

MADISON

- CHAPTER TWO -
The
Basics



HERE'S THE DEAL

So, this game is built on a free core system called Fate (www.faterpg.com). It seems a good choice—flexible, dramatic, fairly popular, FREE.

Rather than reinvent the wheel, we figured we'd just modify the hell out of it for our purposes.

Anyway, it's an RPG, and if you're reading this, you probably already have at least a vague idea of what that means. (If you don't, make sure you read the introduction to this book.)

Onward!

THINGS YOU SHOULD HAVE

In addition to these rules, you'll need a few supplies to play the game. Here's a list of mandatory items, as well as some recommended ones.

You'll need:

- ◆ Four Fudge dice for each player and the **game master** (GM). If you don't have Fudge dice, see the retailer page at Grey Ghost Games (www.fudgerpg.com) or your local or online RPG dice supplier for a pack. (Or see "What Are Fudge Dice?" on this page.)
- ◆ Some copies of the character and city worksheets (found in the back of this book or downloaded from our site at www.dresdenfilesrpg.com) or at least blank paper for taking notes during city and character creation.
- ◆ Things to write with.
- ◆ Between two to six friends (the **players**).

You'll find useful:

- ◆ A set of poker chips or glass beads (to use as fate points).
- ◆ **Index cards** to pass along information during character creation, to make notes on things that come up in play, and to use in myriad other ways.
- ◆ Snacks.

Index cards are just crazy useful at the game table. We end up using them for all kinds of stuff.

DEALING WITH THE DICE

In this game, you use the dice quite a bit to figure out what happens as you play. Whenever there's uncertainty regarding an outcome, you don't just make up what happens—you use the dice to bring that element of chance to how things are going to turn out. The dice allow for unexpected successes and interesting failures.

WHAT ARE FUDGE DICE?

Fudge dice are six-sided dice that have different markings from normal dice—instead of numbers or dots, they have two sides marked with a **+**, two sides marked with a **-**, and two sides that are blank (**■**). If you find yourself without Fudge dice or don't want to purchase them, you can roll 4 normal six-sided dice. Any die showing a 1 or 2 is treated as **-**, any die showing a 3 or 4 is treated as a **■**, and any die showing a 5 or 6 is treated as **+**.

I CAN USE DICE I ALREADY HAVE? WELL, GOOD THEN.

THE LADDER

Most things in the system are rated according to the following **ladder** (when we say "the ladder" throughout this book, this is what we mean):

THE LADDER	
+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Average
0	Mediocre
-1	Poor
-2	Terrible

Usually, the adjectives are used to describe things—someone might be a Good Driver or Average Scholar. The adjectives and numbers are interchangeable, so if you're more comfortable with numbers, it is equally valid to say Drive: +3 or Scholarship: +1. For clarity, it might be

I HAVE TO BUY SPECIAL DICE FOR THIS GAME? STARS AND STONES, BILLY - I ALREADY HAVE A CROWN ROYAL BAG FULL OF "SPECIAL DICE."

Oh, come on, Harry. What gamer doesn't want an excuse to buy new dice?



best to use both, as in Good (+3) Drive or Average (+1) Scholarship.

On this scale, Average represents the minimum level of capability for someone who does something regularly, but not exceptionally. Most people are between Average and Good at the things they do for a living—like Investigation for a private eye—and are Mediocre at most other things. It is only when they are driven to excel that they surpass those limits.

Player characters (PCs) push the boundaries of what “normal” people are capable of and, as such, they tend to be Great or Superb at whatever their central passion is. Each PC is, in a sense, the protagonist in his own story; this means that the heroes of THE DRESDEN FILES RPG are genuinely exceptional individuals and may well be recognized as such.

AWW, THANKS BILLY. IT'S NICE TO KNOW I AM EXCEPTIONAL!

ROLLING THE DICE

You will roll four Fudge dice (abbreviated as 4dF) to generate a result between -4 and 4. When reading the dice, a **+** equals +1, a **-** equals -1 and a **■** (the blank side) equals 0. Some example dice totals:

-+-- -2
 +--- +1
 +-+- 0

The total of the dice is then added to an appropriate skill to get a result. This result can be referred to as the **effort** made, but sometimes it's just “the result.”

Example: Harry Dresden is a Fair (+2) athlete. He rolls the dice to jump over a low wall and he rolls **---+** (-1) for a total result of +1. Checking the ladder, that's an Average (+1) effort.

