

PREFACE

Introductory rules for the Hubris Story Engine

This is the bare bones version of the rules system, stripped to its most fundamental parts. It's fully functional and ready to run – though like any “lite” version of a game, the options have been removed and the complexity has been distilled to the main elements. For experienced roleplayers or ambitious beginners, we recommend the full version of the Story Engine. Translating Story Bones to the Story Engine is easy, though some of the terms and dice rolls are different.

The core of any roleplaying game is the story. Game turns in Maelstrom are played out as scenes within the story. Most scenes can be “role-played” without any rules, but when the outcome is not obvious or a challenge is needed, a handful of dice is rolled to determine the outcome of the scene. Think of each player as an author, and the rules as a tool to allow them to help tell the story of their character.

In essence, the Story rules are about choosing when to spend resources to get additional dice. There is an heroic element to it because the players get to choose WHEN to use their resources, saving them for critical or climactic moments. The sidebar to the right gives a good overview of the process.

CREATING A CHARACTER

Choose your Concept

What's the central concept of your role? Are you a treasure hunter? A self-involved dilettante, or a lost soul seeking enlightenment? A roguish hero or a criminal mastermind? This concept will help you play your role, and the narrator can suggest concepts that will work well in the story.

Choose your Race and Gender

If you know the races of the Maelstrom, then choose one for your role. Otherwise, best to stick with a human role to keep it easy. Pick a gender and an age too while you're at it. If you can draw, sketch your character. Even if you can't draw, try to get a clear idea of what your role looks like. Big eyes? Dark hair? Stocky? Long fingers?

Choose your Descriptors

Choose four adjectives or phrases to define your role. Are you tall? Are you friendly? Are you fiendishly clever? One of these four things should be a quirk or flaw -- one of those wonderful failings that we all have, such as *near-sighted* or even *pouts at the drop of a hat*.

These four phrases are called Descriptors. The flaw is referred to as a Quirk.

RULES OVERVIEW

The Basic Rules:

Characters have a handful of phrases or adjectives called Descriptors. Whenever there is a situation that requires a dice roll, the players add up their Descriptors and that determines the amount of dice they can roll (called the Die Pool). Characters have an extra die as well, called the Base Die. The goal is to roll enough odd numbers (called Odds) to beat the Target Number.

The outcome is decided by how close the roll was to the Target Number. This is the Success Range.

The players can add dice to the throw by spending Descriptors (see Burning Descriptors). They can also set some of their dice aside as automatic Odds (see Traits).

Bidding takes place whenever the scene involves an opponent – in these scenes the Target Number is determined by the total number of Odds rolled by the opponent. Both sides are able to spend Descriptors (by “burning” them) to raise their dice total.

Narrator

The narrator is the person who runs the story. They determine the outcome of events, prepare the plot, and play all the characters in the story that the players don't control.

Characters

Each player plays a role (called a *character*) in the story. The story in the game usually revolves around these characters, and they are the central part of the game. Each player should think of himself as the main author for their character during the game, deciding what that character does and how they behave as the story goes on.

Dice

Any kind of dice will do, because all that matters is whether they roll an odd or even number. Odd numbers count towards your total and even numbers are ignored. When taking actions, the player tries to roll a certain number of Odds, determined by the Target Number. If they roll that many Odds or more, they succeed in whatever it was they were trying to do.

Actions

Actions taken by your character may or may not require a roll of the dice. The narrator will tell you when you need to roll, though generally rolls are only required when you're attempting something difficult or risky.

Traits

Choose three knacks or skills that help define your role. Are you good with machines? Are you a talented pianist? Can you walk a tightrope? In a game about piracy, you may want Traits like *Great Balance*, *Swordplay* or *Improvised Sailing*, and in a story about court intrigue you may want Traits like *Diplomat*, *Dueling*, or *Gossip*.

You'll get these Traits at the basic level, called Weak Traits, but they can later be raised to Mild and Strong Traits.

