

C.O.R.E.

# The Screenplay Manual

(or everything you needed to know to play or create a C.O.R.E. game)

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## Introduction:

# Cinematic Roleplaying

*Welcome to C.O.R.E., the Chupa Open Roleplaying Engine. Developed by the listeners of the Dragon's Landing Podcast, C.O.R.E. is the perfect introduction for new roleplayers, and is designed for speed and story.*

The C.O.R.E. Screenplay Manual provides the mechanics necessary to play in a C.O.R.E. game. It does so in a very generic way: no specific attributes, or skills or anything else is mentioned during this book, except for in some examples. This is not to try to add confusion, but to remove some of the confusion that occurred in the 1.0 release of the rules. Because C.O.R.E. is intended as a modular system that can be used in a wide variety of settings, including a standard set of attributes, skills, etc in the base rules provided more confusion than clarity. Hopefully, splitting the rules up into 2 different books—the Screenplay Manual and a setting—will help to clear these issues up.

*C.O.R.E.* is a set of rules intended to be used as the foundation for other settings and systems to be built on. While games can be easily played without any modifications, the system is only a basic guide, and lacks rules for many things, like magic, that would be specific to a certain setting or genre. Additional modules can be easily plugged into the core system. You will find all of the information you need to create a character, fight foes, and play through exciting adventures.

The rules found in this book are very basic, and are perfect for one-shot games, new roleplayers, and convention games. Groups that prefer extremely simple and streamlined systems that do not get in the way will also find this system a good match. We encourage you to join in the fun and create your own modules and share it with everyone else. It was the community that created the game, and giving back to this community is the best way to help it grow and succeed.

## What Is This Book?

Here's what you will find in each Act of the *C.O.R.E.* rules:

**Act 1: Character.** This section covers the basics you need to know to create a character. It starts by introducing the simple mechanics use throughout the game, and the covers what attributes, skills, and Talents, and how they are used within the game. Then come Backstories: a method for creating a character that is fast, fun, and easy, yet still provides for lots of roleplaying possibilities. We then wrap it up by going over the eight steps to create a fully-fleshed out character—something that can be done in as little as 15 minutes.

**Act 2: Conflict.** This Act provides the means to actually run Stars through the conflicts that arise within the story. In *C.O.R.E.*, conflicts can be anything. They are not reserved for physical confrontations. Arguments, puzzles, and magic rituals are all examples of conflicts.

**Act 3: Directing.** This Act provides guidance for Directors who are creating new settings. It provides advice on creating setting-specific attributes, skills, talents and backgrounds, as well as some ideas to streamline campaign creation.

Act 1:

# Character

Scene 1:

## The Basics

### Dice Notation

All rolls will be made using one or more ten-sided dice. When more than one die is used, only the highest value is kept. To notate a roll of the dice the following convention is used:

**[#] d10 [+/- modifiers]**

*Example:* 2d10 + 4 means “Roll 2 ten-sided dice. Keep the single highest value. Then add 4.”

### Criticals

When your highest die roll result is a ten (10), this is considered a Critical. Roll a single d10 and add that result to your total. Only one die can be added to the result. In other words, even if you roll another 10 on the second roll, you just add the number to your total. You do not roll a third time.

### Fumbles

When your highest die roll result is a one (1), this is considered a Fumble. A fumble does not have any mechanical consequences. Instead, the Director will add a story-based difficulty because of the roll. This difficulty will be based upon what you were trying to accomplish with the roll. If your roll was to bypass a security system, not only were you unable to bypass it, but perhaps it causes a silent alarm to be triggered, bringing in reinforcements in 5 minutes.

It is possible to actually still succeed on the immediate roll, but make things harder for you and your group through a Fumble.

## Basic Task Resolution System

All rolls use the same system to determine success or failure. That system is as follows:

**d10 roll + relevant attribute + relevant skill + any modifiers vs. a target number**

The modifiers and the target number are determined by the type of task. If the roll plus all modifiers is equal to, or higher than, the target number then the roll is a success. Otherwise, it is a failure.

If the highest roll on the dice is a 10, it is not an automatic success. If the highest roll on the dice was a 1, it is not an automatic failure. However, it does indicate that a story-based difficulty happens as a direct result.

## A Few Terms You Should Know

Since *C.O.R.E.* is designed with a cinematic feel in mind, several terms were ripped straight from the movie set and put to use here. Knowing these terms will make sure you don't get lost while reading the rules.

