flinch. The conflict escalates. If you decide to stand your ground, take -1 forward.

Shoot

When you shoot at a target when you are in danger, under pressure or when the stakes are high, roll + Body + Shoot
 If the target is beyond the range of your weapon, take -1.
On 10+, you hit your target. If it is a person, you mortally wound your opponent. He is disabled and may die.
On 7-9, you hit your target. If it is a person, you wound your target, and everybody takes +1 ongoing to Body rolls against him. You are put in danger or must reload.
On a fail, you may take lethal harm from enemy fire, or the GM may make another hard move according to the fiction.
 Note that the move for player vs player action is different.

Influence

When you try to get somebody to do what you want by commanding, intimidating, or charming him, describe what you say and do, and roll + Soul + Command, Intimidate or Charm. Fame or Infamy may be used instead of Soul + Skill if fictionally appropriate.
On 10+, the person complies, unless the GM thinks it is fictionally inappropriate.
On 7-9, the person complies unless the GM thinks it is fictionally inappropriate. The person will also demand payment or a promise.
 Note that the move for player vs player action is different.

Read a situation

When you read a charged situation, roll + Mind + Awareness
On 10+, ask the GM three of these questions.
On 7-9, ask the GM one of these questions.
 You and your allies each take +1 forward when you act on the information.

- where's my best escape route / way in / way past?
- which enemy is most vulnerable to me?
- which enemy is the biggest threat?
- what should I be on the lookout for?
- what's my enemy's true position?
- who's in control here?

Investigate

When you investigate a scene
 If it is in a human settlement, roll + Mind + Investigate
 If it is in the wild, roll + Mind + Tracking / Survival
On 10+, the GM tells you three relevant facts.
On 7-9, the GM tells you one relevant fact.
 Take +1 forward when you act on the information.

Opposed moves

When you make a move in direct opposition to somebody else, subtract that character's Skill (for an NPC) or Attribute + Skill (for a PC) from your roll.

Brawl

When you brawl, roll + Body + Brawl
On 10+, you disable your opponent.
On 7-9, you wound your opponent and everybody takes +1 ongoing to Body rolls against him. You are open for attack and may take harm.
On 6-, you take harm.
 Note that the move for player vs player action is different.

Covering Fire

When you provide covering fire for someone, roll + Body + Shoot
On a 10+, you keep them from coming under concentrated fire.
On a 7-9, you keep them from coming under concentrated fire for a few moments.
On a fail, they are under concentrated fire now.

After providing covering fire, you must reload. (You lose narrative control)

Concentrated Fire

When you are under concentrated fire, take -1 to -3 to all Body rolls.

When you are under concentrated fire at Close range, use the shooter's Shoot skill as penalty for being under concentrated fire instead of 1, unless the shooter's skill is less than 1.

When you fail any Body roll while under concentrated fire, you take lethal harm from being shot.

When you fail to take adequate cover while under concentrated fire, you take lethal harm from being shot.

Gang Fight

When player characters and their allies fight against a large group of opponents in a skirmish or battle, declare your objective and Roll+ Buff

On 10+, The PC's gang/unit succeeds in its objective with very few casualties. The enemy takes heavy casualties and may rout or surrender.

On 7-9, The gang/unit succeeds in its objective with more casualties. There are also other complications.

On 6-, The gang/unit fails its objective with heavy casualties. The NPC members of the PC's gang may be routed or may surrender. NPCs or even PCs may be taken captive or hostage. Important NPCs may die.

Once an objective is resolved, declare your next objective.

Harm and Healing

Types of Harm and Harm modifiers.

Lethal harm: Gun shots, explosions, knife wounds, sabre wounds, arrow wounds, falling off a cliff etc.

Non-lethal harm: Unarmed brawling, being hit with a chair, falling off a horse etc.

Modifiers:

When the harm is caused by a **shotgun or explosion**, take +0

Harm

When the GM tells you to take lethal or non-lethal harm, roll + Body + modifiers, then record your wound on your character sheet.

On 10+, the harm is but a scratch or a bruise, but you cannot act for a moment.

