

# MULRAH

## *My Universal Lite Role-playing Adventure Heuristic*

MULRAH is an indie role-playing game (RPG) that captures the best innovations of the indie RPG movement: descriptively defined characters, conflict (rather than task) resolution, and story-enhancing damage. Unlike other indie games, MULRAH does not pretend these innovations are exclusive to any theme or setting, but rather promotes them as the essential core to any RPG in which story comes first.

**Characters** in MULRAH include any entity that can change the direction of the story. Villains, monsters, thugs, allies, etc. can be Characters, but so can horses, starships, traps, etc.

**Tags** refer to any game element—an attribute, skill, quirk, (dis)advantage, weakness, cliché, feature, etc.—that describes a Character *and* can exert significant influence on the direction of a story. By default, a Tag's **Level** is considered “Ordinary,” the starting point for measuring a Tag's influence. To the degree that a game element is extraordinary, it moves up the chart, gaining Levels, as shown below.

### Story Power Chart

Level	Story Interest
5	Phenomenal
4	Remarkable
3	Exceptional
2	Notable
1	Interesting
0	Ordinary/None

**Character Creation** is simply the process of players choosing Tags for their characters and applying Levels. Tags considered default to the story (like “Bipedal” for humans) are considered Ordinary and need not be noted. Other Tags (like “Magical”) might require an additional Level just to acquire as a (latent) Ordinary Tag. Although one approach to Tag selection might be to pick the broadest, most powerful Tags, players will actually gain the most Story Power if they create flavorful, double-edged Tags. Characters can, within reason, alter Tags and redistribute Levels during downtime.

**Conflict** occurs whenever a PC's action is opposed by another Character, whether an orc, an ex-wife, or a dangerous cliff. Conflict begins with each side determining the stakes or the outcome of the conflict if that side prevails. To resolve a Conflict, each side determines a **Resolution Score** by selecting the Tags relevant to the Conflict and describing how they will come into play in its resolution. Descriptions that advance the ambiance or themes of the story (gritty realism, swashbuckling action, dark humor) may provide a bonus. Unless taken by surprise, players are assumed to go first and win any ties.

**Conflict Outcomes** are mostly described by the players, regardless of whether they won or lost. Whichever Character has the lower Resolution Score applies **Damage** by reducing any of the used Tags by a number of Levels equal to the difference in Resolution Scores and adding those Levels to the **Danger Pool**. If the difference exceeds the Levels available to take Damage, then the victor can also dictate one additional fact about the resolution of the Conflict for every extra point difference available. At the GM's discretion, Conflict can continue beyond a single comparison of Resolution Scores until one side has lost all Levels of its relevant Tags.

**The Danger Pool** contains all Characters' Levels lost to Damage. Any GM or player can use these Levels to bring a negative aspect to the Damaged Tag into play. (e.g., The Damaged “Bloodthirsty Warrior” won't stop fighting even when he has to.) When this happens, the Damaged Level is applied to the Resolution Score of the Damaged Characters' opponents, but the Character regains the Level after the Conflict. Because using Danger Pool is the only way to recover Damage during a session, players are advised to pick Tags that “cut both ways” with both positive and negative implications for their Characters.

**Damaged Tags**, unless brought into play from the Danger Pool, have less Story Power for that Character. A Tag that has lost all of its Levels cannot benefit its Character in Conflict, and, once all Levels from all a Character's Tags have been lost, he becomes **Totally Boring**, receding to the background. Instead of taking a massive hit to her Tags, a Character can instead trade a Level of an undepleted Tag for a new Tag that represents a **Scar** related to the current Conflict.

**Randomization (Optional)** can be added to MULRAH simply by rolling a die for every Level involved in a Conflict. As a rule of thumb, the die you select should about half the total Levels of each PC (e.g., 12 Levels = d6). The highest result from all the dice rolled is the Resolution Score. For grittier campaigns, use **Progressive Randomization**, with 1d4 for Interesting to 1d12 for Phenomenal. For games in which randomization is to have a larger role than Story Power, **Traditional Randomization** has the total Levels involved act as modifiers on a single die roll.

**Luck (Optional)** smiles upon the PCs and other key Characters in your story. Best used in conjunction with Randomization, this Luck always gives certain Characters an extra die to roll in Conflict. Luck used in conjunction with Progressive Randomization makes for flavorful results in which key Characters can deal high amounts of Damage to lesser Characters, but tend to be shielded from it in return.

