

M.A.R.K.S

(MOTIVATION, ARCHETYPE, ROLE-PLAYING, KARMA & SKILL)

AKA A SYSTEM IN SEARCH OF A SETTING

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神宮ゲームズ
Jingu Games

INTRODUCTION

After about a 16-year break, I decided that I wanted to get back into pen-and-paper RPGs. I got out of the hobby when card games like **Magic: The Gathering** began taking away players from the hobby and I found myself with stacks of rulebooks and supplements in which no one else shared any interest.

Let's fast forward to 2009. I finally found a small group of people to play with (no mean feat in Japan, let me say), but none of us had any games, so I took it upon myself to do some research.

The hobby had changed. Old reliable **AD&D** was no more, and in its place was something that I could no longer identify with. Other old favorites, like **BRP/Call of Cthulhu** and **Traveller**, had been given a new look (well, not **CoC**; it's still the death trap I remembered it to be). New games had also emerged that took a fresh approach to the RPG experience, like **Don't Rest Your Head** and **Spirit of the Century**, designed with an emphasis on storytelling. Those games lead to my discovery of **Sorcerer**, **Risus**, **Savage Worlds**, and numerous other games that lead me to reassess what RPGs can be. If only I had the time to play them. . .

I would like to dedicate these rules to all those game designers who have unknowingly contributed to them. It is because of those games mentioned above and many others that these rules have come into being. I have stolen from them all shamelessly, but I hope my transgressions will be forgiven.

PLAYING THE GAME

This game requires at least two players, although more players are often recommended. At least one player must take the role of. . . well, some might say Game Master, and some might say Referee. I prefer the term Conductor, in a musical sense, or Director in a cinematic sense. Whatever they are called, these people are in control of all the game elements not controlled by individual players. What that means is defined by how you play the game.

As for materials, other than these rules the play group will need paper and pencils to take notes, sketch maps, etc., and a decent quantity of regular six-sided dice, say about twenty for the group, or perhaps 10 per player.

Passing the Hat: I'm making these rules available free in their current form to anyone who wishes to download them in the hope that I can get some constructive feedback in return. It's so hard to find playtesters these days. . .

Please feel free to send any constructive comments you have to [Jingu.Games at gmail.com].

Having said all that, I'm not above accepting donations if you feel like showing your support in a monetary fashion. Visit my very basic website for more information.

Thanks for downloading MARKS. I hope you enjoy it.

Leslie J. Furlong

<http://sites.google.com/site/jingugames>

CHARACTER CREATION

A character is the means by which player interacts with the game world. Character creation in MARKS is a six-step process.

1. Choose your Archetype (What you do, what you are, what people see)
2. Describe your Motivation (What makes you tick)
3. Buy Skills (How you get things done)
4. Derive Primary and Secondary Attributes (It's not about potential; it's about how hard you work)
5. Choose your weakness (Everyone has one)
6. Round out the character (Put the "character" in character)

1. Choose an Archetype

Give the character a short description, say five words or less. This is more than a profession; it is how the player chooses to see his or her character and how the player wishes to be seen. Examples include: Cop on the Edge, Retired Spy, Hooker with a Heart of Gold (okay, six words), Original Gangsta, Loyal Bodyguard, Vengeful Gladiator, Spoiled Dilettante, Starf***er, Delusional Priest, Corrupt Politician, etc. Don't be too precise or too vague; a single adjective plus a career works well as a rule of thumb.

Game effect: Any time a character attempts something that is directly related to their Archetype (A gangster or cowboy playing Poker), the player gets a single bonus die added to their resolution pool. If unrelated (an English teacher playing Poker), there is no bonus or penalty. If the action runs counter to their Archetype (a Devout Nun playing Poker, for example, independent of whether she has gambling skill or not), there is a minus one die penalty (an Unconventional or Rebellious Nun, however, would not get the penalty and would likely gain a bonus).

2. Describe Motivation

Every character has a reason for doing what they do. For some it is loyalty to someone or something, for others vengeance. Some people want to protect their family and friends. Others are looking to make a buck, while others want to give to the poor. Think of an expression, crappy movie title or saying that encapsulates that philosophy for your Character, for example:

- * All about the Benjamins.
- * Vengeance is mine!

