

Version 1.5C



**ARGUMENT
DICELESS
STORYTELLING**

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Argument DSS

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You may create derivative works such as additional rules and game scenarios and supplements based on Argument DSS, provided that such derivative works are for your own use or for distribution without charge, or for publication in a magazine or other periodical.

Every derivative work must include the following "About Argument" section in its entirety:

About Argument DSS

This document uses the Argument Diceless Storytelling System by Rainer K. Koreasalo.

The argument system is a free diceless role-playing system, created to be distributed free of charge on the internet.

All material using the Argument DSS is to be distributed free of charge.

The original, unaltered Argument DSS is available at the Argument DSS web site:

<http://people.cc.jyu.fi/~rakorea/argument/>

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What is a Storytelling System?

"A storytelling system" is just another name for a role-playing game system, used to emphasise the fact that role-playing is supposed to be about stories and having fun, not about tables, charts and experience points.

What is Diceless role-playing?

Diceless role-playing is a role-playing genre of systems that don't use any random number generators to determine the end results of a particular action. This means no flipping the coin, rolling the dice or spinning the bottle to determine i.e. how much damage a hit to the head with a beer bottle does.

There is a lot of commercial work on this field of RPGs worth your time and money. The excellent "*Amber - Diceless Role-playing*" from *Phage Press* is the pioneer and you might still get your hands on "*Theatrix*" from *Backstage Press*. Others include "*Persona*" by *Tesarta Industries, Inc.* and "*Epiphany*" by *BTRC*.

You might also want to read the "*rec.games.frp.advocacy FAQ - part III*" for some reflections on the subject. The nature of diceless role-playing is also described in this document.

The Argument system

The Argument system comes in two parts. Chapter 1 is for players and contains all the necessary rulings for character creation and development. From that on the chapters deal

with resolving actions and conflicts and how to be the GM with Argument. There are no secrets in the GM sections — if a player wants to understand how the system works he/she can read those chapters too.

Argument is designed to be diceless — but if the GM wishes the character creation process could be randomised to some degree. Argument is a storytelling system that is designed for generic environments; you easily can play both fantasy and sci-fi with it. I use the industry standard abbreviations for the usual role-playing terms. PC is a “player character”, NPC is a “non player character” and the GM is of course “the game master.”

Appendix submissions

The Argument DSS distribution is open to additions. If you wish to have your derivative work included in the main distribution of Argument DSS as an appendix, contact the author.

All writers who contribute an appendix will retain the copyright over the submitted material but all material included will be published under the same license for further derivation. All writers will be duly credited.

About this distribution

This document was typeset with \LaTeX , a freeware typesetting program for all platforms. PDF versions were produced with the bundled pdf \LaTeX software.

The version number is composed of two parts, the version number and the appendix letter. The version number 1.3B would translate as release 1.3 of the core document and B as the latest appendix. When a new release of the core chapters is written — usually with some additions or spelling fixes — the number increases. When a new appendix is added, the letter part changes.

Chapter 1

Player Section

1 Character Creation

Role-playing is based on the character.

Your gaming experience is dependent on how happy you are with your character. No game master can make the story flow right or have interesting enough things happen to you, when your character doesn't feel right. With diceless role-playing we aim at greater depth of character.

The first thing you need to do when creating a character for the Argument system, is to come up with the character concept and talk about it with the game master. If the GM approves your choice of concept, try answering the following questions and then fill in the details.

- **Name** — Start with the name. It may be difficult if you're not used to making up names, but stick with it. Give your character a name. You get a certain wholeness to the picture when you can place everything in a named context.

Names define us all, so the name comes first. Don't give your character a comical name if the setting isn't comic.

- **Occupation** — What does this character do for a living? That's the second thing people ask a normal person, so that should come next.

This is usually the defining part of character creation. In dice using games this is usually done by selecting the character class. Think about this choice for a moment, don't just put down "an adventurer".

You could be anything; a botanist, car salesman, or in a fantasy setting — a knight.

Make sure the rest of the choices you make during this process reflect your choice of lifestyle.

- **Motivation** — What does your character want? What is the main driving force in his life? What makes his clock tick?
- **Curriculum Vitae (CV)** - What has your character done?

If you don't start playing a newborn, your character is bound to have a past.

Come up with both good things and bad things that have happened. Be creative and don't hold back - take enough time to put some mass into this part.

For a modern genre game you could even write the actual CV for your character. Later, when you answer the questions below, come back to this and see if it needs additions or changes in light of what you put down below.

- **Love interests** — Is your character married?

If not, is the character in love? Or is the character perhaps living "la Vida Loca"?

Maybe the character has homosexual tendencies or the character is a gay person.

Don't hold back with this part of description either, love — or the lack of it — is a big part of our lives.

- **Religious / Magical attitude** — If the GM's setting is a magical one, what does your character think about magic?

Is the character perhaps a magic user? If not, does he fear those who practice the arts?

If the setting is religious one, or the world contains any religions at all, is the character a member of such churches?

Is he just a member or a devotee? Does your character even believe in that stuff anyway?

- **Good / Bad attitude (stuff)** — Do dogs bark at your character? Are birds singing when he walks in a forest, or do they try to hit the character with their faeces?

Is the world a good or a bad place to live in? Are you happy? Do you make others happy too?

- **Anything else?** — By now you should understand why and how to answer these questions and build the background for your character. The questions are here to guide you write your character beyond simply marking the colour of your eyes on the character sheet.

But don't stop here, think about the questions and when the GM tells you something more about the setting you are going to play in, come up with your characters opinions, manners, thoughts etc. about any particular subject.

The more you write down, the better.

When you're done answering these questions have another chat with the game master. The GM will tell you what your skills and attributes are. Don't expect long lists of skills and powers if you didn't write about them in the occupation, CV and Magic part of the character description. If you didn't write when and where, how and why you learned something - you probably didn't learn it. Elaborate and be creative. The GM will

tune it down if he thinks your character will be too powerful.

The Argument system data will look something like this:

*John Doe is a human male. He has **medium strength** and **good endurance**. His **perception is good** but his **willpower is pathetic**.*

Note that there are four attributes in the description. A minimal CV skill description for the character concept could look something like this:

- *John is a mechanic of good abilities.*
- *He's a high-school graduate and an experienced driver.*
- *John has no criminal record, and he is generally a well-liked man.*

Also note that can be quite difficult to distinguish between attributes and skills. Depending of the setting you are going to play in, the GM might give you more attributes — fortune for example is one of the optional attributes. Your attributes define your character, if you have a particularly high or low attribute, make that show on your character description.

2 Character Development

Character development is the key to all drama. In most games this is done by experience points etc. All you see in those games are rising percentages, hit points and all sorts of other numerical information. That is not the kind of development that adds depth to your character.

Argument uses an intuitive system of CV-based skill tracking for your character's development. It's best I demonstrate to explain:

The aforementioned John Doe gets a job as a limousine driver for a very respectable company. He spends four months as a driver for the C.E.O. of that company. John gains

four months experience of operating limousine like motorcars. He also gains an insight in the company's business habits at high levels, knows the names of the C.E.O's family members and where they live.

In short John's skill list would now be something like this:

- *Medium grade High School Graduate.*
- *Good in Mechanics, Auto*
- *Good in Drive, Auto*
- *Expert in Drive, Large Limousine.*

Good knowledge in:

- *The Named Company C.E.O. personal matters — wife, children, mistress, etc.*
- *The Named Company Business Contacts.*
- *The Named Company Holdings, Buildings etc.*
- *Good reputation.*
- *Medium monetary credit rating.*

All the experience is hierarchically noted as new specific skills and knowledge. This is all you need to know as a player. The GM will provide you with additional information.

Chapter 2

GM Section

1 Character Creation

Normally a character is a set of attributes described with cold numbers and a minimal description. But characters aren't numbers. Argument uses adjectives to describe the character's ability in the attributes and skills. The standard skill/attribute adjectives are:

- Pathetic
- Bad
- Medium
- Good
- Excellent
- Superior

The attributes that Argument uses are

- Strength
- Endurance
- Perception
- Willpower

A typical human being would be hence described in Argument mechanics as follows:

"John Doe is a man of middle height and **medium strength**. His body is not unusually framed - no bulking muscles can be seen, but his posture tells of a man with **good endurance** who can run at least for some 15 minutes. He has a solemn face and lively eyes with **good perception**. John is well known

in the neighbourhood, as an easygoing man with not much restraint when it comes to alcohol. It's safe to say that John has **pathetic willpower**."