**Stars.** These are the characters the players play during the game. The players get to create their backgrounds and personalities and steer them through the mayhem that is sure to follow.

**Director.** This is the person who runs the game. She describes the world to the Actors, plays all of the Extras (see below), and makes sure things run smoothly. When disagreements happen while playing the game, she is the one responsible for settling them. In other words, her word is law. Be nice to her.

**Extras.** These are all of the characters in the game that are not played by the players. These are usually played by the Director, though occasionally they might be played by other players who are there only for one game session and are helping the Director out.

**Scene:** A unit of narrative time encapsulating a single set of events. A scene changes when two of these parameters change: setting, time, actions, or people involved.

## Scene 2:

# Attributes

*When you strip away all that a hero has learned throughout their life—the skills, the knowledge, impact their histories have had on them—what are you left with? You have the core of their character: their attributes.*

## What Are Attributes?

Attributes represent the base abilities of a Star. They are not the skills the Stars have developed throughout their lifetime, but their raw force of personality, strength, etc.

Each setting will have 4 attributes. The name and description of these attributes will be customized for each setting.

A traditional fantasy setting may use *Brawn*, *Brains*, *Social*, and *Magic* attributes to represent the breadth of activities the Stars will be doing. However, a setting where the Stars are Roman Senators and the play focuses more on the politics than the warring will require different attributes. They might be *Charisma*, *Honor*, *Income*, and *Influence*. And a modern-day government agency horror setting might use *Fitness*, *Wits*, *Perception*, and *Sanity*.

**Attributes have a maximum value of 5.**

## Attribute Descriptions

Attributes provide a very broad idea of the character. They do not give any specifics about how powerful that attribute might be, or with how much finesse the character can use it. Many times, this is much broader than we would like. Enter Attribute Descriptions.

Attribute Descriptions are a single short phrase—no more than a handful of words in length—that tell us when the character’s strength in that attribute comes into play. Basically, if you had to describe that attribute in words only (no numbers), what would you say? Perhaps your character does heavy physical labor at a factory that requires him to lift 100-lb bags all day long. You might call his Physical attribute “Strong as a bull.” Maybe your character is very blunt, almost to the point of being abrasive. His Social attribute might be described as “Too truthful,” or “Blunt and to the point.”

There are two types of Attribute Descriptions, and both are required: strengths and weaknesses. Strengths gain the character a +2 bonus when the Director agrees that the description is applicable. A weakness causes a -2 penalty when the Director agrees the description is applicable.

When a character is first created, they get one set of attribute descriptions for each attribute. As play continues, Directors may reward—or curse—Stars with a new attribute description in one attribute.

### Scene 3:

# Skills

*No matter how strong a character might be, they cannot defeat a smaller man trained in the martial arts. No matter their intelligence, without training they will never crack the cipher in time. No matter how much natural charisma, they will suffer in politics without training. No matter their natural aptitude in magic, they are likely to change themselves into newts.*

## What are Skills?

Where attributes describe the raw talents of the characters, it is the skills a character possesses that can mean the difference between life and death. They are the learned abilities that a Star acquires throughout their lifetime.

Skills are broad in scope, and do not focus on every little ability possible within a world. Instead of a list of 50 skills, a setting may have only 10 or 15 that are needed. They focus on what is important to that setting, and leave the things that do not make a character special compared to the common person to be handled by Talents or through the story itself.

Our fantasy game might have *Ranged Combat*, *Melee Combat*, *Sneak*, *Craft*, *Sorcery*, etc. Our Roman Senators may be using skills like *Rhetoric*, *Investing*, *Leadership*, *Languages*, *Tactics*, and more. The government agents might require *Firearms*, *Forensics*, *Occult*, *Computers*, *Ancient Languages* or even *Larceny*.

**Skills have a maximum value of 5.** Everyone is allowed to use a skill, even if they do not have any bonuses in that skill.

## Skill Descriptions

Just like attribute descriptions, skill descriptions provide a more detailed look at your abilities. They detail what aspects within the broad description of the skill that the Star has focused on, or is incapable of doing. A fantasy warrior might choose a *Melee Combat* description of long sword, or rapier, where his roman cousin might instead focus on short sword or spear.