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### Optional Rules

#### **Character Creation**

Characters with unlimited Tags and Levels, while powerful, are almost as dull as Totally Boring Characters. Although none of the following rules are required, a thoughtful GM will employ at least one or two of them to guide her players and the stories they create together.

**Required Tags**, set by the GM, can establish the feel of a story setting and the types of Characters players can create. A traditional fantasy game might require Tags for Race and Class/Profession. Tags for Motivation or Personality can encourage character development, while Tags for Combat Skills or Martial Arts are necessary for an action-oriented adventure. Finally, if you want to cover the most pretentious indie RPGs, you will ironically have to require Tags for old-fashioned attributes like Stamina, Will, and Acuity.

**Background-Based Character Creation** requires that each Tag has a clear story behind how and why the Character has it. This approach can become an entire gaming session in and of itself, with the GM relaying the major historical themes of the storyline leading up to the start of play and players responding with their Characters' actions and resulting Tags over the course of that background.

**Balance** could be important to some games, though keep in mind few stories have characters of equal capability. Simply using Gritty Randomization will encourage players to take more Tags rather than add Levels to old Tags. A GM could also impose **Minimum Tags** and **Maximum Levels** on Character Creation; 4 Tags and 10 Levels are a good start. **The Tag Pyramid** is a more rigorous approach, requiring that no Tag be taken at a given Level unless there are more Tags taken at the next lowest level. In other words, one Phenomenal Tag requires at least two Remarkable Tags, which in turn require at least three Notable Tags, and so on.

**A Meta Tag** is at the core of a story's atmosphere and should be selected carefully by the GM, if used at all. It can be a Character's Soul, Sanity, Mana, or even—dare I say it—Hit Points and, once defined, cannot be Tagged. It usually starts out equal to the Character's Levels (10 by default) and increases and decreases when a Character takes specific actions or particular things happen to the Character. For example, Soul might decrease upon seeing an unusually abhorrent sight or when a Character murders someone, but could be increased through heroic, self-sacrificing acts. Upon reaching zero, the Meta Tag will cause the Character to enter a usually game-ending state such as death, madness, etc.

#### **Climactic Story Power**

Sometimes a Character needs to put it all on the line. Depending upon the tone of the story, GMs should carefully select one or more of the following ways to give players more influence over scenes they feel are dramatically important.

**A Cinematic Meta Force** like Magic, the Force, or just Extra Effort could exist that allows Characters to increase a Resolution Score a certain number of times per session, as long vibrant description shows how it is being used.

**An Intense Meta Force** is similar but comes at the expense of a Meta Tag (e.g., tapping into Dark Magics decreases Sanity). Because Meta Tags are difficult replenish and lead to death or worse when depleted, players will think twice before using Intense Meta Forces.

**Destiny Cards**, distributed from a deck of cards to players (3 per player) at the beginning each session, can be used to replace any Character's Resolution Score. For extremely cinematic stories, they could be used at any time, but they add the most flavor when tied to a specific Required Tag or a Meta Force. For example, the GM could stipulate that Destiny Cards can be used only when a Character is calling upon his Motivation. Aces are low, and face cards either represent numbers or special functions at the GM's discretion.

**Arc-Length Story Planning** allows for players to redistribute Levels from one session to another over the course of a story arc lasting several sessions. The GM and players should determine the number of sessions in the story arc, each player selects which session he wants his Character to star in, and then he can add Levels to that session by taking them away from another one.

**Irrelevant Tags** could be used during Conflicts in a more comical game, as long as the player roleplays how Exceptional Chef is used in an aerial dogfight. To tone down the comedy to mere levity, the GM could require a Level of Damage be taken for each use of an Irrelevant Tag.

**Totally Bad Ass** is the opposite of Totally Boring and is appropriate for gritty Characters. Upon losing all Levels, a Character choosing the Totally Bad Ass option accepts that the end has come for this Character. She remains Totally Boring for as many scenes as the player desires, and does not refresh Levels at the start of a new session. However, at the time of her choosing, she makes her final stand, acting with *double* her original Levels in all Tags. After this climactic scene, this Character departs from the storyline.