There are a bunch of other attributes that the GM can plug in the system:

- Fortune
- Appearance
- Dexterity
- Intelligence

I'd advice to use the intelligence attribute with caution. Even good role-players tend to overplay that particular attribute. If the character is unusually smart the GM will have to take part in the role-playing of that character and if the character is a bit dim that can be problematic also. While playtesting the intelligence was approximated from the character background and the willpower attribute with great results. Raw intelligence is rarely needed anyway, and Argument characters should have enough background to determine whether they have the keys to unlock a particular problem.

Use your best judgement to tune the system to meet your needs. There are various methods of setting the attribute adjectives. The primary method for this is to have an extended talk with the player and discuss the character. The player's character concept should give you a pretty good idea what his/her attributes are.

Pathetic or excellent and superior level attribute adjectives always come with a reason

for the rank. Make sure you add the reason for such a high or low-level adjective to the character description. Make the character with the high strength an Arnold-like muscle man and give the one with bad willpower alcoholism or some other similar disadvantage. Every large deviation from medium should have a reason.

If your players don't have a clear picture of their characters the attribute creation can be quite difficult. In that case you can assign attribute adjectives by using an arbitrary random number generator to deviate the adjectives from "medium." Here are a couple of examples:

Get a deck of ordinary playing cards. If you draw a black card the attribute goes down, with a red card the attribute goes up. To determine how much the attribute changes, draw an even number (GM discretion) of cards for each attribute.

Example: You're creating the John Doe character. You're determining his endurance, beginning with a medium rank. You draw six cards from the deck. There's 4 red and 2 black, hence the attribute rises to reach good endurance. If you'd drawn 4 black and 2 red the attribute would have gone down to bad endurance.

If more than 2/3 of the cards drawn are of one colour the attribute goes down 2 levels.

Example: When assigning John's willpower attribute you draw six cards, five blacks and one red. This means that John's willpower goes down 2 levels — since 2/3 of 6 is 4 and 5 is more — from medium, leaving him with pathetic willpower. A draw is a draw is a draw. With equal amount of red and black the attribute is of medium level.

The second option for attribute determination is by using a collectible card game deck. Pick a colour at random, say — the colour green. Then draw cards like in the ordinary playing card example, one for each character for each attribute. Now see if the artwork of those cards has a large quantity of that

colour present or not. Use your judgement to give each card a + or - value to the attribute. Then calculate the total. The rule 2/3 or +/-2 applies here too.

Third option is to search the flavour text of the drawn CCG cards for adjectives. Be sure to browse through the deck before you assign attributes so you can normalise the variation. This is also a good idea for the colour searching option.

Again, you can use any random number generator you wish or can come up with. Try hanging around in town and determine the attributes with how beautiful the women are. When using this option, if you don't want to have high-power campaign, stay out of Japan.

When using the random attribute level system, I recommend that you let the players raise one attribute below excellent level by one level. They should also be able to lower attribute scores to gain a significant amount of CV content. I also recommend that you draw the attribute scores and let the players define which adjective goes to which attribute.

Bear in mind, that the randomised attribute adjective deviation systems given here are an *extension*. Both the GM and Player should always create the character as a combined effort. If you use the system described above, always remember - the randomness stops here. The action resolving in diceless storytelling does not rely on drawing cards from a deck. See section 3 for action resolving with the Argument system.

2 Character Development

As described before in the Player section the Argument system uses a CV-based skill tracking system. The characters' capabilities are described with the standard adjectives given in section 1.

The character background you and the player write down determines the character's initial skills. Try to standardise and normalise the skill level adjectives for your players' characters. Try to make them well

matched to avoid in-party fighting and bias accusations. Don't let one player start with superior skills if the others have good skills at maximum.

The character development system described in the player-chapter seems quite simple but isn't. It is not easy to keep track of all the things a PC does. Since there are no skill lists to tell what actions to track the GM must make some tough decisions. I'd recommend that at first you have the players keep detailed diaries of their characters' actions. Tell them not to keep track of every shot fired or every lock picked, but rather to put down successful missions and what kind of skills they had to use to succeed. The goal here is to keep track of the character's abilities and his advancement, not to count the times he fixed a broken tire.

If the character often gets an argument — described in section 3 — or manages to turn it into a permanent argument and thus successfully performs actions over his normal capabilities in that field, that should give grounds for permanent raise in his skill adjective level.

An argument becomes permanent when the character gradually learns the skill. This usually means that a new sub skill is added to the character's CV leaving the base skill level unmodified. The base skill level rises only by gaining enough (GM discretion) sub skills to cover the whole field of that base skill.

I don't recommend using the same reasoning for attributes and skills. Attribute development should be a lot more difficult — if not impossible — than skill development.

3 Action Resolving

Action resolving is the most difficult part of diceless storytelling. In systems that use dice the action resolving is all about the die roll. The die determines if an action succeeds or not. I think this is wrong.

In storytelling we aim at the story. It's not really all that much fun if the PCs fail at a critical moment just because the dice roll went badly. Sometimes that was just what

you were heading at, but most of the times it just ends up killing a couple of characters and creating resentment in players. Of course you can always ignore the die roll, but if you're going to do that — why roll it in the first place?

The main concept of diceless action resolving is in the old saying, "let the best man win." It's that simple. The character, PC or NPC, with the highest ability or skill always takes the day, unless there's an advantage — an argument — on the weaker side that levels the playingfield.

In evenly matched situations the going gets tough. Who's the better man/woman when they're equally skilled? That's when the arguments come in play. An argument is in a word — an advantage.

The advantage can come from physical characteristic: in an evenly matched fistfight one of the characters has an elevated position, or he is a lot bigger than his adversary is.

The argument can come with an equipment or experience: in a manhunt the fugitive has a good hiding place and the service man searching for him is just a good seeker. The tie is broken, because the police wield an infrared camera that gives them a superior perception.

A player can only get an argument by role-playing. If the character does something that gives the story just the right direction you were wishing for you should think giving him a positive argument (special knowledge of the area for example) or if the character does something extremely stupid (like they always do) give them a negative argument.

A positive argument raises the appropriate skill or attribute for the task the argument is meant for and a negative lowers it. Don't let your players know you're giving them negative arguments if they're not physical in nature. Misinformation as a negative argument is a most delicious plot device.

Example: John Doe is racing the limousine to get away from mercenaries that are trying to kill his boss, the C.E.O. of Named Company, Inc.

John is an expert limousine driver, as men-

tioned in the character development part. But, unfortunately the man driving for the bad guys is an expert van driver, hence John is unable to shake him.

The chase continues into the commercial district of the Named City Metropolitan area. John has good knowledge base of the Named Company holdings in this area. He makes a daring manoeuvre over three lanes and manages to cut into the Named Company parking hall where he gets on the second floor before the pursuers can follow. Meanwhile, the C.E.O. has used the car phone to call for security and the assailants are held at gunpoint in the first floor.

In the given example the argument for the driving skill was the knowledge of the area. Knowing the location of the parking garage was enough to boost John's driving skill to superior. Note that the argument was used to raise the driving skill level in comparison to the adversary's driving skill.

If there is no direct or indirect opponent from whom to determine the skill level the PC's skill is to be contested against, the GM must give the attempted action a *difficulty rating*. Such a situation is called a non-contested action. Difficulty rating is simply the adjective level the character must reach with or without arguments to succeed in the action.

You can give the players continuous arguments for particular purposes. Such arguments can i.e. come from using specific equipment, or having knowledge of timed events, such as the time of the supposed triad hit to the First Bank of Named City Metropolitan Area. Continuous arguments don't count towards skill development if they are not made permanent. See section 2 for argument permanency.

Arguments never give an advantage over normal skill level. Had the driver for the assault team been a superior driver he would have been able to follow John's manoeuvre into the garage. When an argument is used to boost or deteriorate a skill or an attribute the result is called *an argument rank*. The re-

sulting argument rank is always weaker than a normal no-argument rank of the result level. When deteriorating a skill the argument rank is always stronger than a normal no-argument rank of the result level.

Some actions can't have positive arguments. Such actions are said to be *skill or attribute critical*. For example, actions that fall within the medical profession are skill critical in the worst-case scenario.

Let's assume the patient has suffered critical injury (injuries described in section 4) via gunshot wound to the stomach.

A critical injury requires excellent level skill in medical profession (surgery) to stabilise the patient. The closest skill equivalent the PCs have is of a good field medic level. The player characters make an argument that with their extensive first aid kit they should be able to stop the bleeding, and they are right - the bandages help to stop the bleeding but the bullet has ruptured the intestines and the patient dies of infection in less than an hour.

Note that had the bullet hit the patient in the arm or a leg the bag would have provided sufficient equipment to stop the bleeding.