During play, any conflicts that require the use of that skill description, receive a +2 bonus or a -2 penalty, depending on the application in the conflict.

A beginning Start may not have more than one skill description in any single skill. However, they may place skill descriptions under as many skills as they wish, though it is not required to have one in each skill. As play continues, Directors may reward—or curse—Stars with a new skill description in any one skill.

## Scene 4:

# Talents

*All perfect villains hold a secret in reserve for the day they desperately need a surprise. So does every hero. Talents take characters beyond their normal abilities into areas that are often seemingly supernatural.*

## What Are Talents?

Talents are special abilities that characters possess. They might be a racial ability, or a certain style of fighting that only a particular family can teach. Talents may be more mundane, also, like the ability to always find the right type of contacts when you need them, or always managing to keep small—but useful—items hidden on yourself, no matter how thoroughly you are searched.

Talents can be thought of as *enablers*. They do not always provide a skill set, but might enable you to use certain abilities. Magic is a perfect example. Perhaps anyone in the world can cast magic, but only if they are born with the talent to do so.

Beginning characters are always given one free Talent. Stars can get more talents only by spending Rehearsal Points on them. There is no limit to the number of Talents a Star can have, but you can only take a Talent once, unless the description says otherwise.

Talents generally have both a purchase cost, and a use cost. The purchase cost tells you how many rehearsal points are required to buy that talent for your Star. The use cost tells you how much of an attribute must be temporarily spent to use that talent. Some talents may allow you to use story points instead of attribute points. If they don't specifically say so, you may only use attribute points.

Here is an example talent so you can get a feel for how they work:

### Skill Mastery

This talent provides super-human mastery in skills. When bought, the player chooses one skill that he is a Master of. For each rank of Mastery, they roll a bonus d10 for conflicts involving that skill. A minimum skill score of 3 is required to purchase Skill Mastery for that Skill.

This Talent can be bought more than once. For each time this talent is used on a skill, an additional die is used during skill checks. However, the minimum skill score goes up by 1 for each rank in Skill Mastery. A minimum of 3 is needed for 1 rank. Minimum score of 4 in order to have 2 ranks, and only a Star with a skill score of 5 may take 3 ranks of Skill Mastery.

Purchase Cost: 5

Use Cost: n/a

## Scene 5:

# Backstory

*What is it that turned your favorite character into who they are today? What events triggered the insanity that bred your favorite villain? It is all covered in their history. Their Backstory.*

## What Is Backstory?

Backstory is the sum of events that happened to the characters before the game started. Many times, players will write a general history of the characters, complete with the most important events that made that characters who they are today. Often, this is fine, and the player can spend points through their character to make the numbers match the backstory. Some times, though, we are playing after a long day of work and are tired enough that our muse is not working as well as we might wish.

These Backstory is divided into four life stages. They are: Childhood, Education, Passion, and Career. Each event tells the major way your Star's life went during that life stage. During childhood you might have been an *Orphan*, a *Child Laborer*, or even *Created*, not born. Your education might have been on the streets as a *Criminal*, or as a brat in the *Military*. Each backstory adds to your attributes and skills until—after all four stages are chosen—you have a nearly complete character.

## Using Backstory

Stars are created by choosing one event from each life stage. Childhood, Education, and Passion each give one or more points in a single attribute and a single skill. Careers give you three points in attributes and two skills.

There are two ways to use Backstory for creating a Star.

**Backstory First.** This way helps you create your Star's history by choosing backstory events before you know your Star's history. You might have a general idea, and select from the events available during each life stage. Or you might start choosing interesting events, and then figure out who your Star is by creating stories that connect the events together. This works especially well to create well-rounded,

highly roleplayable characters when you choose events that don't necessarily seem to go together at first glance.

**History First.** If you already know your Star's history, then you should choose events during each life stage that come the closest to representing what you wrote down for their history. You won't always find a perfect match, but that just might spark some great character ideas by trying to explain the differences. At times, you will find it very easy to pick similar events at each life stage. This is not recommended. For example, if your Star is a career military person, you might be tempted to make him a *Military Brat*, that was sent to *Military School* by his parents, and joined the *Military* as soon as he was able who spends his spare time training in *Martial Arts*. Yes, your Star will be a fantastic fighter, but not much fun to play. Even if those are the events that were in your written history, you should find places to choose other events, and then modify your history to make this fit.