ROLLING BEYOND THE LADDER

On occasion, you'll end up rolling for a high or low skill, and getting a result that puts you past the ladder—higher than Legendary (+8) or lower than Terrible (-2). When that happens, just use the number that you came up with. (If you're feeling creative, come up with your own adjective for this dramatic roll!) This happens a little more often when you get bonuses due to **aspects**, which you'll learn about on page 18.

DIFFICULTY

When you roll for a result, you are trying to meet or exceed a target value, which is the **difficulty** for the roll. The difficulty indicates how hard it is to do something. Difficulties are measured on the same ladder as everything else. For instance, it might be a Mediocre (+0) difficulty to jumpstart a car, but a Good (+3) difficulty to repair that same car after a serious breakdown. Guidelines for setting difficulties are found in *Running the Game*, page 310.

The difference between the difficulty and the **effort** (the result of the roll) is the magnitude of the **effect**, which is measured in **shifts**. Shifts are used to determine the potency of a character's efforts and to govern the resolution of complex actions. There's no such thing as a negative shift—any roll that does not reach the difficulty is simply considered a failure (although failing the roll by a great deal might influence how the group describes the result).

Example: If Harry is rolling to jump over that wall against a difficulty of Fair (+2) and he rolls a Great (+4) result, he succeeds by two, so he generates two shifts. If he rolls Mediocre (+0), then he fails—he missed the target of Fair by two (but he doesn't generate negative shifts). If he rolls exactly Fair (+2), then he succeeds as well, but with no shifts.

WHAT'S ON YOUR CHARACTER SHEET

A character sheet is composed of four basic elements—your **skills**, your **aspects**, your **stunts**, and your **supernatural powers**. These represent your character's resources for solving problems, winning conflicts, and impacting the story during the game.

Skills are a basic measure of what your character can do, covering things like perceptiveness, physical prowess, social and mental capacity, and professional training. Aspects are a set of descriptive phrases that help you out (or make things complicated!) when something that happens in the story is particularly relevant to your character. Stunts expand the function of skills to cover a more specialized niche or allow you to do better in a specific circumstance. Powers cover a wide range of abilities outside the reach of normal mortals and have numerous benefits.

Think of a shift as something you use to “shift” the outcome in your favor.

SORT OF LIKE MOVING ENERGY FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER WITH MAGIC, THEN! SEEKOMANCY!

If you're really anti-Fudge dice, you can roll 2 different color six-sided dice and subtract one from the other. That gets you a range of -5 to +5 and a wilder, more random curve—but it's just as valid so long as everyone does it.

DON'T CROSS THE STREAMS!



For instance, in the earlier examples, Harry - you were using your Athletics skill to jump the wall.

SKILLS

Characters have **skills**, like Drive and Guns, which are rated on the ladder (page 16). When you roll the dice, you are usually rolling based on your character's skill.

Nearly every action that your character might undertake is covered by his skills. If he doesn't have a skill on his sheet, assume that it defaults to Mediocre (+0).

Skills are covered in greater detail in their own chapter, beginning on page 120.

ASPECTS

Characters also have a set of traits called **aspects**. Aspects cover a wide range of elements and should collectively paint a picture of who the character is, what he's connected to, and what's important to him (in contrast to the "what he can do" of skills). Aspects can be relationships, beliefs, catchphrases, descriptors, items, or pretty much anything else that paints a picture of the character.

Some possible aspects include:

- ◆ TO SERVE AND PROTECT
- ◆ SUCKER FOR A PRETTY FACE
- ◆ MY GRANDPA'S TRUSTY SIX-SHOOTER
- ◆ MONEY-COLORED EYES
- ◆ WHITE COUNCIL WIZARD
- ◆ STUBBORN AS A MULE
- ◆ TRAINED BY TERA WEST

When one of your aspects applies to a situation, you can **invoke the aspect** to get a bonus by spending a fate point (see below). In this capacity, the aspect makes the character *better* at whatever he's doing, because the aspect in some way applies to the situation (such as invoking TO SERVE AND PROTECT when acting in the interests of the Law).