On 7-9, you take a wound. Describe it and write it on your character sheet. You cannot act for a moment and take -1 ongoing to Body rolls until you are healed.

- Lethal harm heals in a few days. If wounds are not attended to, it will become septic and healing will be prolonged.
- Non-lethal harm heals after a short rest. (About an hour.)

On 6-, you are disabled and cannot act at all.

• Lethal harm: You are mortally wounded and will probably die, the GM will decide when.

- Non lethal harm heals after a long rest. (About three hours to a day.)

When the harm is caused by a **revolver or rifle**, take +1

When the harm is caused by **unarmed brawling**, take +1

When the harm is caused by **an arrow or a blade**, take +2

When the harm is caused by **something else**, the GM will add a modifier according to the cause.

Heal

When you heal somebody who is mortally wounded, roll + Mind + Medical

When an NPC heals you when you are mortally wounded, roll + [The healer's skill. The GM decides, it can range from -1 to 3]

On 10+, the mortal wound becomes a wound that will heal in a few days. Describe it and write it on the patient's character sheet. The patient takes -1 to all Body rolls until it is healed.

On 7-9, the mortal wound becomes a permanent debility. Describe it and write it on the patient's sheet. The patient's Body modifier is permanently decreased by 1.

The player may pay 5 Grit to recover from a permanent debility.

On 6-, the patient dies.

Extra moves

When the session starts, review your Beliefs, Goals and Bonds, and take Grit tokens equal to your Grit in hand.

When you play one of your **Character Aspects for a better outcome**, explain why it is fictionally appropriate, pay 1 Grit and take +1 to a roll after it is rolled.

When the GM tells you to play one of your **Character Aspects for a worse outcome and he explains why it is fictionally appropriate**, take -1 to a roll after it is rolled. Alternatively pay 1 Grit to ignore the GM.

When you fail a roll after all modifiers are added, take 1 Grit.

When you achieve your Goal, take 1 Grit and write a new goal.

When you resolve a bond with another character, take 1 Grit and write a new bond with that person.

When you get better at what you do, pay 5 Grit to

- Buy a new general skill with a +1 modifier.
- Buy a new specialist skill with a +0 modifier.
- Add +1 to an existing skill to the maximum of 2.
- Permanently overcome your character's Issue, if the fiction allows it. At some stage you will get a new Issue, as the fiction dictates.
- Permanently change the Archetype or Twist of your character's High Concept.

When you recover from a permanent Body debility, pay 5 Grit.

When the session ends, review your Beliefs, Goals and Bonds, and write down your Grit in hand equal to your amount of Grit tokens. Write a short session report on the back of your Character Sheet.

Player vs Player Moves

Influence (PvP)

When you try to get another Player Character to do what you want by commanding, intimidating or charming him, roll + Soul + the appropriate Skill. Subtract the target character's Soul + Nerve.

You may choose to roll + Bond instead, if it is fictionally appropriate.

On 10+, if the target character's player chooses to comply, he takes 1 Grit.

On 7-9, if the target character's player chooses to comply and demands payment or a promise, he takes 1 Grit.

On 6-, If the target character's player refuses, he takes 1 Grit. The GM makes a hard move against the active player as the fiction demands.

Brawl (PvP)

When you brawl with another player character, roll + Body + Brawl.

Subtract the target character's Body + Brawl.

On 10+, you harm the target character (who rolls for harm) and retain narrative control.

On 7-9, you harm the target character (who rolls for harm), but the target player may choose to harm you or to introduce some other complication. The GM has to agree on the complication. Narrative control then passes to the target player.

On 6-, you fail to harm the target character, and the target player may choose to harm you or to make another hard move against you. The GM has to approve this move. Narrative control then passes to the target player.

Only the player with narrative control rolls dice.

Shoot (PvP)

When you shoot at another player character, roll + Body + Shoot

Subtract the target character's Body + Shoot if he shoots back at you.

On 10+, you harm the target character (who rolls for harm) and retain narrative control.