Special Powers

Starting characters don't have Special Powers unless the narrator allows it. Players will have a chance to develop special powers through Story Points as the game progresses. Special Powers include the Magical Arts, ESP, Dream Travels, Firestarting, or any other "supernatural" ability or gift. Like Traits, they are unique to each game and depend on the kind of game you'll be running.

SCENES

Open and Rolled

Scenes that require a dice roll are called Rolled Scenes, and scenes that do not need to be resolved with dice are called Open Scenes.

We generally encourage you to treat most scenes as Open unless the actions of the players are risky or the outcome is unpredictable. Every so often an Open Scene should be rolled to lend an additional element of chance to the story.

The Die Pool

The Die Pool is the number of dice the player rolls to attempt actions in a Rolled Scene.

All characters have a Base Die. In addition they add a die for each Descriptor (not counting Quirks). This total is their Die Pool. Players can increase their pool by working together (combining Die Pools) or by "burning" Descriptors and Quirks (see below).

For purposes of the Die Pool, all Descriptors count towards the total. In the basic game this means all starting characters have the same Die Pool.

Actions

Whenever anyone declares an action in a Rolled Scene, the narrator determines a Target Number or Opposing Total. If any characters are working together on the same action, they get to add their Die Pools together for the roll.

At this point, before the dice are rolled, Descriptors may be burned for additional dice, and extra dice are awarded for strategy or advantages on either side.

Once the final Die Pool is decided, the dice are rolled. If the roll is

against a Target Number, then the goal is to roll a number of Odds equal to or greater than the Target Number. If the roll is against an Opposing Total, then the goal is to roll more Odds than the opponent does (re-roll in case of ties). The number of Odds rolled GREATER THAN the number needed are called Target Odds, and they determine the Success Range of the action.

Burning Descriptors and Quirks

Players can get additional dice for scenes by "burning" Descriptors and Quirks. To do this the player has to use the Descriptor in a sentence to show how it might help the character: "I'm so *nimble* that I can get under the portcullis before it closes" or "I'm *friendly* enough that the bartender tells me what I need to know." Unless it's a real stretch, the player gets an extra die for their pool for that action. Players can burn as many unspent Descriptors as they want per action.

Quirks are used the same way, although it's usually harder to find a use for them: "I'm so *near-sighted* that I avoid the sorcerer's magic gaze" or "I'm such a *glutton* that I think my stomach can handle the poison."

Descriptors can only be burned once per session. Put a check mark next to it to indicate that it's been used. Burnt Descriptors still count towards the Die Pool.

Using Traits

When a Trait is appropriate to the action, it gives the character Auto Odds. In a fight, Traits like *swordsman*, *boxer* or *tactician* would most likely be appropriate (depending on the kind of fight). In a chase scene Traits like *horse riding*, *streetwise*, and *climbing* might all be appropriate. The narrator is the final judge, however, and Traits like *jack of all trades* and *improvisation* should be discarded in favor of more specific (and more imaginative) Traits.

Auto Odds are dice from the Die Pool that are set aside and counted as Odds without rolling.

Weak Traits allow 1 Auto Odd, Mild Traits allow 2 Auto Odds and Strong Traits allow 3 Auto Odds.

Target Numbers and Opposing Totals

These are the guidelines for Target Numbers. The Target Number reflects how difficult the task is in itself: advantages like ambushing or careful aim add dice to the character's pool instead of lowering the Target Number (see Getting Extra Dice).

Example: Ashland is trying to pick a lock. The lock is not a very good one, so the Target Number is 3 (Hard). The fact that Ashland has lock picks doesn't lower the Target Number, it gives him extra dice.

When an opponent is involved, the Opposing Total is used. The number of Odds rolled by the opponent(s) determines the Target Number.

EASY (2 Odds)

This task shouldn't be taken for granted, but with a little effort can be achieved.

HARD (3 Odds)

This task is tricky and should be taken seriously. With good effort and focus it can be completed.

REALLY HARD (4 Odds)

An attempt is not likely to succeed, and may even be dangerous. With a lot of luck and a great effort it can be accomplished.

EXTREMELY HARD (6 Odds)

This is a feat for a specialist. With training you might stand a good chance, otherwise it would take a lot of luck and an amazing effort to accomplish.