## Scene 6:

# Creating a Star

*Creating a Star is quick, easy, and fun. You do not need to set aside two hours just to get ready to play. Instead, take between 15 and 30 minutes and have a fully realized character. That way, you can get right to what you like best—playing the game.*

Characters in *C.O.R.E.* are designed from the beginning to be able to contribute to the story and to the drama. They are built quickly by choosing from a number of available background options, and then given some flexibility to tweak the numbers, so that no two characters will ever be alike.

Here are the eight simple steps needed to create a character:

- 1. Choose a concept.** The first thing you need is an idea. Write it down. Pass it by your Director and make any changes to fit better into the world. For the best roleplaying possibilities, leave big holes—or hooks—in your character background so that the Director can easily build your character's past into the campaign. This makes everyone's job easier: you'll have more fun, because you're a real part of the story; and the Director doesn't have to spend hours trying to figure out how to work you into the game. Don't think in terms of game mechanics, but try to create a realistic person with goals, likes, and dislikes.
- 2. Record your free abilities.** Your Star should be heroic, and able to do things the everyday person could not. Even if you have designed your character to be an ordinary man stuck into extraordinary circumstances, you should have the ability to pull this off. Put one point in each of your attributes before you even begin character creation. That way, even things that you're not very skilled at will have a slight chance to succeed.
- 3. Choose your Backstory.** Now that you have your background ready, look through each life stage in the Backstories (Childhood, Education, Passion, and Career) and pick one from each group. Each Backstory will have attributes and skill bonuses (or penalties) to assign to your Star. Write those down on your character sheet. Each group builds on the others, forming a nearly complete character in just this one simple step.

4. **Customize your skills.** Because even identical twins have different personalities, you need to add a little more customization to your Start. You get 4 points to spend in skills however you want.
5. **Choose your Talent.** Every Star has little skills or fantastic abilities that they can do. It is just another part of what makes your character ready to face the challenges that lie in store for them. Choose one Talent from the lists of Talents your world or Director has. Don't worry—you can get more later.
6. **Rehearse your part.** Each Star starts with 5 Rehearsal Points to spend on things like an additional Talent, extra skills, or even another point in an attribute. See the table later in this Act for the costs.  
Note: Check with your Director about the exact number of rehearsal points you get to start with. In some worlds or systems, a higher power level will be desired.
7. **Choose Personal Goals.** Each Star should have personal goals that they are striving to complete during their lives. These could be finding a long-lost brother, or avenging the murder of your parents. Choose no more than 3 goals at this point. When you successfully complete a goal, you can always choose a new one. Make sure you don't skip this point, though, since you can get story points from completing steps toward your personal goals.
8. **Flesh out the character.** One last step: simply give your Star a name, write down some notes about their appearance, and any other details you need to really be able to get into your character, and you are ready to play!

## Scene 7:

# Character Growth

During the life of the game, the characters will change and grow. This is an exciting part of playing the game. The basic method for character growth is Story Points. These are described in detail in Act 2: Scene 5.

## Improving Your Star

Story points are spent in various ways to improve your Star. They can either be spent on increasing attributes and skills, or adding new talents. In some cases, your Star might be able to create new items or research new spells with the use of story points.

You can never increase the same attribute or skill twice in a row. You need to improve something else in between. In addition, you cannot add two talents in a row.

### Advancement Costs

- Improve a skill by 1 point – 2 story points.
- Improve an attribute by 1 point – 5 story points.
- Add a talent – number of story points varies

## The Training Montage

Before you can actually spend your story points to improve your Star or building something new, you must perform a Training Montage. This is a short description of the event that is the inspiration for what they are

spending their story points on. This might be a flashback to a pivotal event that made them start learning this skill. It might be something that happened “off-screen” that helped them develop their current skill or gave them their new talent.

Each player gets their turn in front of the camera, so to speak, at the beginning of each episode, to give their training montage. The player should have fun and get creative with their narrative. Bringing props would be cool, too. If the montage is done well enough, or the story is cool enough, the Director might even reward a bonus story point or two.

The event(s) described must be directly related to the improved attribute or skill. So, no going skiing in the Aspens to increase your gambling skill, unless you can tie it in somehow. Maybe by a sudden flash of inspiration by the patterns of the trees?

If you are creating a new item, or spell, or whatever, you should find a way to make the story of its creation or research exciting in some fashion, not just a retelling of the facts.