- * How dare you!
- * Family First.
- * Livin' La Vida Loca.
- * Not on my watch!

Game Effect: If a character attempts an action in line with their motivation, the character gets a bonus die added to their roll. If the action runs counter to their motivation, the player suffers a one die penalty. **This bonus/penalty also increases by one die with every consecutive related action within the same scene.**

3. Buy Skills (See Skills Table)

In most cases, players have **20 points** with which to buy their skills. Skills can range from level one through five, but a starting character's skills are bought at Apprentice (1 point for 1 die), Journeyman, (3 points for 3 dice) or Master (5 points for 5 dice) level.

Game Effect: Unsurprisingly, for every level in skill a player may roll one die when that skill is tested.

4. Derive primary and secondary attributes

In most games, attributes are the first features generated for a character. In MARKS the attributes are based on the skills taken.

Skills are categorized according to their governing attribute, Physique, Reason, or Insight. To determine the attribute scores, use the chart which follows.

PRIMARY ATTRIBUTES (PHYSIQUE, REASON, AND INSIGHT)	
Total skill points under an attribute	Primary attribute score
0-3	1
4-5	2
6-7	3
8-9	4
10	5

Improving your primary attributes can only be done by increasing the value of their related skills.

Secondary Attributes are Will, Fatigue, and Karma. These attributes are derived from the governing attributes using the following formulae:

SECONDARY ATTRIBUTES		
Attribute	Formula	Score
Will	$(\text{Reason} + \text{Insight} / 2)$	1 to 5
Fatigue	Physique + Insight	2-10 consecutive actions
Starting Karma	n/a	0 (maximum 5)

Will measures the strength of the character's mind when faced with mental or physical stress or trauma.

When a character faces a frightful, traumatic or otherwise stressful situation, the player may have to make a Will roll, with the number of dice rolled equal to the character's Will score plus Archetype, Motivation and Color dice (see Resolution Mechanic section for more detail). The number of dice in the opposition pool is determined by the GM.

If the player succeeds, the character is simply unaffected by the trauma. Otherwise, failure has its consequences. The general effects of failure are dependent on the nature of the trauma and are governed by the descriptors (see the Resolution Mechanic section). However, any time a major descriptor is part of the resolution, the character loses a point of Will. A character with a Will reduced to zero is at the mercy of the GM and has likely breathed his last breaths (so to speak) under the control of the player.

Fatigue is the number of physical actions a player can perform in a scene before tiring, such as hand-to-hand attacks, leaps, full speed movement and so on. When a character is tired, the character suffers a one-die penalty until rested, usually 30 in-game minutes.

More importantly, Fatigue is used to determine the effects of injury. The details are described in the Combat section.

Karma points are used to give your character an advantage or avoid peril and are discussed later in the rules. A character starts with zero points and a maximum total of 5. Both of these values will change during play.

Once a character is generated, both Primary and secondary attributes are independent of further changes to skill levels, but are still related to one another.

5. Choose your weakness

After your secondary attributes are determined, choose one of your primary attributes to be your weakness. Any skills governed by that attribute can never be improved, and no further skills can ever be gained.

6. Round out the Character

Give the character a name and a physical description as well as any other details you deem necessary.

Game effect: None directly, although it might give the GM some ideas. . .

RESOLUTION MECHANIC

1. Roll resolution dice and determine their success pool (maximum five dice).
2. Roll resistance dice and determine their success pool (maximum five dice).
3. Determine the victor (the challenger who rolled the highest untied die), the number of successes (all remaining dice in the victor's pool higher than their counterparts in the opponent's pool), or the number of failures (in the case of passive resistance) and apply their effects.

To resolve a conflict in which the outcome is both uncertain and relevant, dice are rolled representing a character's **Motivation**, **Archetype**, and the controlling player's **Role-playing** in addition to the character's relevant **Skill** level, as follows:

1. **Skill dice:** 0-5 dice (typically 1, 3, or 5 dice)
2. **Archetype dice:** +/- 1 die
3. **Motivation dice:** +/- 1 die, plus another +/- 1 die for every consecutive related action in the scene.
4. **Color dice:** +/- 1-3 dice
5. **Bonus/Penalty dice (from equipment)**

Skill Dice: Obviously skills play an important part in conflict resolution. Every level in the skill being tested equals one die for the pool. For starting characters, this means one, three or five dice.