An aspect can also gain you more fate points, by bringing complications and troubling circumstances into your character's life. Whenever your character ends up in a situation where one of his aspects could cause him trouble (such as STUBBORN when he's trying to be diplomatic), you can mention it to the GM in the same way you mention an aspect that might help you. Alternately, the GM may initiate this event if one of your aspects seems particularly apt. Either way, this is **compelling an aspect**, and it limits your character's choices in some way. If the GM initiates or agrees to compel the aspect, you may get one or more fate points, depending on how it plays out.

Aspects are a much bigger topic than we can get into in this overview. For a lot of groups, aspects make up the core of the game. We go into more detail on invoking and compelling, along with what makes a good aspect, in *Aspects*, starting on page 98.

As for fate points, we'll talk more about those shortly.

MORTAL STUNTS

Stunts are the special tricks your character has up his sleeves which allow him to stretch or break the skill rules. Typically, they either give a bonus to a specific use of a skill or broaden a skill to encompass some other way of using it. Some help you take a hit in a fight or other things like that.

Stunts have very specific uses and rules, which are detailed more fully in *Mortal Stunts*, starting on page 146. Though not all characters will have stunts, many will.



Example: John Marcone has the *Trick Shot Artist* stunt. This means that when he's taking a trick shot at something (not a person), like shooting the rope holding a chandelier, he receives a +2 bonus on his roll.

SUPERNATURAL POWERS

Powers are a lot like stunts, in that they help characters stretch or break the rules. But they go beyond how to use a skill and into using your supernatural nature. Anything a mortal can't just do, even with a lot of training—wield magic, lift with inhuman strength or run with inhuman speed, recover from damage that would cripple a mortal, etc.—is due to a power.

Like stunts, powers have very specific uses and rules, which are detailed more fully in *Supernatural Powers*, starting on page 158. All supernatural characters have powers—that's what makes them supernatural.

Example: Thomas Raith gains many powers as a *White Court* vampire, such as *Incite Emotion*. This allows Thomas to rouse strong feelings of lust in a target, even from a distance.

FATE POINTS

The other, and potentially most important, resource that you have during a game is a currency called **fate points** (FP). Fate points are central to the function of the game system; they are basically a measure of how much power you have to influence the story in favor of your character. When you spend fate points, you take a little bit of control over the game, either by giving your character bonuses when you feel he needs them, or by taking over a small part of the story. To earn fate points, you allow your character's aspects to create complications for him.

Each player begins the first session of the game with a number of fate points equal to his character's refresh level (page 68). You'll refill your total number of fate points back to that level each time a refresh occurs (page 20). Fate points are best represented by some non-edible token, such as glass beads or poker chips. (Previous experiments with small edible candies have left players strapped for points!)

LOOK, I'M SORRY, OKAY? NO ONE TOLD ME THAT'S WHAT THE JELLYBEANS WERE FOR!

You may, at any point, spend a fate point to gain a bonus, invoke an aspect, make a declaration, or fuel a stunt.

Gain a Bonus: A fate point can be spent to add 1 to any roll of the dice or to improve any effort (such as an attack or defense) by 1. In practice, this is the *least* potent way to use a fate point—you're usually much better off using one of the other applications discussed below.

Invoke an Aspect: Aspects are those things that *really* describe a character and his place in the story. When you have an aspect that's applicable to a situation, it can be invoked to grant a bonus. After you roll the dice, you may pick one of your aspects and describe how it applies to this situation. If the GM agrees that it's appropriate, you may spend a fate point and do one of the following:

- ♦ Reroll *all* the dice, using the new result, or
- ♦ Add two (+2) to the final die roll (after any rerolls have been done).

You may do this multiple times for a single situation, so long as you have multiple aspects that are applicable. You cannot use the same aspect more than once on the same skill use, though you may use the same aspect on several different rolls throughout a scene, at the cost of one fate point per use.

Example: Maya McKenzie has the aspects *QUIET AS A MOUSE*, *I REMEMBER WHERE I CAME FROM*, and *UNCOMMON SENSE*. She's just grabbed a forbidden book and is trying to sprint out of a sorcerer's lair before the dark spellcaster's imminent return.

Maya has *Good Stealth*, but she rolls terribly $\blacksquare\blacksquare\blacksquare\blacksquare$ (–3) for a result of *Mediocre* (Good – 3), which is far from good enough. Her player, Amanda, points out that Maya's trying to be *QUIET AS A MOUSE*. The GM thinks that's fine, so Amanda spends a fate point to reroll the dice. She does a little better: $\blacksquare\blacksquare\blacksquare\blacksquare$ (–1) for a result of *Fair* (Good – 1).