The skill or attribute critical actions are a small minority of situations. Rules for when to call for skill critical actions cannot be given unequivocally. It's up to you, but here's a good thumb rule: "Difficulty rating of excellent or superior in a non-contested action usually makes it a skill critical action."

If a player has no experience in the field of action he's trying to commit, that action is a considered unskilled. Unskilled actions are considered skill critical pathetic level actions, unless they are clearly attribute-based actions. Attribute based unskilled attempts are considered as actions one level below the attribute adjective level and they're also skill critical.

Let your players know when you invoke the skill critical actions. This will serve as an efficient mood creator (see section 5.)

4 Combat actions

Combat is an essential part of some role-playing settings and very few settings manage to be completely combat free. Combat creates excitement and if well placed, phased and balanced, it can make your story deeper and more captivating.

It is often believed that diceless role-playing can't handle combat. This is of course, wrong. Diceless storytelling can handle combat as well as any dice using system. It just takes a bit more effort.

Combat is handled as a contest of skills. There is no real difference between resolving the driving example above and a fistfight in an alley - the best skill wins.

Combat arguments often come from knowing or getting to know the weaknesses of your opponents. In combat, perception and combat awareness are the keys to survival. Always make combat dangerous and never leave a stupid action unpunished. Don't be afraid to hurt the PC's, but don't overdo it. Be just and unbiased. Yes, I know - that's a lot to ask.

The most difficult thing with diceless combat resolving is the need for detail. If the player doesn't understand what is happening, and what threats are present, you can't expect him/her to make all the right decisions you had in mind. You have to describe things thoroughly. Make a point of describing imminent death threats at least twice in your description.

Consider this combat **example**:

... You're standing there on the bridge as you decided to leave behind and detain your pursuers so that your buddies can carry the wounded professor back to the van.

Player: Yeah. I stand somewhere in the middle of the bridge and wait for them.

Ok. There are five men in black business suits, white shirts and black sunglasses, real men in black. They run from behind the corner and reach the bridge in ten or so seconds as your buddies have just reached the cover of the buildings. Then they just stop.

Player: They stop?

Yes. One of them raises his left hand and holds his middle finger against his ear. He seems to be talking to his sleeve.

Player: He's calling for back up.

Could be, or he's requesting confirmation on something. What are you doing?

Player: I draw my pistol and start taking backward steps. I try to keep my eye on them.

The man talking to his sleeve nods. His right hand goes under his left arm inside his jacket. He nods again. What are you doing?

Player: He's reaching for his gun, I go for cover of one the bridge poles and start shooting.

Wait a minute, how fast do you make the move for cover? With a leap or with a few hasty steps?

Player: I jump for cover, grouching behind the pole.

And you plan to shoot, yes? OK. When you make a fast movement all the five men draw their large handguns. When you hit the ground behind the pole you hear the guns thunder shots at you. Five shots rain around you. Three of them hit the ground under you as you leap. Two ricochet out of the pole as you land. You're not hit but shooting from this position is out of the question. What are you doing?

Player: I meant, I try to squeeze a shot while I'm still in the air.

You needed both of your hands near your torso to land somewhat safely. You're not an expert acrobat, you see, and the leap you just pulled off was quite a feat. Oh, by the way. Hitting the asphalt you took some minimal injuries, so mark that down. What are you doing?

Player: How good is the cover?

You can't see them in this position, but whether or not they can see you, you cannot say. What are you doing?

Player: I don't need to see them to know that they're probably moving to a safer position instead of standing there in the middle of the bridge. Since I can't see them, I won't waste my time and life on trying to fire some rounds just for the sound of it. I push

up from the ground to get up on my feet and then continue the movement to jump over the railing.

Good reasoning. When you get off the ground you hear three shots. You hear two of them clang against the railing as your leap takes off. You have to use a lot of strength, good thing you have more than enough with your excellent level. Your jump is just a bit off to the right and your legs hit the rail as you go over it.

Player: You said three shots and two to the railing, what happened to the other shot?

As you fall the 15 meters from the bridge you feel a wave of pain from your right leg. I guess that's where the third shot landed and that's why your leap was a bit off. You land with not quite so Olympic level dive to the water. That was one long drop so you go deep into the water. What are you doing?

...

Try to describe the events from the viewpoint of the character. If the character has presumptions describe things that way. Take special care of inserting the character's view on life to your description. Listen to the questions your players ask for such presumptions and play by them. Try to make your players speculate and reason aloud so you can get a better picture whether they are being stupid or not. Remember that one man's wisdom is other man's folly. Don't punish sound reasoning, even if it's wrong, but the lack of it.

Learning to describe the environment to meet your players' needs is something that will take a while to learn. In dice using systems the GM can always hide behind the die roll to provide the outcome, in diceless role-playing you will really have to go on a limb to make the world alive and the threat real. Combat usually takes a significant amount of time in dice using systems. It should take at least the same amount of time diceless role-playing. Don't speed things up when it comes to combat but slow them down.

The players will rely on your description. Make them ask questions and don't let them second-guess anything. When you think they

are doing something really stupid, ask them for confirmation by adding detail and presenting their action as a question to them. If they can't take the hint, let them have it. It's all about your skills as a manipulator. If you can learn to lead your players correctly, the combat will go nicely enough. Teach your players to search for combat arguments and use them.

If you're using the fortune attribute you can contest the combatants fortune when situation is otherwise a stalemate.

Combat skills

In combat you should know what you are doing. In battle skill is everything. Untrained combatant will bleed and inexperience can cost you your life.

When asking for combat actions from players, pay attention to what kind of maneuvers they try to pull. Your normal John Doe just won't be able to make that gravity defying kung fu move and the professor of literature almost certainly won't try blind the enemy with his fingers. If the proposed action is way out of the characters league you should try to give a casual hint to the player to try something else. If they stick with their lunatic maneuver, give the enemy a positive argument against that attack and give the PC negative arguments for that action.

On the other hand, if the proposed player action fits the character and his skills perfectly you might encourage such action with a positive argument. All of this is meant to provide realism and dramatic direction.

You should also make a point of telling the players what kind of combat experience they have. The characters' fighting styles should be based on this background information.

Size combat modifier

Size can be handled quite easily in argument combat. The size difference of the characters is given as a positive argument to the larger combatant.

Example: A human is fighting a large dragon. The size difference is +5. The dragon has combat experience of excellent level. With his size modifier the dragon has a difficulty rating of argument superior +4.

Damage levels

Where there is battle, there is damage. Here are the injury adjective levels and medical skill adjective level needed to tend them:

- Minimal — Pathetic
- Minor — Bad
- Moderate — Medium
- Serious — Good
- Critical — Excellent
- Deadly — Superior

Note that medical skill use in tending critical or deadly damage is almost certainly skill critical action. This ruling is only for modern settings. With a magic rich fantasy setting defining what is skill critical what is not is quite difficult.

You can also apply the list above to damage done to machines etc. Use the appropriate skill to repair the damage.

The time an injury takes to heal is relatively hard to determine - having no medical expertise, I won't venture into that field. If you need to know how long a particular injury would take to heal and don't want to make an uneducated guess, give your doctor a call and ask. Be certain to offer some kind of explanation for asking such things. "I'm writing a story" usually works well and isn't too far from the truth. Remember to be respectful.

Taking Damage

The ability to sustain damage varies greatly from character to character. There's no easy answer on how you should handle damage with the Argument system, other than that damage counts as negative arguments for all

actions. The GM should decide what kind of damage is incapacitating and how many negative argument levels to give for damage.

Moderate damage from punch to the stomach could mean only two negative argument levels for a short while, but a moderate wound to the torso should be incapacitating.

5 Creating the story

To successfully tell a story, you need to know the story by heart. With a storytelling system you cannot play by asking the dice what your NPCs will do.

You have to actually role-play all the NPCs through their motivations and goals. That is your greatest challenge, but first let's take a look on how to create a simple but entertaining storyline for one stand-alone session.

At first it will help to think your gaming session as a movie or a TV-show. Start by determining what kind of story you want to tell. What's it going to be? Drama? Action? Romance? (Stay away from those, they always become too epic to fit into a campaign — just kidding). When you've got the genre down, start thinking if the story would best be made into a TV-movie, big screen movie, TV series episode, miniseries etc.

With both the style and genre selected you can start stretching and fattening the plot. Select the timeframe from this list and start planning:

- **TV series** episodes come in two standard formats - 30 minutes or 1 hour with commercial breaks. An hour long TV episode usually follows the intro — title — act 1 — commercial break — act 2 — commercial break — act 3 — end credits. With 30 minutes shows there's only one commercial break.
- **TV-movie** is usually 80 - 90 minutes long and contains an intro — title credits — various number of acts and end credits.
- **Big-screen movie** is no different from a TV-movie when it comes to structure,

but there's just a lot more cinematic elements i.e. more money to be spent.