Unskilled attempts: If a challenger attempts an action without possessing any applicable skill, the attempt is considered an unskilled attempt. In such cases, the challenger may only roll their available archetype, motivation and role-playing dice.

Skill substitution: Occasionally a situation will arise where more than one skill may apply, usually with a penalty. For example, Notice might be substituted for Tracking skill, with a -1 die penalty. The GM determines whether a secondary skill can be used or not.

Character (Archetype and Motivation) Dice: If a character attempts an action in line with his or her Archetype and/or Motivation, they gain or lose the appropriate number of bonus or penalty dice.

In addition, for every consecutive related action within a scene, the

Motivation bonus or penalty increases by one.

Color Dice: Flashes of wit, actions that are cleverly described and/or properly role-played (such as a well-described and relevant flashback) that improve or propel the narrative net the player up to 3 bonus dice, while blandly stated actions that obstruct or annoy result in up to 3 deducted dice. The exact number of dice awarded or deducted is up to the GM, but consistency is recommended.

Bonus Dice: When a character is using the right tool for the job, the character rolls normally. However, if the quality of the equipment, software, or tool is inferior or superior to what is normal, dice may be added or subtracted to reflect this difference.

EQUIPMENT QUALITY (EXAMPLE: FIRST AID)	EFFECT
Scant or no equipment (chewing gum, bare hands)	-2 dice to impossible.
Inferior or inappropriate equipment (Swiss army knife, duct tape, pack of cigarettes)	-1 die
Average equipment (camper's first aid kit)	0
Above Average (Combat medic's kit)	+1 die
Superior equipment (Hospital)	+2 dice
Cutting Edge Equipment (Sci-Fi / Magical aids)	+3 or more dice

The GM has final say as to how many bonus or penalty dice to assign to a roll.

From any roll, a maximum of five dice is selected for both the resolution and resistance pools. Each die is then paired with one from the opposing pool in descending order. Once the resolution and resistance pools are established, whichever pool possesses the highest untied die roll is the victor with at least that one success. Any remaining dice in the winning pool of higher value than their counterparts in the opposing pool count as additional successes.

Example 1: A Bodyguard with the “Not on My Watch” motivation with a small arms skill of 4 is trying to shoot a kidnapper. Following some nice role-playing, the Bodyguard rolls 7 dice (four for the skill, one for the Archetype, one for Motivation, and one for RP) and gets 1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 6, and 6. Since the spymaster can only keep five of the dice, the player opts to drop the 2 and 3, for a final pool of 1, 3, 4, 6, and 6.

“Huh? Why did he keep the one?” You might ask. It’s about Karma, baby. More on that later.)

Resistance Dice: Relative to a Journeyman’s level of ability (in game terms, level 3 or 4), the passive difficulty levels are

- * Trivial: 0 dice; Automatic success
- * Simple: 1 die
- * Routine: 2 dice
- * Challenging: 3 dice
- * Difficult: 4 dice
- * Formidable: 5 dice or more
- * Impossible: Automatic failure.

Example: The GM rolled five dice for the kidnapper (figuring distance, movement, Archetype, and so on), with the result of 2, 2, 5, 5, 6. When compared to the Bodyguard’s roll, we have the following result:

Bodyguard	1	3	4	6	6
Oppose Roll	2	2	5	5	6
Result	n/a, Karma	success	n/a	victor	Tied, n/a

The Bodyguard therefore inflicts two points of base damage on the Kidnapper (see the chart) AND gains one point of Karma.

Resistance dice are meant to take into account all the possible variables in a given situation, rather than act as base numbers to be modified after consulting various tables and lists. To justify the number of dice, the GM should be able to envision the situation and explain it to the players as necessary. If the player suggests why the difficulty of a task should be easier or more difficult, they are free to do so, but the final decision should be left to the GM.

The key is to be consistent to the spirit of the game being played. Remember that the resistance dice are based on a Journeyman’s or average professional’s level of competency, so skill level alone will not affect the target numbers.

