

Materials

- 3 white dice per player, representing Discipline.
- 6 black dice per player, representing Exhaustion.
- 8 purple dice per player, representing Madness.
- 20 red dice, representing Pain.
- 20 coins or tokens, representing Hope and Despair.
- Optionally, 3 bowls; preferably one light, one dark, and one other.
- 1 protagonist sheet per player.
- Scratch paper and pencils.

Character Creation

Characters should always be generated as a group so that players can bounce ideas off one another and the GM. In this way, players can make sure their concepts don't overlap too much, and that they are all on the same page with regards to the feel of the game and the stories they want to tell.

- Go over the protagonist sheet and answer each of the questions.
- Set Discipline to 3.
- Cross out 3 Response boxes, leaving 3 unmarked. These represent how the character will react to being pushed to the breaking point.
- Choose an Exhaustion Talent. This is a skill or ability that a normal human being can have, that the character will develop to a superhuman level.
- Choose a Madness Talent. This is an impossible ability the character will discover is not impossible for them.

Conflict Resolution

Dice are only rolled when there is a meaningful conflict to be resolved. Dice are always rolled when there is a meaningful conflict to be resolved.

The GM assigns Pain dice equivalent to the obstacle or opponent the player is contesting against. 2-4 Pain for low risk, 5-7 Pain for medium risk, 8-12 Pain for high risk.

The player always rolls their Discipline, plus any accrued Exhaustion and Madness dice. *Before rolling the player may choose to add 1 to their accrued Exhaustion. They may also choose to add up to 6 Madness dice to their pool for this roll only.*

Each die that comes up 1-3 represents a Success. The side with the most Successes wins the conflict. However, the highest untied die of any color determines what aspect "dominates" the scene, be it Discipline, Exhaustion, Madness, or Pain.

Helping: One or more players may choose to help another by rolling dice equal to their Discipline. These contribute to the main character's total successes, but do not count towards Discipline dominating the scene. Furthermore, every character that helps with the conflict is subject to the results. Whatever aspect dominates the scene applies to all characters involved, as do the stakes of the conflict when appropriate. Helping another can be useful, but it carries great risk.

If Discipline dominates: the situation remains relatively controlled, the character acts in a skilled, competent manner.

The player may decrease their current Exhaustion by 1, OR remove a check from one Response.

If Exhaustion dominates: the events are extremely taxing on the characters involved, draining them of resources, time, energy, or will.

The player MUST increase their current Exhaustion by 1, even if they already voluntarily increased it for this roll.

Crashing: If the character's Exhaustion rises to 6 or more, the character crashes. They will collapse into unconsciousness by the end of the scene, if not sooner. A character who has crashed is extremely vulnerable, and their sleeping mind is like a beacon to the Nightmares. Crashing is very, very bad, and without protection, usually results in capture, if not madness or death, and probably all three in due course. *A character who crashes (or sleeps voluntarily) clears out all their checked Responses, reduces their accumulated Exhaustion to zero, and remains asleep for at least 24 hours. When they wake, they will not have access to their Talents, nor may they roll more than 1 Discipline die, until they have been awake at least as long as they slept.*

If Madness dominates: things get more chaotic, bizarre, and out of hand. The character's mental and emotional stability become jeopardized. Reality may very well start to pull at the seams.

The player MUST check off one of their available Responses, and narrate the character's reaction accordingly.

Snapping: If the character has no more Responses available, the character has been pushed past the breaking point and immediately snaps. They will suffer a psychotic break that lasts at least the remainder of the scene, although the effects will probably linger well after.

A character who snaps clears out all their checked Responses, and replaces one Discipline die with one permanent Madness die.

Succumbing: A character who snaps enough times to replace all their Discipline with Madness has succumbed to the forces of the Mad City and becomes a Nightmare themselves- a fate worse than death. *A character that has succumbed is no longer available as a PC. The character becomes a Nightmare, with Pain dice equivalent to their total dice pool at the time of their transformation, and powers most likely based on the Talents and drives the possessed as a human being.*

If Pain dominates: Things go from bad to worse. Even if the character succeeds in what they set out to do, there will be a heavy price for it; and if they failed, they may as well have tried putting out a kitchen fire with lighter fluid.