While planning try to rhythm your session to fit the selected timeframe. I'm not suggesting that you time events by the clock either in-game or off-game, but rather that you pace the events in sequence and divide the story in parts — acts.

This will help you get your story structured and make the players feel comfortable with the gameplay. There is a reason why TV-shows and movies are made the way they are, and it's not all just because of commercial breaks and box office. The whole modern storytelling culture relies on the same principles. If you want to break the principle, that's fine by me — but first learn to do it by the book so that you know what you're doing when you start breaking the tradition.

A TV drama has a cast of central characters (the PCs) played by the actors and actresses (the players). There is also a theme and background to the series (campaign theme and setting — see section 6) and some supporting characters (the NPCs) that give the show a feeling of a surrounding world and continuity.

If you choose the framework of a TV drama series, each gaming session should be either one episode or at least one act. As explained above, each episode starts with an intro sequence i.e. a short dramatic sequence before the intro credits roll. The intro sequence is used to bring the viewers into the right mood and get the action going.

After the intro and credits a TV episode usually spends some time establishing the scene and introducing the key figures. The goals and hindrances are also set up and explained here. Usually this act is all talk and but little action. A very wise man once said: "The ass must be found before it can be kicked."

Then the suspension is gradually increasing throughout the episode. Finally, this leads to the episode climax or in some cases, the cliffhanger where either the greatest challenges are met, and leaps of faith performed

or the viewer is left to wait for the next installment. All the build-up should either be resolved or left hanging to bring the viewers back. In my experience, game masters often forget about the rhythm and the flow of the story. For too many times I have witnessed an end of a gaming session with the story only half satisfied or the break long overdue. When you think it's time roll the credits, bring up the music and fade to black.

When the time passes things gradually change. Some characters prosper and others go down. Some characters get written off the show and others die to provide drama. As with a TV series the campaign will eventually come to an end. When you see this happening, cancel the show. Don't let your campaign become "the X-files from the 5th season onwards" of role-playing.

In all storytelling getting the mood and feel of the story right proves to be very difficult. There are a few things you can do to keep the suspension of disbelief up.

- **Use music.** Every movie and TV show has some music. Sometimes it's so discreet that it generally goes unnoticed. That's what I think should be your aim when selecting the background music for your gaming session. Make the music fit the story not the other way around.
- **Use voiceovers.** Instead of just plainly noting "You walk away from the Named Company building. No one is following you" say something like "Our heroes exit the building with no hurry. They take their time to cover the distance to their van. There are no followers at sight or any other indication that their actions were noticed." Be involved and excited.
- **Use cinematic elements.** You can make the players enjoy the story even more if you use cut-scenes, intro sequences, credits and recaps. Imagine starting each session with a recap. Make your players take part on this, having them insert their lines, thoughts

and speculations on why, where and by whom.

Of course, all the planning in the world can't save you from the havoc the players let loose. They will probably do all the wrong things and make all the wrong decisions. Don't make too detailed and time consuming plans since the risk of the players screwing things up is too great. Section 7 deals with player GM conflict.

Try to find balance between inspiration and planning. Try to keep large-scale plans but let the players find their own way to the plot points you want to keep. That way you won't seem like you're railroading, even if you are. Practice makes perfect so play often and play hard, but play fair.

6 Designing a setting and Setting specific rulings

Creating a working and interesting setting is a great challenge. There are a multitude of interdependent things you have to consider when building the world around your story. To successfully build a detailed world you'd have to be a geologist, ecologist, economist, historian. . . Since we can't master all that, we must cheat and give our world a theme.

The theme will define the way the PCs perceive the world around them and give you a way to escape the burden of creating all those minute details by giving them only the details that fit the genre and theme of the setting. In a comedic setting, for example, the inner workings of the taxing system should be left out of the picture. You should "zoom out" — i.e. skip the details — as often as possible to maintain the storyflow. But don't think that details aren't important, they are.

When creating a setting try to fill in at least the following details:

- **Theme** — as explained above, the theme is a bit like the name of a character. When you have the theme set down you can tweak the rest to meet your

goals. It's easier to know what kind of details are needed when you know what will be the focus of the game.

- **Plant and Animal life** Make at least broad-minded sketches of what kind of flora and fauna embellish the fields and pastures of your setting. Create a few animal races of your own or spread the land with the creatures of our native Earth.
- **Population and Inhabitants** Design — or choose — all the intelligent races for your setting. Write down various racial tensions and their reasons. Spread the various intelligent races over the map in tribes or nations, depending on the races and their habitat preferences. If you only use humans, try to put more detail on the next two topics in this questionnaire.
- **Technology level** — You should have a rough estimate of the technology level for the setting. Define what is and isn't possible with technology and more importantly, what's considered mundane and day to day technology everyone uses. Remember, technology is a resource too.
- **Societies and Infrastructure** — Create different social structures and nations. Place them on the map. Remember that uneven distribution of resources will undoubtedly create tensions between nations. Use that to your advantage if you need war to tell your story, if you need diversity — create trade routes to transit resources and people from place to place.

6.1 Races

The attribute system uses a *racial offset* system for non human races. Racial offset is an adjective level modifier used to widen the adjective space. A typical racial offset is that for strength, ie. a troll traditionally has a lot more brute force than a human. The notation used in this document for racial offset

is **race : attribute : offset : deviation: circumstances** — Thus, “Troll : Strength : +2 : Normal” translates: trolls have normal adjective deviation for strength, all levels are considered two levels higher than the human medium.

Offset is a raw number giving the amount of levels with which the attribute is modified when used for action resolution.

Deviation tells how the attribute adjective level can differ from the medium. The options include normal, negative only, positive only, minimum or maximum deviation value. You could say “Troll: intelligence: 0: Negative only: all” making human medium level intelligence the maximum for trolls or “Elf : Perception : +2 : min. +1: all” to give elves perception at least one level higher than the medium human.

Racial offsets can also be environment specific. I.e. some races have better dark vision but in daylight their vision does not distinguish itself from those humans. This information goes to the circumstance part of the racial descriptor.

Refer to Appendix A for racial offsets for the standard fantasy races and modify them to your needs or create a set of your own races.

6.2 Cybertech

Hydraulic arms and infrared vision eyes? How should they be handled? Think of them as arguments.

Enhancing cyberware should count as positive arguments to the skill or attribute. They grant positive argument adjective levels to the original skill or attribute levels. Damage to enhancing equipment will only reduce the skill or attribute to the original. Enhancing cyberware can also give negative argument levels.

Equipment replacing organic parts should count as *level granting arguments*. They give the specific argument adjective level no matter what the original skill or attribute level was. Damage to such equipment will permanently lower the adjective level until

the equipment is repaired. Replacing human flesh with machine parts can count as negative arguments for other skills and attributes than what the cybertech was constructed for.

6.3 Magic

Magic system always sucks — there’s no way around it. It’s a cooperative effort between the GM and players to make it suck as little as possible. I present here the basic steps of designing a magic system for Argument DSS — to review my first argument magic system, refer to Appendix B.

To create a magic system for your Argument setting answer the following questions:

- **Power source** - Where does the energy for the spells come from? Is the caster the power source? If not, then what / whom? If yes, what attribute, skill or personality aspect makes it possible for her to cast spells?
- **Control** - How does the caster control the flow of energy? What kind of actions are needed to successfully control the flow? Does the energy flow through the character? Is the character a conduit or a floodgate? If the energy does not traverse the caster then what point origin, route and destination does the energy follow?
- **Effect** - What does the controlled flow of energy do when it strikes the target? What effects various aspects of energy manipulation cause? Are there absolute limits to the effects for each energy type?
- **Orientation** - Is magic control or flow oriented? Do you need to perform specific control ritual for each effect? Are there only named and numbered spells or can casters construct spells? Is the spell development a lengthy process or can the caster just “wing it?” Can you combine spell effects to create something new? How flexible the magic system is?

- **Different forms of magic** - Are there more than one way to cast spells? If yes, where does the difference occur? Is the power source different, or maybe the control method? Go through these steps for each different form of magic.

When you have the answers to the questions above, you can start designing the actual magic. It's easier to create named and numbered spells - like in most magic systems, but you might want to venture into the uncontrolled free magic if your setting allows it. The magic system described in Appendix B is a freeform system with no specific spells.