The Effects of success: The degree of success is represented by the number of successes or failures in a roll. For each success or failure beyond 1 (that is, from 2 through 5), the effected character gains a narrative description.

Descriptors are classed as minor or major, and are cumulative, so a

character with five successes will gain three minor descriptors and one major descriptor.

The exact wording and effects of an individual descriptor depends in part on the skill being employed, but not completely. Descriptors are storytelling devices and they should therefore grow out of the scene.

As a rule of thumb, minor descriptors will only have a temporary effect and are relatively mundane (a weapon jams, a computer crashes, an item is fumbled or dropped, another guard appears, a door opens), not lasting beyond the scene in which they occur, while the effect of Major descriptors will last much longer, perhaps permanently (a weapon backfires, a motherboard is fried, a dropped item breaks, a guard gets a free attack, etc.) and can be scene enders.

Minor descriptors are applied in order of appearance from 2 to 5. Each descriptor may only have one verb and each is separated by an “as”, “and”, “but” and so on.

NUMBER OF SUCCESSES	EFFECT
Tie	You barely succeed with one detrimental descriptor.
-/+ 1	You succeed or You fail unremarkably.
-/+ 2	One minor beneficial or detrimental Narrative descriptor.
-/+ 3	Two minor beneficial or detrimental Narrative descriptors.
-/+ 4	Three minor beneficial or detrimental Narrative descriptors.
-/+ 5	Three minor and one MAJOR beneficial or detrimental Narrative descriptor.

Example: A character with makes a leap from the roof of one building to a balcony of a building opposite.

- * With a tie, he might say “I succeed, but I am hanging onto the railing.”
- * With one success, he can say “I succeed.”
- * With a result of 2 successes, he might say “I succeed, and I keep running unimpeded.”
- * With three successes, he might say “I succeed, and I keep running unimpeded, as my pursuers watch in amazement.”
- * With four successes, he might say, “I succeed, and I keep running unimpeded, as my pursuers watch in amazement and I crash through the door.”

- * With five successes, he might say “I succeed, and I keep running unimpeded, as my pursuers watch in amazement and I crash through the door as the pursuers fall into the street below.”

Karma: Normally, a roll of 1 is to be avoided, but whenever a player chooses an untied die roll of 1 for the resolution pool, a single Karma point is awarded to the Player Character. So if a success pool totaled 1, 1, 1, 4, and 6 the PC would gain up to three Karma points, depending on the number of ties with dice in the resistance pool.

Using Karma: One point of Karma can:

- * Absorb 1 point of BASE damage (before applying force multipliers),
- * Re-roll all dice from a single skill attempt, aside from the roll the spent Karma point was gained from, taking the best result,
- * Substitute a rolled 1 with another die from the same roll,
- * Change a detrimental descriptor into a beneficial descriptor, or
- * Bend reality (find a hidden key to a locked door, distract a guard with a young lady prancing by in a high school uniform, etc.), *as long as the player sells it to the GM*. The GM, may grant the request, but it is within the GM’s rights to put a price on it (the lock breaks, someone will find the key missing, the jailbait sees the player sneaking around and says something to the guard just as the player gets by, or something similar).

COMBAT, DAMAGE AND RECOVERY

Combat is like any other test of skills, with skill rolls compared to either an active or passive opposition roll.

Time: While in-game time is generally measured using standard increments (minutes, hours, days, etc.,) combat is measured in rounds. Each round lasts for a few seconds, long enough for every participant to declare a single major action (usually but not necessarily an instigating action involving rolling dice). Secondary actions are allowed, but they may result in die penalties if he GM declares the action to be distracting.

Speaking, for example, would normally be a secondary action, possibly resulting in a die penalty for a concurrent major action, but if the character were trying to rally troops using Leadership skill, such speaking would be considered a major action. Both may still lead to extra color dice.

Initiative: Deciding who does what when is a two step process. First, every independent unit (each PC, main NPC and group of Stock NPCs) rolls a single die and adds this score to their Will. This is the **Action Order** from highest to lowest. Ties are considered simultaneous.