The player must add 1 Despair to the GM's pool.

If the Player Wins: The character has accomplished the goal or won the stakes set for the conflict, whether it be overcoming an obstacle, defeating a foe, convincing an ally, or simply navigating the environs of the Mad City safely.

If the GM Wins: The character has failed to accomplish their goal, or lost the stakes set for the conflict. They have been obstructed, led astray, defeated, or simply exhausted their resources.

The GM may, at their option, either increase the character's Exhaustion by 1, or check off one of their Responses. The GM may NOT, however, inflict a consequence that has already occurred as a result of this conflict (IE if the character already gained Exhaustion, the GM may not give them another).

Despair and Hope

Whenever Pain dominates a scene, the GM gains a token of Despair. At any time, the GM may spend Despair to make the PCs lives miserable, in the following way:

- After dice have been rolled in a conflict, the GM may spend 1 Despair to add a “6” result to any pool in play, which may change the aspect that dominates the scene. The GM may spend as many Despair in this way as they wish during a single conflict.
- Similarly, the GM may spend 1 Despair to REMOVE a “6” result from any pool in play.
 - The GM may not alter a pool that is not in play, IE if the player rolled no Madness dice, the GM may not add a “6” in Madness.
 - If the GM uses Despair to cause Pain to dominate the scene, they do NOT gain Despair at the end of the scene.
- **At the END of the scene, after the conflict has been resolved, the GM must give the players Hope equal to the amount of Despair they spent during the conflict.**

The GM’s pool of Despair can wreak havoc on the poor character’s lives, but not without pouring into the players’ shared pool of Hope. At any time, any player may spend Hope from the collective pool in the following way:

- A player whose character is not currently involved in a conflict may spend 1 Hope to reduce their current Exhaustion by 1, as long as the GM agrees the character has a chance to rest. The player should narrate an appropriate moment of respite from the whirlwind of events that allows them to catch their breath.
- Alternatively, the player may uncheck one of their Responses.
- A player who has accrued permanent Madness may spend (5 – Discipline) to restore one permanent Madness back to Discipline. This requires lengthy rest or some other means of psychological balancing, which is difficult to find in the Mad City.
- After the dice have been rolled in a conflict, the player may spend 1 Hope to add a “1” to their Discipline pool, adding a success to their total. They may spend as many Hope as they wish during a single conflict, but remember, it’s a shared pool!
- **Spent Hope is gone, and does not replenish until the GM spends Despair.**

Talents

Some regular folk, or “Sleepers”, are quite capable, and may have one or more highly developed skills. But whether due to having more time to train, because they are unusually focused, or because they have somehow broken the “rules”, the Awake can develop at least one “talent” to a preternatural degree. Those who survive long enough discover they can even do things that should be impossible. When coming up with Talents, players should discuss their ideas with the group to make sure that they are suitable for the feel of the game and are not overlapping too much with other players’ concepts.

Exhaustion Talent: An ability that is fairly mundane in nature, something anybody could have a natural aptitude for or excel at with practice. Each character has one that being Awake has allowed them to transcend the normal threshold of. However, this transcendence is linked to the character’s Exhaustion. The more tired they are, the more preternatural their level of ability becomes. Exhaustion Talents can be used in two ways:

Minor Use: A player can invoke a minor use of their character’s Exhaustion Talent as long as the character has at least one Exhaustion. Since players can opt to increase their Exhaustion before a rolling in a conflict, this option is generally always available.

A character making minor use of their Exhaustion Talent who rolls less successes than their current Exhaustion may instead use their current Exhaustion as the number of successes for that roll. IE, if a character has 3 current Exhaustion and rolls 1 success while making minor use of their Exhaustion Talent, they may increase their successes to 3. This does not affect what aspect dominates the scene.

Major Use: A player may invoke a major use of their character’s Exhaustion Talent by voluntarily increasing their current Exhaustion by 1 (although they do not have to invoke the Talent in order to do this).