When designing the actual effects of magic, keep in mind that every effect should translate roughly to the attributes, skills and their arguments. Magic can give you skills to use or take them away from your adversaries. Magic can alter your attribute levels etc. To maintain balance you should try even out the power cost and the power gain for each spell. It's safe to say that you should keep the argument efficiency of a single spell under 100 percent. This is easily achieved by making the power input actually count as negative adjective levels and the gained power as only argument adjective levels.

Personally, I'd advice against named and numbered spells. If magic is so commonplace and formal that spells can be listed, named, numbered, labelled and archived, then power is too easily obtained and controlled. This will also force all the villains and heroes to use the same stupid *fireball* or *magic missile*. Every spell system that uses spell lists is, in my opinion, unbalanced and will inherently *break* the world since all such systems are designed for players and PCs, not for whole worlds. Spells that don't seem unbalanced when used in adventuring will totally screw up the peaceful city life of the normal commoner.

7 Argument and frustration

The first thing you must realise is that when there are no dice in play, whatever you do, someone won't like this or that thing and they will whine at you about it. And they will keep whining about how badly you described things and had you done a better job they would have done things altogether differently. Usually they are partly right and partly wrong. They probably didn't know all that you did about the situation and maybe you just didn't mention something. But they shouldn't know everything, and it's their job to ask you questions and tell you their reasons for their actions. So the first rule of keeping the GM sane goes like this: Players whine — don't take it personally.

Players don't like to lose. And that's the second thing you must learn to accept. But by accepting it I don't mean that they shouldn't lose. Sometimes the players must lose to keep the story flowing right. So you must not pay heed to their whining and let them bully you into second guessing your choices.

You can't please everyone. The players will comment on the setting, the names, the story, the plot, and individual people. They will make fun of your dramatis personae and try to screw the whole storyline by doing something overtly stupid or they will think that they have ideas worth installing into the campaign. They might, so hear them out, but don't let them pressure you into accepting things into your world that just shouldn't be there. Again — when you turn them down, they will whine.

There is no limit what the players will do; they'll threaten people, they'll steal things — even important relics — for no purpose and whenever they can, they'll provoke conflicts. In general they will do everything else, except the things you had planned. It's your job to adapt, but only to a certain degree. If you're trying to tell a story with little or no violence, when the players start kicking drunks on the

streets, just walk out. If they can't play the game you want them to play, they need another GM.

However, you should not be too protective of the world, setting and story you've created. This will make you seem judgemental and partial and the game will suffer. Give your players free reign, but give them some guidelines.

8 Acknowledgements & afterwords

This is the second release draft of the first public play test version of the argument system. The core components were constructed from ideas by many different people:

Mika Harju came up with the skill development model.

Jaakko Virtanen introduced the idea of using cards to create random attributes. He also provided insight throughout the writing process, asking all the right questions that still needed answering. He also played in all of the pre-release playtest campaigns.

Martti Huusko provided ideas for the racial stats system and wrote the standard fantasy races appendix [A](#). You wouldn't be reading this without Martti's help with proofreading and playtesting this release.

Both Jaakko and Martti contributed to the Kalevala magic system described in Appendix [B](#).

The purpose of this document has been to write down a simple, but efficient system for diceless role-playing. There are numerous other free systems out there using largely the same idea-base as presented here.

I'd like to give you one final rule for diceless role-playing — It's supposed to be fun.

Appendix A

The Standard Fantasy Races

by Martti Huusko

Intro

These stats introduce the size attribute. Since both the gaming system and most of the gaming settings are build around size +0 humans, those playing a character of a race of a different size can face some difficulties.

The use of size attribute in combat is given in the combat section.

The stats for each fantasy race are given only where they differ from the human standard.

Dragon

Dragons are the absolute paradigms of creature. Wise and powerful they boast incredible powers of magic and body. In the fantastic settings dragons usually posses a wide variety of different powers from shapeshifting to a fiery breath. All in all, dragons are to feared and respected:

- Strength: +5 : min +3 : all
- Willpower: +2 : normal : all
- Endurance: +3 : normal : all
- Perception: +2 : normal: nightvision
- Size: +3: min +0 : all

Dwarf

In modern fantasy literature dwarves are portrayed as short sturdy warriors that live under the ground and love working with metal and stone. They are cunning in the arts of war and metalwork and have a tendency for greed.

- Strength: +1 : min +0 : all
- Endurance: +1 : min +0 : all
- Perception: 0 : normal : nightvision
- Willpower: 0 : normal : -2 when gold is involved

Elf

Elves can be seen from two perspectives: either they are a group of noble defenders of the woodlands against the encroachment of the other races or they can be seen as a bunch of wimps hiding in their forests and caring nothing of the troubles of others. Anyway, the elf offers a possibility of a flexible race.

- Perception: +1 : min +1 : possibly nightvision
- Endurance: -1 : normal : all

Giant

Giants are a race of large human-like beings with immense physical strength yet usually lacking in intelligence.

- Strength: +3 : min +2: all
- Size: +2 : positive only : all
- Intelligence: 0 : negative only : all

Gnome

Gnomes are the fabled tinkerers in the modern fantasy. They are smart and wise, prone to absent mindedness and melancholy moods but still plying their trade usually as a tradesman of some sort.

- Size: -2 : negative only : all
- Willpower : +1 : normal : all
- Strength: -2 : normal : all

Goblin

Goblins resemble gnomes in that they are curious and small. However, the modern fantasy has made the goblins beings of malice and hatred, quick with their wicked weapons and eager to use traps.

- Size: -1 : normal : all
- Strength: -1: normal : all

Half-Dwarf

Half-dwarven folk are rare in the modern literature of the genre. They are usually portrayed as strong as their dwarven heritage yet with the size of their human parents.

- Half-dwarf: Strength: +1: normal: all
- Half-dwarf: Endurance: +1: normal: all

Half-Elf

Half-elves are the cross-breeds of the elves and humans. They are more robust than their elven parent and have the nightvision too. They are, however, usually social outcasts because of their polluted blood.

- Perception: 0 :normal: nightvision

Halfling

Hobbits, the small folk or the hin. The halflings have many names in the genre. They are portrayed as small and agile, usually with either a homely bent or that of innecessant desire for loot.

- Size: -2 : max -1 : normal: all

Half-Orc

Half-Orcs are the children of orcs and humans. They are socially unacceptable in many worlds as their heritage betrays their violent siring. Half-Orcs are both large and stupid, but not as large and stupid as their Orc ancestry. They make an interesting adventurer.

- Strength: +1 : normal : all
- Intelligence: -1 : normal : all

Human

Humans are usually the mainstay of all fantasy worlds. Depicted as adjustable and numerous they don't have be to that way, some worlds have the humans in more disadvantaged positions. They usually lack any stat modifiers.

Humans have the followin argument stats:

- Strength: +0 : normal : all
- Endurance: +0 : normal : all
- Perception: +0 : normal : all
- Willpower: +0 : normal : all

Lizardman

Lizardmen are amphibious beings of the swamplands. They posses strong limbs for swimming in the murky waters and their scaly hide usually grants them protection. They however require water to survive as their aquatic skin cracks and dries if not immersed in water.

- Strength : +1 : normal : all

Orc

Orcs are very common in the fantasy settings. They take the political and ecological niche of stupid enemies that come in large hordes. They are big and stupid and their primitive tribal society makes an easy target for the more civilized heroes. As with humans this can be different. Orcs have a strong tribal society and a shamanistic belief system that although from outside looks primitive in fact is not. Orcs make an excellent misunderstood race especially if they are not inherently evil in the world.

- Strength: +2: normal : all
- Perception: -1 : max +1 : in twilight and darkness +2, nightvision
- Intelligence: -1 : normal : all

Troll

Trolls are glorified orcs. Very large and immensely strong they also possess the ability to regenerate quickly. This makes them a pain to kill and doesn't encourage large brains in the trolls.

- Strength: +2: normal: all
- Endurance: +3: min. +2: regeneration
- Perception: -1 :normal: all
- Intelligence: 0: negative only: all
- Size: +1 : min 1 : all

Appendix B

Kalevala Magic

The Finnish national epic Kalevala is a very magic rich story of great heroes and sorcerers, gods and witches. This myth is written entirely in peculiar rhyme because it was sung by old men and women. Elias Lönnrot collected these songs and compiled the epic.

The following translated excerpt from the Finnish mythos shows the Kalevala magic at work:

*I find my power in a chant.
I win my magic from a song.
But can I find a woman's warmth?
And can I win a maiden's love?*

This sad song sang Väinämöinen,
old magician, ancient sage,
as his sleigh ran over the marsh,
sped along the lake.
The wind blew his beard,
the summer sun warmed him.