Still, she's worried it's not quite good enough, so she suggests that, since Maya *REMEMBERS WHERE SHE CAME FROM*, she's been in similar scrapes before... The GM thinks that Maya's street experience is not going to be much use when trying to evade a sorcerer. But she might be able to change her description of what she's doing to make the aspect fit better. Is that what she'd like to do?

The Basics

Amanda decides to stick with the original plan and notes that with Maya's UNCOMMON SENSE she can identify the best moment to scurry over and grab the book. The GM likes the creative application of the aspect, so Amanda spends another fate point to get an additional +2 on the roll, bringing it up from Fair to Great, which is enough to let her quietly escape the sorcerer's lair with only seconds to spare!

Scenes, other characters, locations, and other things of dramatic importance can have aspects. Sometimes they're obvious, and sometimes they're less so. You can spend a fate point to invoke an aspect which is not on your own character sheet, if you know what the aspect is. This is covered in greater detail in Aspects on page 105.

As a rule of thumb, invoking someone or something else's aspects requires a little more justification than invoking one of your own aspects. For scene aspects, it should be some way to really bring in the visual image or the dramatic theme that the aspect suggests. For aspects on opponents, you need to know about the aspect in the first place, and then play to it.

Example: Biff Abernathy is fighting some thugs in an old warehouse. The scene has the aspects DARK, CRAMPED, and WAREHOUSE. What's more, Biff has fought these guys before and knows that they're pretty cocky, so his player, Fred, figures that they have an aspect like OVERCONFIDENT. When Biff jumps the first one, he spends 2 FP to invoke the DARK aspect of the warehouse and the OVERCONFIDENT aspect of the thug. Fred describes the thugs as being so sure of themselves that they're not being as cautious as they could be, so when Biff drops out of the shadows to cold cock one of them, it comes as a complete surprise. The GM likes the visual, and while the thugs technically have COCKY rather than OVERCONFIDENT on their sheets, she thinks that's close enough, so she approves. One of the fate points is spent normally and one goes to the thug, though Biff may be hitting him hard enough that he'll never get the chance to use it.

Use certain Stunts and Powers: Some stunts and powers have particularly potent effects and require spending a fate point when used; this will be made clear in the description. See *Mortal Stunts*, page 146, and *Supernatural Powers*, page 158, for more.

Make a Declaration: Declarations are usually handled with a skill roll (page 116), but in some cases you may simply lay down a fate point and declare something. If the GM accepts the fate point, it will be true. This gives you the ability to create things in a story that would usually be under the GM's purview. Typically, these things can't be used to drastically change the plot or win a scene.

Declaring "Doctor Keiser drops dead of a heart attack" is not only likely to be rejected by the GM, it wouldn't even be that much fun to begin with. Declarations are better suited to creating *convenient coincidences*. Does your character need a lighter (but doesn't smoke)? Spend a fate point and you've got one! Is there an interesting scene happening over there that your character might miss? Spend a fate point to declare you arrive at a dramatically appropriate moment!

Your GM has veto power over this use, but it has one dirty little secret. If you use it to do something to make the game cooler for everyone, the GM will usually grant far more leeway than she will for something boring or, worse, selfish.

As a general rule, you'll get a lot more lenience from the GM if you make a declaration that is in keeping with one or more of your aspects. For example, the GM will usually balk at letting a character spend a fate point to have a weapon after he's been searched for them. However, if you can point out that you're ALWAYS ARMED or describe how your DISTRACTING BEAUTY kept the guard's attention on inappropriate areas, the GM is more likely to give you some leeway. (This is much like invoking an aspect, but without a die roll.)

REFRESHING FATE POINTS

Players usually regain fate points between sessions when a refresh occurs. The number of fate points you get at a refresh is called your refresh level, and it will vary depending on the game (see *Character Creation*, page 53, for more details). Your refresh level will be reduced by the stunts and powers your character possesses.

PCs are not allowed to let their refresh level drop below one; when a character's refresh hits zero or less, he crosses over that crucial, invisible line that separates a mortal's free will from a monster's compulsion of nature.

Totally
Batman.



If the GM left things with a cliffhanger, she is entitled to say that no refresh has occurred between sessions. By the same token, if the GM feels that a substantial (i.e., dramatically appropriate) amount of downtime and rest occurs in play, the GM may allow a refresh to occur mid-session. (Check out the optional Partial Refresh rule in *Running the Game*, page 317.)