A character making major use of their Exhaustion Talent may add their current Exhaustion to the number of successes they roll in a conflict. IE, if a character has 3 current Exhaustion and invokes a major use of their Exhaustion Talent, they would add 1 to their current Exhaustion immediately, bringing it to 4. If they then roll 2 successes, they would add their current Exhaustion, bringing their successes to 6. If they had rolled no successes, they would still add their current Exhaustion, giving them 4 successes. Thus, their current Exhaustion is still the minimum number of successes they can obtain, as with a minor use. Similarly, this does not affect what aspect dominates the scene.

Madness Talent: This is an ability or power that should be flatly impossible; something that would be considered supernatural, be it magic, a psychic ability, a super-power, or just bending (or breaking) the laws of reality. A Madness Talent should be relatively specific. Players should definitely consult with each other and the GM to make sure Madness Talents are appropriate.

A player must roll at least one Madness die in order to invoke a Madness Talent. The GM may require a certain minimum number of Madness dice required, depending on the relative potency or difficulty of what the player wants to do. If the action is not already opposed, the GM may roll Pain dice they feel appropriately reflects the difficulty or risk associated with the action.

CONFLICT SUMMARY

- 1) **Exhaustion:** Once per roll, a player may voluntarily increase their Exhaustion by 1 before rolling. *This may or may not be in conjunction with a Major Use of their Exhaustion Talent.*
- 2) **Madness:** Before rolling, a player may choose to include from 1 – 6 Madness dice. *This may or may not be in conjunction with an invocation of their Madness Talent.*
- 3) **Talents:** The player may invoke a minor or major use of their Exhaustion Talent, and/or they may invoke their Madness Talent.
- 4) **Helping:** Before rolling, any player whose character is in a position to do so may declare that they are helping the character directly involved in the conflict. *This player or players will roll only their Discipline dice, which will contribute to successes, but not for determining what aspect dominates.*
- 5) **Pain:** The GM determines the number of Pain dice they will be rolling according to the difficulty or risk associated with the conflict, or the strength of the opposition to the character's goal.
- 6) **Roll:** Everyone rolls the appropriate dice.
- 7) **Hope:** Any player may spend one or more Hope from the collective pool to add a result of 1 to their Discipline pool. *This does affect what aspect dominates the scene.*
- 8) **Despair:** The GM may spend one or more Despair from their pool to add a result of 6 to one or more aspects. *This does affect what aspect dominates the scene.*
- 9) **Results:** Once Hope and Despair have been applied, dice that show a result of 1, 2, or 3 are considered successes.
 - a. **If the GM wins:** The character fails at whatever they were attempting. *The GM may check off one of the character's Responses, or if their Exhaustion has not already increased during this conflict, the GM may increase it by 1.*
 - b. **If the Player wins:** The character succeeds at whatever they were attempting.
- 10) **Dominance:** The pool (white for Discipline, black for Exhaustion, purple for Madness, red for Pain) that has the highest untied value determines what aspect dominates the scene.
 - a. **If Discipline dominates:**
 - i. The situation remains relatively stable, the character acts reasonably and with confidence and competence.
 - ii. The player may remove a checked Response, or decrease their Exhaustion by 1.
 - b. **If Exhaustion dominates:**
 - i. The situation taxes the character's mental, physical, emotional, or material resources in some way.
 - ii. The player must increase the character's Exhaustion by 1, even if they voluntarily increased it before rolling.
 - c. **If Madness dominates:**
 - i. The situation becomes more chaotic. Reality may begin to distort or unravel.
 - ii. The player must check off one of their Responses and narrate the character responding accordingly.
 - d. **If Pain dominates:**
 - i. The situation exacts a price from the character, whether they succeeded or not.
 - ii. The GM adds one Despair to their pool.
- 11) **Crashing:** If the character's Exhaustion has increased to 6 or more, the character will crash by the end of the scene, if not immediately.
- 12) **Snapping:** If the character has checked off all their Responses, the character will snap by the end of the scene, if not immediately.
 - a. The player immediately clears all their Responses.
 - b. The player changes one Discipline into Madness.
- 13) **Succumbing:** If the character has changed all their Discipline to Madness, they will succumb by the end of the scene, if not immediately.
 - a. The character becomes a Nightmare with Pain equal to their total dice pool at the time they succumbed; perhaps with powers and motivations based on those they had as Awake.
 - b. The character passes out of the player's control and becomes an NPC.