IMPOSSIBLE (8 Odds)

This task seems almost impossible. No one short of a highly trained professional even has a shot at this.

These are guidelines. The Target Numbers can be whatever seems fair for the situation.

Getting Extra Dice

When a character has an advantage while performing an action they are awarded extra dice. Advantages come from circumstances (ambushing, good cover in a firefight, advantage of ground, etc). If they have a disadvantage, dice are added to the Opposing Total instead of deducting from the character's pool (in the case of a straight Target Number, the Target Number is increased).

Generally, each good idea or tactical advantage adds a die for all characters that benefit from it. A really good idea or major tactical advantage gets 2, and an amazing idea or overwhelming tactical advantage gets 3.

Descriptors for Items: In addition, special items and equipment can have their own Descriptors. A sword could have "hits like thunder" and eyeglasses could "see like a hawk." Only special items have Descriptors, either because they are incredibly well designed or because of their magical nature. These Descriptors can be burned, and they count towards the user's Die Pool as long as they are being used (the sword only adds "hits like thunder" when wielded, and the glasses only add "see like a hawk" while worn).

Magical Arts

To use the Natural or Scientific Arts, characters need to have the Magical Arts Special Power. They can use magical Traits (called Flux Traits) by burning a Descriptor to invoke them. They then roll against a Target Number based on the difficulty of the task. Flux Traits are the individual powers of the magic being used, and

include such things as *Soothsee*, *Transmutation*, *Humors* and *Dreams* for the Natural Arts, and *Combustion*, *Magnetism*, *Animation* and *Electricity* for the Scientific Arts.

Feel free to develop Flux Traits and appropriate Target Numbers for them. Otherwise, refer to the full rules for details on Special Powers such as the Magical Arts.

Success Range

For every action there are "degrees of success (or failure)" determined by the Success Range:

Complete Success	(4 or more Target Odds)
Basic Success	(2-3 Target Odds)
Partial Success	(0 to 1 Target Odds)
Partial Failure	(Missed by 1)
Basic Failure	(Missed by 2-3)
Complete Failure	(Missed by 4 or more)

Complete Success: A stunning success! The action was accomplished fully and with style!

Basic Success: A solid success. The action was accomplished, but without much room to spare.

Partial Success: A minimal success. The action was accomplished, but badly!

Partial Failure: A minimal failure. The action failed, but not by much.

Basic Failure: A solid failure. The action failed and nothing was gained.

Complete Failure: A stunning failure! The action failed completely and embarrassingly!

Injury

If failure in a scene can lead to injury, the narrator should make that clear before the dice are rolled. The number of Health Levels lost due to injury is determined by the Success Range of the scene: For every Target Odd rolled, the losing side takes a level of injury. In group rolls the injuries can be given out randomly if it's not obvious who was hurt.

Health and Injury

Characters are always healthy unless they've become injured or ill over the course of the story. Characters have Health "levels" that effect their abilities as follows:

Healthy: Other than minor scrapes, bruises or the common cold, a character at Healthy is considered to be fully functional for purposes of the game.

Running Scenes

The time frame for actions varies based on the situation and the action itself. Speed and movement is just a matter of common sense; if it helps, the narrator can draw a diagram of the scene to help visualize what's going on.

1. Declare Actions

The players announce what actions they are taking. There is no particular order to declaring actions, as long as everyone gets a chance to declare.

2. Determine Target Numbers

The narrator decides on a Target Number for the actions being taken. If there is an opponent, the narrator says so and the Target Number will be decided by an Opposing Total instead.

3. Assign Extra Dice

The narrator assigns extra dice if either side has an advantage.

4. Determine the Die Pools

Players add up their Die Pools, adding any extra dice that were assigned in step 3. Players attempting the same action combine their pools. At this point players can burn Descriptors for extra dice.

5. Roll the Dice

The dice are rolled and the Odds are added up (Auto Odds are set aside and counted as Odds).

6. Determine the Success Range

The narrator works with the players to determine what happened based on the degree of success.