When a refresh occurs, bring your current number of fate points up to your refresh level. If the number of fate points you have when you refresh is higher than your refresh level, your current total does not change.

Example: *Evan Montrose and Maya McKenzie have just won a hard fought victory against a dark sorcerer, and they end the session with 4 FP each. The GM feels that was a suitable climax and they refresh at the beginning of the next session. Maya has a refresh level of 8, so Maya gets 4 FP, enough to bring her up to 8. Evan's refresh is only 1 (wizardsing is costly), so he gets nothing, but he does get to stay at 4.*

EARNING NEW FATE POINTS DURING PLAY

You earn fate points when your aspects create problems for your character. When this occurs, it's said that the aspect is **compelled**. When your character ends up in a situation where his compelled aspect suggests a problematic course of action, the GM should offer you a choice: spend a fate point to ignore the problem, or acknowledge the problem and *earn* a fate point. Sometimes, the GM may also simply award a fate point to you without explanation, indicating that one of your aspects is going to complicate an upcoming situation. You can refuse that point and spend one of your own to avoid the complication, but it's not a good idea to do that too often, because you will probably need the fate point in the future. And let's face it—that's a pretty boring way to play anyway. Drama is a good thing.

NO. DRAMA SUCKS.
GIVE ME BORING.
I LONG FOR BORING.



Example: *Biff has the aspect DUMB LUCK, which his player, Fred, has explained to the GM means that Biff has a tendency to have things go his way when he's at his most dense or foolish, but it also means that he can stumble across very bad or strange things without meaning to. Biff is on his way to pick up his girlfriend Maya when an ambush drops on him. Normally, Fred would roll Biff's Alertness to try to avoid surprise, but the GM pushes forward a fate point and says, "Wouldn't it just be Biff's DUMB LUCK if he got jumped and hauled away, leaving Maya thinking she got stood up again?"*

Fred can now choose whether to take the fate point—in which case Biff doesn't roll Alertness; he automatically fails the roll and skips right to getting kidnapped, since he's the only PC in this scene—or spend a fate point, evading the downside of his DUMB LUCK and getting a chance to avoid surprise with an Alertness roll.

HEH. CUTE PICTURE. LOOKS LIKE MURPH COULD GO FOR SOME BORING, TOO.

I MAKE HER DO THAT WAY TOO MUCH.

The Basics

This isn't just the GM's show; you can trigger compels as well—on yourself or on others—either by explicitly indicating that an aspect may be complicating things or by playing to your aspects from the get-go and reminding the GM after the fact that your character already behaved as if compelled. The GM isn't always obligated to agree that a compel is appropriate, but it's important that players participate here. See *Aspects* on page 100 for a more detailed treatment of compels.

...AND OFF YOU GO

So that's a quick overview of the basic elements of the game. Don't worry if it seems like a lot to take in! The following chapters will help you better understand each piece of the whole, and a lot of it is easily picked up by diving in and playing. Before you move on to *City Creation* and *Character Creation*, though, you may find it helpful to read over at least the chapter on *Aspects*.

Part of why we decided to base the game on the Fate system is that it sits right at the midpoint between soft, lightweight, story-focused games and the harder, "crunchier," more simulation-oriented games out there. In Fate, what a character believes in and what's important to his personal story can matter just as much as the fact he can sling around spellfire or change into a wolf.

AUGUST 19, MS. JENNIFER J.

- * LOST ENGAGEMENT RING, "JUST GONE!"
- * PUT ON DRESSER AT NIGHT; WOKE UP = ADIOS!
- * MISTAKEN? STOLEN? BF/HUBBY RESETTING IT? CHECK LOCKS. TALK TO BF/HUBBY.
- * SHE'S SUPERSTITIOUS. AND WORRIED.
- * WE HAVE A PICTURE OF IT! BONUS!
- * TRY \bar{b} WITH A $\bar{b} \bar{b} \bar{b}$?
- * GO OUT TO ARCHER HEIGHTS, TALK TO HER NEXT WEDNESDAY.

Uh... Harry? Why's this in here?

WHUPS! SORRY, MAN. I GRABBED THE PAPER I HAD ON HAND. SELF-EMPLOYMENT IS A HARSH MISTRESS!

I'll tell you who's a harsh mistress!

SHUT UP, BOB.