Step two is the **Declaration phase**. All actions are declared in reverse action order, with the lowest result stating their actions first. Once the Declaration phase is complete, actions are resolved in the proper action order.

If a declared action can no longer be performed (for example, a target is no longer in a shooter's line of sight), the independent unit may hold their action until the next phase, taking first place in the next phase's action order, or change targets/actions in the current phase at a -1 dice penalty.

Damage: The number of successes achieved in a combat roll is the base damage inflicted. This base is then multiplied by the force multiplier reflecting the potency of the weapon in question.

When a character suffers injury, the character can either absorb the base damage using Karma points on a one-for-one basis, absorb the regular damage with armor or some other protection, or accumulate the damage, suffering dice penalties as listed in the damage chart.

Damage and descriptors: Minor descriptors can be used to describe the damage or temporary disabilities, but cannot cause any additional damage by themselves. Major descriptors, however, may be used to describe injuries that pose a threat to the victim's well being (permanent or life-threatening injuries), regardless of the amount of damage inflicted.

Recovery: After a combat is finished and a scene ends, if a character is able to rest 30 minutes the character will recover 50% of the damage recovered in addition to any treatment received. Any remaining damage can only be healed by medical care or time (usually one or two points a week).

Treatment: the amount of sticky damage (damage that remains unhealed after rest and first aid treatment) is equal to the number of dice in the opposition pool vs. the dice rolled by any character with healing skill. The total is then deducted from the remaining sticky damage.

Non-Lethal Damage: Damage from some weapons, such as pepper spray or Tasers, is considered non-lethal for the purposes of this game. Non-lethal damage accumulates normally, and can lead to incapacitation, but not death. Additionally, non-lethal damage completely heals after 30 minutes of recovery time.

CHARACTER IMPROVEMENT

At the end of a scenario, a player may alter their character by doing one of the following:

1. **Exchange a motivation/underused skill for another motivation or skill at no cost. Unless the original skill fell under the weakness attribute, the new skill cannot fall under the weakness attribute.**
2. **Improve a single skill by one (maximum five) by reducing your Karma point cap by one.**
3. **Gain new skill at level one by reducing your Karma point cap by one.**
4. **Increase the Karma point cap by one point.**

Any Karma points the player has remaining in their Karma Bank not exceeding the point cap may be kept for use in future adventures.

RESOLUTION MECHANIC		
Roll: Skill (1 to 5 dice) Archetype (+/-1 dice) Motivation (+/-1 dice) Color (+/- 1 to 3 dice) Equipment (+/- varies) And keep up to five dice	VERSUS	Roll: Resistance Dice (from zero to 10) active: (+ only) passive: (+ or -) And keep up to five dice
Highest untied roll = Victor Additional high rolls = 1 success each UNTIED 1s = Karma Points		

NUMBER OF SUCCESSES	EFFECT (RESULTS FROM +/- 1 TO 5 ARE CUMULATIVE)
Tie	You barely succeed with one detrimental descriptor.
-/+ 1	You succeed or You fail unremarkably.
-/+ 2	One minor beneficial or detrimental Narrative descriptor.
-/+ 3	Two minor beneficial or detrimental Narrative descriptors.
-/+ 4	Three minor beneficial or detrimental Narrative descriptors.
-/+ 5	Three minor and one MAJOR beneficial or detrimental Narrative descriptor.

WEAPONS	
Weapon Examples	Force Multiplier
Bare Fist or foot	0.5
Brass knuckles, steel toe boot, baseball bat	1.0
Metal pipe, nunchucks	1.5
Light firearm (.22, .25), stiletto, light bow, javelin-thrower	2.0
Medium firearm (.38, 9mm, 12 gauge at long range), crossbow, dagger, heavy club or mace, pepper spray*	2.5
Heavy firearm (.45, .357 Magnum, 5.56mm, 12 gauge at medium range), katana, lance/bayonet	2.75
Very Heavy firearm (.44 Magnum, 7.62mm, 12 gauge at close range), Taser*	3.0
Heavy weapon (.50 Barrett, grenade)	4.0