Example with Starting Characters:

Jorthid and Ashland are trying to get away from some thugs who have chased them down an alley. Ashland tries to kick open a door so they can get away while Jorthid holds off the thugs.

1. Ashland is kicking in the door. Jorthid is fending off the thugs. The two thugs (as a group) are attacking Jorthid and Ashland.
2. The Target Number for kicking in the door is 2 (Easy). The Target Number for the fight is determined by the Opposing Total.
3. The thugs have an extra die each because they're armed (clubs and knives).
4. The thugs combine their pools for a Die Pool of 10 (including their extra dice). Ashland has a Die Pool of 4. Jorthid burns a few Descriptors (because he's desperate!) for a Die Pool of 7.
5. Ashland rolls 3 Odds. The thugs roll 5 Odds. Jorthid rolls 4.
6. Ashland has a Partial Success and barely manages to get the door open. Jorthid has a Partial Failure and gets hit in the head with a club for an injury.

Injured: An injured (or very ill) character is in bad shape, having suffered a bad wound or powerful illness. Injured characters don't get their Base Die.

Out: A character who is Out is either grievously wounded or seriously ill. These characters are unable to do anything at all.

Dead: Dead characters are dead. Though the player may bring in a new role or take over another role, this character is considered to be dead for purposes of the story.

Since the characters start at Healthy, two injuries would take them to Out, and one more would kill them.

Healing: Characters generally heal a Health level every 3 to 5 days if given proper care. Strong medicines, special herbs, healing rituals and the Arts can all help speed up the process. The narrator should use their judgment and the healing time should reflect the kind of injury the character sustained.

Story Points

At the end of each game the narrator awards Story Points for role-playing and plot advancement. These points can be used to give the character additional Descriptors and Traits (or even Special Powers) and may also be used during games to replenish up to four "burnt" Descriptors.

These are guidelines, and narrators can give more or less as they see fit. In general, characters should get 1-3 points a game. Each character gets 1 point for each of the following events:

1. *Making it through the game session alive.*
2. *Learning something important about their character or the story they are in.*
3. *Major contributions to the success of the group by the character.*
4. *Plot success: Award this point to characters that accomplish major goals.*
5. *Chapter's end: During long-term stories, there may be "chapters" within the story. Whenever the narrator feels as though a "chapter" has ended, award a point to all the characters.*

Adding to the Character: As the story progresses the characters develop and grow. To reflect this, Story Points can be spent to add more Descriptors and Traits, improve Traits, and buy Special Powers as follows.

Descriptors: The cost of a new Descriptor is equal to the total of your existing Descriptors (not counting Quirks). A *starting*

character would have to spend 3 Story Points for a fourth Descriptor, and 4 Story Points for a fifth, and so on.

Quirks: The cost of a new Quirk is equal to the total of your existing Quirks. The maximum amount of Quirks that can be bought this way is equal to half the character's Descriptors (not counting Quirks). *A starting character would have to spend 1 Story Point for a second Quirk, and 2 Story Points for a third (providing they had at least double this amount of Descriptors).*

Traits: It costs 3 Story Points for each level of a Trait, including the first. A Weak Trait costs 3 Story Points, a Mild Trait costs an additional 3 Story Points, and a Strong Trait costs an additional 3, for a total of 9 Story Points for a Strong Trait.

Special Powers: If your narrator allows them, Special Powers cost 7 Story Points. Some Special Powers require special Traits as well, like the Magic Arts power that uses Flux Traits to determine the specific powers of the Arts. (Special Powers are covered in the full rules).

Translation to the Story Engine

This section is included to help you convert the Story Bones to the Story Engine (and vice-versa). There are two sections, one for the first generation rules (as printed in *Maelstrom Storytelling* HG1001) and the other for the second generation rules.

The main difference is the simplification of scene resolution. In the main rules scenes can have almost any scope or scale and events can be resolved a variety of ways.

FIRST GENERATION CONVERSION: The Story Engine

In addition to the many options and added depth of the complete rules, the terminology is somewhat different.