Around the bend
another sleigh raced,
full speed down the trail
the young man pressed.
No time to stop,
no time to turn aside.

The horses swerved,
the sleighs collided.
Shaft wedged against shaft,
harnesses entangled.
The drivers nearly tumbled out.

Astonished, they eyed each other,
waited for words.
The horses dripped sweat,

pawed the ground.

"Young man!" said Väinämöinen.

"Who are you who drives so recklessly?"

"I am Joukahainen," said the youth.

"Old man, who are you who got in my way?"

"I am Väinämöinen," said the sage.

"Now move your sleigh and let me by,
for youth must ever give way to age."

Said Joukahainen,

"That was in a time long past.

Age must now make way for youth,
for the young know more than the old!"

"Is this true?" scoffed Väinämöinen.

"Say what you know, then.

Share this great knowledge!"

Said Joukahainen,

"Yes, I know a thing or two.

I know the fire is on the hearth,
and the smokehole near the ceiling.
A plow in the south is pulled by horse,
and in the north by reindeer.
The pike feeds on salmon
and lays its eggs when frost arrives."

"An infant knows as much!" said
Väinämöinen.

"What else can you offer?"

Said Joukahainen,

"Iron comes from ore,
copper from the rock.

Water is born from the mountains,

fire from the heavens.
The titmouse was the first of birds,
the willow the first of trees.”

”A toddler has such wisdom!
Can you furnish nothing better?”

Said Joukahainen,
”Back in the beginning,
the seas were dug out,
and the mountains piled high.
The pillars of the sky were erected,
and the rainbow raised.
The sun and moon were set on their paths,
and the stars scattered in the sky.”

”Know yourself a fool,” said Väinämöinen.
”For I dug out the seas,
and I piled high the mountains.
I stood among the seven heroes
who erected the pillars of the sky
and raised the rainbow.
And when that was done,
we set the sun and moon on their paths
and scattered the stars in the heavens.”

Then declared Joukahainen,
”If my knowledge does not impress you,
my sword may do better.
Old man, draw your blade!”
”My sword stays where it is,” said
Väinämöinen.
”I would not dirty it on you.”

Cried Joukahainen,
”You won’t fight?
Then I’ll use great magic on you!
I’ll chant you to a pig,
change you to a swine.
After that, I’ll strike you dead,
throw you on a dunghill!”

Then Väinämöinen grew angry.
He began to chant.
The earth shook,
the sky rumbled.
Water splashed from the lake,
the stones cracked.

Väinämöinen chanted
and the sword of Joukahainen
became lightning bolts across the sky.
His crossbow turned to a rainbow over the
lake,
his arrows to hawks overhead.

Väinämöinen chanted
and the sleigh of Joukahainen
became a log in the water.
His horse turned to a boulder on the shore,
his whip to a reed on the bank.

Väinämöinen chanted
and the coat of Joukahainen
became a cloud in the sky.
His hat turned to a water lily on the lake,
his belt to a snake among the reeds.

Väinämöinen chanted
and Joukahainen sank in the marshy ground,
up to his waist in the swallowing earth.

Cried Joukahainen,
”Reverse your words,
undo your spells!
I will give you a hat full of silver,
a helmet full of gold.”

”Keep your wealth,” said Väinämöinen.
”My coffers overflow.”
He chanted again,
and Joukahainen sank to his chest.

”Reverse your words,
undo your spells!
I will give you fields for plowing,
meadows for pasture.”

”Keep your land.
My farm stretches beyond sight.”
He chanted again,
and Joukahainen sank to his chin.

”Reverse your words,
undo your spells!
I will tell you of the fairest woman,
the finest maiden.”

Väinämöinen stopped his chant.

Said Joukahainen,
"She is lovely Aila,
maiden of Northland,
daughter of age-old Louhi.
She's called a blossom sweet to smell,
a fruit ripe to pluck.
Her fame spreads far,
the suitors gather.
But no proposal has she smiled on,
no suitor given the nod."

Then Väinämöinen chanted again.
He reversed his words,
undid his spells.
Joukahainen rose from the marshy ground,
up from the swallowing earth.

The cloud became again his coat.
The water lily turned back to a hat,
the snake to a belt.
The log became again his sleigh.
The boulder turned back to a horse,
the reed to a whip.
The lightning became again his sword.
The rainbow turned back to a crossbow,
the hawks to arrows.

The young man wept in shame.
The old man raced for home.

Kalevala Deities and demigods

Deities are always present in Kalevala. Almost every song is song to them, by them or because of them. Each deity in the Kalevala pantheon has a well defined domain of power. The domains do overlap a bit — there are usually both male and female deities for each domain.

Ukko is the Ancient Father who rules the highest heavens; He makes all things possible; He's the sky god and leader of the Finnish pantheon. Even today, the Finnish word for thunder carries his name — ukonilma (Ukko's

weather)

Akka or later **Rauni** is the Goddess of lightning, grain and the rowan tree. She is the great maternal deity and the goddess of sexuality.

Tapio is the god of forest and vegetation. He rules the Tapiola domain of forests. Tapio is also the god (drinking) water. Tapio has a very dark beard. Tapio is the caretaker of forests and game.

Mielikki is the lady of prey, the lady of the Hunt. She is also Tapio's wife — the queen of Tapiola. Mielikki is the protector of hunters, forest wayfarers and campers. She is also the queen of forest *haltija*'s (faeries). Mielikki crafted the *Otso* (Bear), and thus she is the mistress of the beast.

Hiisi is a forest spirit. Hiisi was originally a benevolent forest spirit but after the Christians infiltrated the land he became associated with evil sorcerers and necromancers.

Louhi Witch-Queen of Pohjola, the Winter Hag/Crone; leader of the rival tribe of the southern Kalevala

Tuoni Lord of the Underworld *Tuonela*, along with his wife, Tuonetar, and his daughters:

Kalma is the spirit of death, **Loviatar** provides the shamans a passageway to the trance, **Kivutar** is the daughter of pain and **Vammatar** is the daughter of suffering and injury. Also called Kipu-tyttö (pain girl).

Untamo God of sleep and of dreams. Bringer of rest .

Ilmatar Goddess of creation and the mother of waters, daughter of the Sky.

Ahti is the sovereign of waters.

Vellamo is the wife of Ahti, powerful Goddess of the water.

Pellervo is the lord of the fields, trees and plants.

Päivätär is daughter of the Sun God.

Terhi is the goddess of the Mists.

Power source of Kalevala Magic

The power for Kalevala spells — called *songs*, as seen in the excerpt above — comes from many sources. The main source for power is the song itself and all songs are of specific *realms*. These realms dictate what kind of effect the song can have.

Realms are gained by meeting the perquisites listed below. Each realm is considered a skill and given an adjective level. The adjective level can change substantially during the game and the initial value varies much like any skill in CV skill tracking system. See the Singing section below for details.

Realms of power

Here's a list of the realms of song and their perquisites. The Finnish word for each realm is given to provide mysticism.

Divine realms

The Gods of Kalevala provide their worshippers with songs to praise them and ask them for favors. Access to these realms also makes other realms available.

- Jumala — God (specify): This realm can only be gained by male characters.
- Jumalatar — Goddess (specify): This realm can only be gained by female characters.

Realms by Kin

In the Kalevala family is power. Like in most primal myths, virginity is emphasized.

- Neito — Maiden: This realm can only be gained by unmarried, sexually intact female characters or their bridegrooms. The bridegroom access to the realm is limited to the period between engagement and marriage ceremony. This realm is

lost to both females and males when the marriage is consummated. Raped Neito realm users retain the power of the realm until the next sunrise.

- Äiti — Mother: For women only. This realm is gained on the first full moon during pregnancy. This realm cannot be lost even if there is miscarriage or the child is lost after birth.
- Isä — Father: Like the Äiti domain, but for men.
- Akka — Crone/Hag: For women only. This realm is gained when reaching menopause. When a woman gains this realm she loses access to the Neito realm. The name of this realm is the same as the maternal deity.
- Ukko — Old man: For men only. This realm is gained when hair starts to turn gray. Men don't lose the bridegroom access to the Neito realm even if they have gained this realm.
- Veli — Brother: For men only. This realm is gained by forming an ritual bloodbond. Naturally, male characters that become brothers also gain this realm. Physical brotherhood realm can never be lost, but if the ritual brotherhood is lost by death of the other or betrayal of trust, then the realm access is also lost.
- Sisko — Sister: Like the Veli realm, but for women.