On 7-9, you harm the target character (who rolls for harm), but the target player may choose to harm you (if he is in a position to shoot back) or to introduce some other complication. The GM has to agree on the complication.

Narrative control then passes to the target player.

On 6-, you miss, and the target player who may choose to harm you (if he is in a position to shoot back) or to make another hard move against you. The GM has to approve this move. Narrative control then passes to the target player.

Only the player with narrative control rolls dice.

COWBOY WORLD WEIRD

Name:	Age:
Look:	Gender:

High Concept	Attributes	Wounds <small>(Lethal or Non-Lethal)</small>	Earned
Archetype:	Body:	-1	Grit:
Twist:	Mind:	-1	Fame:
History:	Soul:	-1	Infamy:
		Permanent Debility	Sanity:
Group theme:		-1	Weird level:

Starting skills	Points	+ Attr	I am good (or bad) at this because...
	+2		
	+2		
	+1		
	+1		
	+1		
	-1		
	-1		

New Skills	Points	+ Attr	I am good at this because...

Beliefs, Goals and Issues

I believe that:

Therefore my goal is to:

My issue is:

Bonds: Name	Points	My bonds with them are:

Gear and Wealth

Gear:

Wealth:

Player Moves

- Use a skill:** Roll + Attribute + Skill. 10+: Success. 7-9: Add complications.
- Influence:** Roll + Soul + Command or Intimidate or Charm. Or (For PVP) Roll + Bonds. Or (For NPC's) Roll + Fame or Infamy. 7-9: Demand payment or a promise.
- Henchman:** Roll + Soul + Command, Intimidate or Charm. Or Roll + Fame or Infamy. If the henchman has the appropriate skill +3; take +1.
- Read a situation:** Roll + Mind + Awareness. 10+: Ask 3 questions. 7-9: Ask 1 question.
- Read a person:** Roll + Soul + Empathy. 10+: Ask 3 questions. 7-9: Ask 1 question.
- Investigate:** Roll + Mind + Investigate 10+ Learn 3 facts. 7-9: Learn 1 fact.
- Teamwork:** Everybody participating rolls + Attribute + Skill. The highest roll counts.
- Nerve:** Roll + Soul + Nerve. 10+: Take +1 forward. 6-: Take -1 forward.
- Brawl:** Roll + Body + Brawl or Plasma Bladesmanship. 10+: Disable. 7-9: Wound. (Take +1 on all body rolls against target)
- Shoot:** Roll + Body + Shoot. 10+: Disable. 7-9: Wound. (Take +1 on all body rolls against target)
- Covering fire:** Roll + Body + Shoot. 10+: They do not come under concentrated fire. 7-9: They do not come under concentrated fire for a short while. 6-: They are under concentrated fire now.
- Concentrated fire:** Take -1 to -3 to all Body rolls.
- Gang fight:** Roll + Gang Buff. 10+: Victory with few casualties. 7-9: More casualties. 6-: Defeat, major casualties.
- Harm:** Roll + Body + Harm modifier. 10+ Lose narrative control. 7-9: Wounded (-1 to all body rolls) 6-: Disabled.
- Heal:** Roll + Body + Mind + Medical (PC) or Roll + medical skill (NPC) 10+: Mortal wound becomes a wound. 7-9: Mortal wound becomes a debility. 6-: Patient dies.
- Going Weird:** Roll + Soul + Weird. Subtract the difference between the level you go weird at and your level from the roll. 10+: Success, disable target. 7-9: Complications, wound target. 6-: Roll for Sanity.
- Prayer:** When it works, roll+3 for healing, OR pay 1 Grit to change any roll to 10+, OR something beneficial happens.

Weird Moves

Going Weird

When you go Weird, roll + Soul + Weird

If you attempt to go Weird at a level higher than yours, subtract the difference between the level you want to go Weird at and your Weird level from your roll. So if you are level 1 and attempt to go Weird at level 3, you have a -2 penalty. (Using Weird at a level lower than your own does not make it easier.) Subtract the Weird skill (or Soul + Weird for a PC) of an opposing Weird user from your roll if appropriate.