Terminology

<i>Story Bones</i>	<i>Story Engine</i>
Quirks:	Weak Descriptors
Traits:	Secondary Affinities
Odds:	Successes
Auto Odd:	Automatic Success
Target Odd:	n/a
Target Numbers:	Difficulty Rate
Die Pool:	Bidding Pool
Special Powers:	Prime Affinities

Mechanics

Aspects: Descriptors need to be assigned to one of the four different Aspects (Mind, Matter, Spirit, Chaos)

Die Pool: The Die Pool (Bidding Pool) is determined differently, based on the Aspect of the scene

OASIS

Fiction from the Maelstrom World

Abrom knew the desert. He knew it because he had spent his life there, feeling its winds as they weathered his skin and the suns as they stole the moisture from his garden. It was night now, and Abrom gave prayer for the day as the cool winds blew through the village.

The traders would be there tomorrow, he thought to himself, and he wondered what they would bring. Tools from the great cities, and parts for their aging pump. When he was a child he thought of different things – magical hearing pieces, wondrous animals and winding toys of the shiniest brass. These strange men would come through their village on their way across the desert and pass on, leaving Abrom to his simple life. He used to ask them about their travels and about their homes, and sometimes they would weave tales until the dawn and Abrom would sit transfixed as he brought every word to life in his mind. A dangerous world, that was something he knew, but it still teased him to think of it. A world that shifted and moved, with forests of green plants and oceans of water.

His parents had told him of it, of course, but they had told him without any yearning or desire. Cold facts that did not seem to do justice to the mystery of the world beyond. Abrom's world was without mystery, without surprise. Their small oasis never changed, and the horizon was a desert of yellow sand in all directions. Aj Orran, the Great Storm, never came. Abrom's village was like a forgotten piece of the world, left out of the twisting shifts that moved the oceans and brought mountains to the plains and rivers to different seas in a random pattern known only to God. Why Aj Orran did not come to Abrom's home, only the Prophet knew.

As Abrom slid eventually into sleep, he thought of the choices he had made, of his wife and children, of his garden and his desert. The Prophet would have wanted this, he thought, his breathing getting deeper as he edged towards the Dream in the one exotic journey his life allowed.

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Story Bones

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Target Numbers: The Difficulty Rate has a different scale

Cultural Affinities: The issue of Affinities isn't addressed at all in Story Bones. Characters should be given a free Prime Affinity that they can use for a Cultural Affinity. In addition, the Base Die is tied to a character's Cultural Affinity and isn't always automatic.

Story Points: There are more uses for Story Points, and costs are different.

Quirks: Quirks can't be burned for extra dice, only to invoke Quick Takes.

SECOND GENERATION CONVERSION: "Engine2"

Story Bones is based on the 2nd generation Story Engine, so translation is fairly simple and straightforward.

Terminology

<i>Story Bones</i>	<i>Story Engine</i>
Traits:	Trait Affinities
Flux Traits:	Flux Affinities
Special Powers:	Prime Affinities

Mechanics

Aspects: Descriptors need to be assigned to one of the four different Aspects (Mind, Matter, Spirit, Chaos)

Die Pool: The Die Pool is determined differently, based on the Aspect of the scene

Target Numbers: The Target Numbers have a different scale

Cultural Affinities: The issue of Affinities isn't addressed at all in Story Bones. Characters should be given a free Prime Affinity that they can use for a Cultural Affinity. In addition, the Base Die is tied to a character's Cultural Affinity and isn't always automatic.

Story Points: There are more uses for Story Points, and costs are different.



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What Abrom did not know is that change was slowly stirring in the desert sands. Change in the form of a small brass device the traders brought with them, a device old since before the Great Equinox changed the world. As they crossed the sands the device began to hum, buried within the folds of their baggage. The hum was soft and soothing, and as they passed, ancient machines began to stir deep beneath the sands. The magnetic web of a lost technology reached its long fingers deep into the desert for the first time in a thousand years.

By morning the traders reached the lonely Oasis only to find it changed. Outside, for as far as an eye could see, there was an ocean under a cloudless sky.

"By the Prophet...." Abrom said as he opened his door and stared out in wonder. He walked slowly to the edge of the water and let his feet touch the sea for the first time.

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