Elemental realms

Elemental realms are free for all, but followers of certain deities have an automatic +1 adjective level argument when singing from these realms. The elemental realms and corresponding the deities are given below.

- Maa — Earth: Tapio, Mielikki, Ukko, Ilmatar
- Ilma — Air: Ukko, Ilmatar

- Tuli — Fire: Ukko, Tapio, Mielikki
- Vesi — Water: Ilmatar, Ahti
- Elämä — Life: Ukko, Akka, Ilmatar, Tuoni
- Valo — Light: Ukko, Ilmatar, Päivätär
- Pimeys — Darkness: Tuoni, Akka, Ukko, Untamo
- Hukka — Wolf, Endurance
- Kettu — Fox, Willpower
- Joutsen — Swan, Appearance

Ritual realms

Ritual realms are open to everyone but the symbol of the realm must be present while singing.

- Malja — Chalice
- Veitsi — Knife
- Veri — Blood
- Ahjo — Forge

Realms of Divine Domains

Gods grant specific control over their favored terrain to their servants. The domains and the granting deities are listed below.

- Aava — the wide open sea: Ahti, Ukko
- Järvi, suo — Lake, swamp: Ahti, Terhi, Tapio
- Metsä — Forest: Tapio, Mielikki
- Puu — Tree, Wood: Tapio, Mielikki
- Sumu — Mist: Mielikki, Terhi, Tapio

Protector Spirit Realms

Animal protector realms are granted if the character has an aspect of the protector beast. Usually this means a high attribute adjective level. The following list gives the essence attribute for each protector spirit.

- Otso — Bear, Strength
- Kissa — Cat, Perception

Using the realms

Each realm is a song. A character, who gains an access to a realm of song has become skilled in that song. In theory all songs are as powerful, but there are certain exceptions and special cases. Every song is more powerful when sang for an effect inside that song's realm — Mother song would be especially powerful when used to protect one's own child. GM should to give positive argument levels for such a song use.

It's not efficient to start naming the effects for each realm listed above. You should be able to figure out the concept of each realm and thus be able to make decisions what's acceptable during gameplay.

Singing and songs

In Kalevala everyone can sing. Every character has access to at least the Elämä realm and thus everyone can sing spells.

Using this magic system with the Argument DSS you need to determine the realms each character has and their skill level in each of the realm songs. Skill level determination can be done from attributes or from general background.

Example: You're creating Vieno, a young woman of the Norther Kalevala tribe. She's an unmarried virgin woman of 17 years. This grants her access to the Maiden realm. Her appearance attribute is excellent, so her skill level in the Maiden realm is also excellent.

Singing uses up song levels from the realm songs. To sing a song a character sacrifices one or more adjective levels from one or more realm songs. This is only a temporal power drain, the levels return once per day (morning/evening — GM discretion).

The sacrificed power flows to the song, add all the levels together. Every level is worth the same amount — Good + Pathetic = Excellent. The resulting adjective level is the *power adjective level* of the spell.

The power adjective level and the realms used to sing the song dictate the effect of the spell. Songs that sound from elemental realms or divine domains can cause damage. Use the damage severity system in GM section 4.

Example: Louhi, the demigoddess witch from souther Kalevala is raiding the lands of the northern Kalevala tribe. She's got rather formidable powers. Let's assume that the GM is making Louhi sing a song. Louhi sings a chant to mentally overpower a PC — let's make her the aforementioned Vieno, a Songmaster for the patron deity of the Kalevala Patheon, Ukko.

Louhi's base willpower is excellent, easily matched by Vieno's Superior level willpower. Louhi summons a hailstorm by singing from the both the Air and Water elemental domains. She sacrifices one level of each realm song. Since Louhi is the controller of the summoned storm, she can use it as an argument for the test of wills.

Louhi's willpower is now considered an argumented rank one level higher than superior — she used two adjective levels to gain two argument levels — let's mark that down as "argumented Superior (+1)". If the Songmaster does not defend herself, she's in trouble.

Louhi's song brings down the hailstorm. When it comes to chants, elementals are not her strongest field — but being away from her stronghold and battle worn, she must use the songs she has left. Vieno's deity is the divine controller of the weather, thus Vieno could sing a song either from the Jumala (Ukko) Realm or the Air elemental realm anytime and easily twist the storm out of Louhi's grasp.

Vieno refrains from such an action, wishing to use her deity's song for the final blow. Instead, she uses the Neito song realm to make

her beauty create envy in the ugly witch. She sings the song and sacrifices two adjective levels of the Neito song to bring about the aforementioned effect, thus eliminating the argument and levelling the playing field.

Louhi is brought down to little choise. She has little more than her Elämä song left to sing and she's not prepared to sing it yet. She doesn't have access to the Maiden song, since not 13 summers had passed in her lifesong when she's was bedded. She's a singer of the Ritual realms but those songs have already been song. She does, however, have one song level of both water and darkness realm songs and she decides to use them to bring about black mist from the bog. Having depleted her magic she hopes to get away under the cover of the black mist. It's up to Vieno now to find the witch in the misty darkness.

Vieno wants to make sure Louhi stays out of her lands so she calls on the power of Ukko. Her song sends shivers down the backbones of Louhi's henchmen as Vieno sacrifices all four of her Jumala (Ukko) divine realm song levels to cast lightning upon them and their mistress.

Four levels of the Songmaster's song of the deity is worth a superior power adjective level. Lightning can surely be considered an attack song — superior level attack causes deadly damage. Vieno's attack is an area effect so she gets to distribute the damage anyway she likes. She decides to give Louhi her trouble's worth and assigns serious injuries to the fleeing witch. She then distributes the rest of the damage among Louhi's henchmen, causing minor injuries to all of them.

Lightning strikes down from the sky and through the pathetic black cloud Louhi conjured. It strikes the witch and burns her right eye bursting it out it's socket. The lightning traverses the witch and spreads through the ground to burn Louhi's followers. The men scream as the electricity heats up their swords and burns the skin of their palms. Vieno let's the wicked witch retreat — there's no need for another evil woman in the universe.

Curses and other songs of ill fortune

One prevalent use of magic in the Kalevala are the curses. Curses are more powerful than songs and are often sung by desperate characters. Curses harm both the target and the singer. Characters who sing a curse are often taken mad or driven from their families, even suicide is not uncommon.

If the tolls of singing a curse are horrid, so are the effects. When singing a curse — “a Kirous” — the character *permanently* sacrifices levels of song realm(s). Each level counts as two power adjective levels. I.e. if the character permanently sacrifices two levels of the Neito realm the curse has four power adjective levels.

All curses can be used to cause damage, no matter what realms were used to wrought them. Furthermore, the damage can be assigned either as physical damage or targeted towards specific attribute. It would not be uncommon for a raped woman to sacrifice her lingering Neito realm levels to bring vengeance upon her assailant.

Cursing is an evil act. God’s will not tolerate their realms being sacrificed as curses. Anyone using Divine or Divine Domain realms as the power base for a curse will soon find themselves facing cantankerous deities. God’s slash back with equal power that the curse delivered. They tend to target willpower and place an order of suicide or cause madness.

Those venturing to curse from the Kin realms will find that the matron deity Akka often disapproves this kind of actions, not including the aforementioned Neito realm sacrifice after rape. Those cursing with the Kin realm shall have their children eaten by a bear, brother’s lung pierced by a buck antler and their sisters will drown in lakes, drawn under by the malevolent water pixie Näkki.

Cursing from the elemental realms could be met with the elements of the sacrificed realms continuously hindering the curse singers life. The rain will always pour, the wind will always blow, the forest will not grant easy pas-

sage. There’s just no realm the caster can curse safely.

When a realm is drained with curse, it’s lost. Some realms can be gained anew, like some realms of kin. A very evil woman could bear a child to gain access to the Äiti realm, just to sacrifice her newborn to curse her enemies. The realm could be gained again by getting pregnant with a second child. . . Such use of the realm should anger all the deities since the Äiti realm is considered the most sacred realm of them all. After all, Lemminkäinen’s mother brought her son back to life from the Tuonela river.

Appendix C

Argument Vampires

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Introduction

Vampires are perhaps one of the most important role-playing genres. This section shows how to handle these nightly creatures with the Argument system.

Obviously, this section is meant to make the transition from dice using games over to argument easier. Players experienced with the games such as *White Wolf Publishing's VampireTM* or *Nightlife* can use this appendix to convert their existing character to an Argument DSS character.

The attributes for vampires are handled in a way similar to the way presented in the standard fantasy races appendix. The power of vampire doesn't come directly from attributes, but rather from the incredible amount of life experience gathered during hundreds of years. After all, vampires are originally humans.