On 10+, you are successful. If you cause harm, you disable the target.

On 7-9, the GM adds cost, danger, a worse outcome, or an ugly choice. If you cause harm, the target is wounded and everybody takes +1 on all body rolls against it.

On 6-, the GM makes a Hard Move. In addition, if you went Weird at level 3 or more, roll for Sanity and subtract the Horror rating of the level you went Weird at from your roll.

Level	Cause Harm using Weird	Weird mind stuff
1		Communicate with a raven.
2	A creature smaller than you. Harm modifier: +2	Influence a creature with human intelligence. Feel the presence of Weird users you share a Bond with. Sense their emotions.
3 Horror +0	A creature your own size. Harm modifier: +2	Feel the presence of Weird users or Weird creatures you do not share a Bond with. Sense their emotions. See short but vague visions of the past, present or future.
4 Horror +0	A creature double your size, Harm modifier: +2	Communicate telepathically with Weird users you share a Bond with.
5 Horror +1	A creature the size of a horse. Harm modifier: +1	Read the mind of a creature with human intelligence against their will. Communicate telepathically with Weird users or Weird creatures you do not share a Bond with. See short visions of the past, present or future.
6 Horror +2	A creature the size of a wagon. Harm modifier: +1	Influence a creature with superhuman intelligence. Read the minds of Weird users or Weird creatures you do not have a Bond with, against their will.
7 Horror +3	A creature the size of a locomotive. Harm modifier: 0	See short but detailed visions of the past, present or future.

Ritual

When you perform a ritual to do something massively weird the GM will tell you what you need in terms of time (minutes to weeks) and resources (mundane or weird), depending on the desired effect. The effect only happens after all the GM's conditions have been met and you **Roll to go Weird at at least level 5**. The GM decides the level.

On 10+, you succeed.

On 7-9, you need more time and resources, or the GM adds danger, a worse outcome, or an ugly choice. The effect only happens after all the GM's additional conditions have been met.

On 6-, The GM makes a Hard Move. In addition, roll for Sanity and subtract the Horror rating of the level you went Weird at.

Sanity

All Player Characters start with 3 Sanity.

When you are confronted with horrifying Weird stuff, when someone else loses sanity, or when you fail a Weird roll at level 3 or higher, roll + Soul + Nerve. Subtract the Horror rating of the monster that triggered the move or the level you went Weird at from the roll.

On 10+, you are full of bravado, take +1 forward.

On 7-9, you are OK

On 6-, things happen to you according to your Sanity. Then lose 1 Sanity.

3 Sanity: You experience irrational terror. If you choose to stand your ground, take -1 ongoing to all rolls as long as the situation lasts.

2 Sanity: You are disabled by abysmal despair, paranoia and hallucinations. You may recover once the situation has been resolved and you have rested for an hour or so.

1 Sanity: You feel an overwhelming sense of allegiance to the horror you are facing, and experience paranoia against your friends and allies. The GM uses your character as an NPC for his own nefarious purposes for one move only to attack or thwart the other Player Characters, then you are disabled. You may recover once the situation has been resolved and you have rested for a few hours.

0 Sanity: You go insane and are removed from the game. The GM may use you as a monster, if she so chooses.

To recover all lost Sanity, perform some act of redemption or purification and pay 5 Grit.

Prayer

When you pray, the GM chooses one

- Nothing happens (for now).

- The GM allows you to use +3 instead of a PC's Mind + Medical or an NPC healer's skill when somebody is healed.

- The GM allows you to pay 1 Grit to change any die roll to a 10+ result.

- The GM causes something to happen providentially that helps the PC's in their righteous cause. Examples: It starts raining, the cavalry arrives, there is a tree growing out of the side of the cliff or a wagon load of hay that breaks your fall, etc.

Then, if it worked, permanently decrease your Weird skill by 1.

Gadgets

When you build a new gadget, describe its function. The GM will tell you if it is feasible, and how much time, money and other resources you must spend. Then roll + Mind + Engineering

On 10+, the gadget works more or less as planned.

On 7-9, it does not work quite as planned, and tends to break down.