*Non-Lethal weapon

ARMOR	
Armor Examples	Damage Reduction (B/P/S)
Bare flesh, light clothing	0/0/0
Modern Armor	
Motorcycle leathers	0/1/1
Type I ballistic armor (protection vs. .22 LR; .380 ACP)	1/6/1
Type IIA ballistic armor (9 mm; .40 S&W)	1/7/2
Type II ballistic armor (9 mm; .357 Magnum)	2/8/3
Type IIIA ballistic armor (.357 SIG; .44 Magnum), steel helmet	3/9/4
Type III ballistic armor (Rifles)	5/10/5
Type IV ballistic armor (Armor Piercing Rifle)	5/12/7
Ancient or Medieval Armor	
Leather cuirass	1/2/3
Chain mail hauberk	2/3/6
Plate mail	5/8/7

B = Bludgeoning: clubs, fists, crowbars, baseball bats

P = Piercing: firearms, bows, crossbows, stilettos, ice pick, javelins, gladius

S = Slashing: Axes, machetes, katana

COMBAT & ENCOUNTER RANGES	
Range	Maximum distance
Point blank	1 meter
Close	5m
Medium	50m
Long	250m
Very Long	500m
Extreme	1500m

DAMAGE EFFECTS TABLE (SUPERSEDES NARRATIVE DESCRIPTORS)	
Amount of accumulated damage	Effect (Narrative Descriptors cannot be used to increase the effects of damage beyond those below)
1. Less than Fatigue	No effect; superficial bruising, cuts, burns, muscle strain, grazed, etc.
2. 1.0 to 1.5x Fatigue	If the damage from a single wound is equal to the character's fatigue or more, the wounded character is unable to complete any further actions until the end of the current round unless a Will roll is made versus a number of dice equal to the damage of the wound. The character also suffers -2 dice penalty to all further skill checks.
3. Over 1.5x but less than 2.0x Fatigue	Roll Will vs. damage or be Incapacitated, otherwise -3 dice penalty to all skill checks. Recovery requires first aid or similar treatment.
4. 2.0x Fatigue or greater	Automatic incapacitation. Roll Will vs. damage or die. First aid is required to revive the character, at which point they will be at -5 dice. If A Will roll is made by the injured character or a Karma point is spent (by either the injured party or the caregiver) the injured party may move at base pace (5m/turn). Full recovery requires hospitalization or similar intensive treatment.

SKILLS LIST (A WORK IN PROGRESS)

SAMPLE INSIGHT SKILLS	SAMPLE REASON SKILLS:	SAMPLE PHYSIQUE SKILLS:
<p>Carousing Charm Nerve Gambling Musical Instrument (Specify) Acting Leadership Survival Notice Streetwise</p>	<p>Healing/Medical Lore (Specify) Knowledge (Specify) Programming Tracking Engineering Mechanic Demolition Broker Tradesman Strategy Navigation Forgery Trade Diplomacy Investigation</p>	<p>Melee weapon Hand-to-hand Athletics Vehicle (Specify) Small Arms Heavy weapons Intimidation (“... or Else!”) Dancing Stealth</p>

NAME: *Jack Worthington*

WEAKNESS: *Insight*

ARCHETYPE: *World War One Veteran turned Barnstormer*

MOTIVATION: *Asserting My Independence*

ATTRIBUTES

WILL:3

FATIGUE:6

KARMA: 0 / 5

PHYSIQUE:3

REASON:3

INSIGHT:3

SKILLS

Fighting

3

Mechanic

3

Pilot

5

Small Arms

3

Medic

1

Carousing

1

Athletics

1

Book Learning

3

SPECIAL ABILITIES

WEAPON: *Webley Mark IV .455*

FM: 2.5

ARMOR: *leather jacket*

0 / 0 / 1

DAMAGE

LETHAL:

NON-LETHAL:

LINGERING/PERMANENT INJURIES:

NAME :		WEAKNESS :			
ARCHETYPE :					
MOTIVATION :					
ATTRIBUTES					
WILL :		FATIGUE :		KARMA :	
PHYSIQUE :		REASON :		INSIGHT :	
SKILLS					
SPECIAL ABILITIES					
ARMOR :			/ / /		
DAMAGE					
LETHAL :			NON-LETHAL :		
LINGERING/PERMANENT INJURIES :					