Some people believe vampires get their powers by becoming enlightened in death, others believe the powers to be a manifestation of some mystical curse transmitted by sharing blood with the vampire to be. Some sci-fi oriented settings describe vampires as humans enhanced by a blood parasite that releases chemicals into their bloodstream.

For a vampire to survive it has to supersede its surrounding society. Vampires must rise over the social norm and assume a posi-

tion and a state in which either no connection to normal humans is needed or blending into the surroundings is easy enough even for the children of the night. The transitional experience of death, cutting the chains of dependency from society sets the new vampire on a path towards something other than human. The rising feeling of superiority towards its former fellow men, now nothing more than food, is the final stroke that sets the newborn vampire free and makes it more than human.

Vampires also recognize the animal inside them. Setting loose the beast within can give the body powers it does not normally harness. Like the mother who can perform immense feats of strength to save a baby from under a concrete slab, a vampire can set itself free of all fears and inhibitions and just do what needs to be done. This perfect concentration gives the vampire superhuman strength. This is somewhat similar to the state towards which oriental meditation techniques drive their followers.

Whatever theory you use, or setting you've played in, the fact remains the same, vampires are powerful creatures.

Background

Every vampire is either born or brought under the curse, there's no spontaneous passing over to the nightlife. Every transition has a reason. Sin is the usual name for moral or religious wrongdoing. This fundamental concept of evil acts is often denoted as the reason for vampirism. This essence of evil bewitches the entity and the fight against this fall from

grace, the fall from humanity, is one of the most intriguing stories to tell. Not all vampires are evil, but their heart burns with the embers of hellfire that disconnects them from the world around them.

In the western world, a religious curse is often said to be the reason of vampirism. This biblical curse starts either from Lilith or Cain, passed down the bloodline for countless centuries. Other stories tell of vampires raising from the ashes of Sodom and Gomorra or from blood either from the cup of Holy Grail or the descendants of Jesus. Even more stories set the beginning of endless night in the acts of blasphemers and those excommunicated by the Catholic Church. Other religions recognize the restless dead too and this proves that life by night is a lively setting for a campaign.

Themes of the game

Erotica, political intrigue and exploring the essence of evil are fundamental parts of vampire mythology and literature. The game theme should try to emphasize these aspects. The ever present prospect of hunger and the characters' ability to resist it often set the theme of vampire campaigns. It's up to the GM to decide how the feeding will affect the vampires. They might become more active or grow passive when the need to feed has been satisfied.

Usually the heightened senses of the children of the night set certain requirements for the GM. The world around the characters should have more detail and events to reflect the vampire senses. The surrounding world seems so much more alive when you're dead. It even seems angry and demanding in all that detail.

Another possibility for the main theme of a vampire campaign is that of the powers of mind. In literature, vampires are either hideous monsters from the grave or beautiful enticing seducers. The theme selection is obvious here, it's either a social ballet or a violent killing and mayhem spree disjoint from

society.

If everyone around you is potentially capable of intruding into your thoughts and reading all your secrets; if you can't know if you are the one pulling the strings or just the puppet, how do you survive?

Physiology

A vampire that has been recently brought over is traditionally just a shadow of the creature it will become in passage of centuries that lie ahead it. With its powers not yet fully manifested the newborn must cope with post mortem angst. This pain will eventually corrupt the values of this once human creature.

In general vampires are thinner, paler and cooler than they were as humans. Internal organs mummify inside the body and protruding fangs appear. These changes can be optional for GMs. There are at least these two versions for the vampire racial appearance attribute:

- Appearance -2 : negative only : all
- Appearance +1 : normal : Seductive / Dangerous situations

Traditionally, vampires acquire greater and more acute senses when passing over. Their sense of taste clearly exceeds that of an ordinary human. Vampires also develop a sense of smell like that of a bloodhound – with all the ambiguity intended – and maintain vision in the deepest darkness. A clear advantage when preying on humans, of course.

- Endurance +1 : normal : Very high pain threshold.
- Perception +2 : normal : Scent / Taste / Nightvision.

In addition to the above, vampires are in many ways immortal. They don't age. Every evening the body reverts back to the shape it was when it was brought over. There might be only a few mystical rituals to rid the body

of the trapped soul. That is, if the soul is there in the first place.

You've probably heard of all the ways a vampire can die. Stakes, burning and sunlight are mentioned in most of the myths. Take your pick. Whatever true death you choose for your campaign, the vampires are terrified of it. The loss of an eternity while facing oblivion is a rather strong theme for any story.

In addition to the true deaths, there are some personal weaknesses for each vampire. These weaknesses are carried over from the human life to life in the darkness. Self-absorbed ones cast no reflection in the mirror, as the image never leaves the body. Those devoted to their families in the real world end up killing only second sons. The roses give to the first love flood to mind from every petal in the nightly path. The longing for something is always present.

Mental state

Every vampire has an addiction. Addiction to blood, or some other substance available in humans. Extraction of this substance from a human is usually hazardous to the subject's health. Being deprived of this substance eventually makes the vampire uneasy and it starts to suffer from withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms are usually so grave that no vampire can resist the hunger indefinitely.

- Willpower 0 : normal : -2 when hungry, -3 when ravenous.

Each vampire is torn between dreams of past life as a human and a megalomaniacal beast that wants to ravage. The human side seeks familiar places and holds on to memories of familiar things.

Each group of vampires has an alpha male or female. Some even have both. Each member of the pact is reaching for this seat of power, or any lower position of power available in the group. These lower positions

can be anything from alpha's bodyguards to watching mortals in a street corner.

- Status : 0 : normal : all

In addition to the pursuit of status among vampires, children of the night often seek positions of power among mortals, either to secure feeding grounds or gain social status in the limelight.

Vampire archetypes

Vampires form communities that function just like a wolf pack. These packs are formed on common interest or the need for security. Each group has some kind of common ideology and point of view on things. Because of research and devotion to this point of view, all packs have certain special and distinctive powers.

There's a multitude of groups with different beliefs and sometimes it's difficult to determine just how these groups differ from each other. However, a rough cut can be made to divide all these groups into the following categories:

Wild Vampires

The wild ones usually inhabit wastelands or the outskirts of a town. They aren't exactly social and easily resort to violence. Wild ones follow a strict hierarchical power structure. These children of the wild have superhuman strength and endurance and have the ability to become inanimate objects.

The wild ones hunt by night and twilight, relying on their senses and cunning wit. Mortals who do not serve their purpose as willing feeding grounds or messenger are considered cattle.

- Strength : +2 : positive only : +3 when hungry or ravenous
- Strength : +2 : positive only : +3 when hungry or ravenous

- Willpower : -1 : normal : -2 when hungry, -3 when ravenous
- Endurance : +2 : positive only : all
- Perception : +2 : positive only : Scent / nightvision
- Appearance : -2 : normal : Feral
- Status : -2 : normal : all

Social Vampire

Social vampires, also called *the speakers*, are seducers and creatures of words. The speakers are usually members of various secret societies or clubs, usually participating in more than one. Speakers have abilities to modify the opinions of the humans around them and enclose themselves inside their hearts.

Speakers thrive on sin. They rape and pilage both mentally and physically the ones that have placed trust in them. Speakers often offer something of value to the mortals, be it the promise of eternal life, unheard sexual ecstasy or pure influential power.

- Strength : +1 : normal : all
- Willpower : 0 : normal : -2 when hungry, -3 when ravenous
- Endurance : +1 : normal : all
- Perception : +2 : normal : nightvision / Taste
- Appearance : +1 : positive only : Seductive
- Status : +1 : normal : all

Mystical Vampire

The third vampire archetype is the mystical vampire. These spiritual creatures operate either from within the church or somehow following the church doctrine. They entangle themselves in the magic and occult. These exercises with the unknown often grant them fantastic supernatural abilities.

The *searchers* find their way into secret societies and clubs, hoping to find hints on the reasons of their own existence through their obscure rituals. Searchers can alter the minds of their mortal followers and victims, driving them away from their normal life and into their arms.

- Strength : 0 : normal : all
- Willpower : 0 : positive only : -2 when hungry, -3 when ravenous
- Endurance : +1 : normal : all
- Perception : +2 : normal : nightvision / Taste
- Appearance : +1 : normal : Dangerous
- Status : 0 : normal : all

Servants of the blood

Some vampires gather mortals around them to fulfill their hunger for either blood or company in the darkness of night. These servants are usually linked to the vampire in more ways than one.

- Primary trait : 0 : positive only : any enchantment the vampire can give
- Willpower : 0 : normal : -2 in masters presence
- Status : -3 : normal : the servant can use portion of the master's status.