Like any story, training montages should be fun, exciting, and dramatic. The more so the better.

Act 2:

# Conflicts

Scene 1:

## Conflicts Defined

*A roleplaying session without conflict of various kinds is just plain boring. If the Stars can't get into a good argument or fight, or pull a fast one on the local curmudgeon, something is lacking. Just like reading a story, part of the excitement in RPGs comes from living through dangers and triumphs that we will never see in real life. It might be racing through the streets, chasing the burglar on your Harley; finding your way through the maze of Roman politics; or even defeating the evil Overlord through cunning, guts, and luck.*

Conflicts should be run fast and furious, so the flow of the game is not interrupted any more than it should be. To make this happen, the conflicts are divided into three different types so you only have to deal with the amount of detail needed for that conflict. Characters are encouraged by the rules to be both descriptive and daring, adding to everyone's fun.

### What Is a Conflict?

Put simply, conflicts happen whenever one person wants something and someone else opposes them. A conflict can be a fight, a verbal argument, trying to squeeze the proper amount of venom out of snake's fang for a potion, or trying to wrest your opponent's control of magic away from them. Conflicts can be associated with each of the four attributes. They each form a different type of conflict, but all of them are resolved in the same way.

Using the fantasy world we saw in Act 1, we have the following attributes: *Brawn*, *Brains*, *Social*, and *Magic*. Here is a quick look at some possible conflicts for each attribute:

**Brawn:**

- Jumping onto a moving vehicle
- Running across a field and dodging the 50 arrows flying around you
- Fighting the Villain one on one in the final Scene.

**Brains:**

- Solving a riddle
- Remembering the names and reputation of all the soldiers bearing down on you
- Realizing the water stain on the dresser actually means something

**Social:**

- Fast-talking your way past a guard
- Not making a fool of yourself at a Royal Ball
- Winning a battle of wits with your enemy

**Magic:**

- Properly using the name of the demon that wants to eat you
- Reading someone's mind
- Get the Rain Dance done just right

Many times, you will find that a certain conflict can be handled using any of the attributes. During the conflict each player will be able to describe why they think a certain attribute should be used. To make this a little clearer, we'll use a card game in our fantasy world as an example.

**Brawn.** The Star tries to win the game using physical methods of cheating like double-dealing, hiding cards, and similar methods.

**Brains.** The Star tries to win the game using their intellect, perhaps by counting cards or rapidly determining what cards the Extras have by what has already been played.

**Social.** The Star tries to win the game using intimidation, bluffs, and reading the other players.

**Magic.** The Star tries to win the game by casting spells to increase his luck, reorder cards, or even conjure cards he might need.

Each of these is a valid conflict, and Stars are encouraged to play to their strengths. Each type of conflict might have different types and costs of failure, so Stars might have to join in a conflict they're weaker in, just to survive the possible failure.

## Scene 2:

# Conflict Scope

*Every group has different elements of the game they like to focus on. Some groups like to get deep in the specifics of every combat, while other groups might like to detail only the conflicts that are most crucial to the story-line, speeding through less important conflicts in a single roll.*

## What Is Conflict Scope?

Conflict Scope is a way to zoom in and out of the action going on around the Stars. It allows you to focus on only what is important to the story. At times, this will mean finally facing the villain and slowing the action down so that every blow, every witty repartee, and every time you draw a weapon is crucial. At other times, you might just want to get your Stars from point A to point B quickly, even though there is some potential danger involved in the journey.

By using all three types of conflicts, each gaming group can customize their experience based on what they find important. If you love the tactical decisions of war-gaming, you can have that. If you prefer fast-pacing and keeping your players on the edge of their seats, you can have that, too.

## Types of Conflicts

### **Time-Lapse**

Time-Lapse conflicts are all of the smaller conflicts that do not have any direct impact on the overall story. These could be haggling over the price of a horse, or mowing through the vast battalion of orcs that stand between you and your true enemy. These conflicts are handled with a single roll for the overall conflict. They often do not present much in the way of danger to the characters.

### **Normal**

Normal conflicts are those that have a small impact on how the story progresses, but not so crucial that the story would end if this conflict were lost. These types of conflict should definitely hold the possibility of danger and death, but don't necessarily need every little blow to be detailed. In the case of multiple opponents, you might separate each opponent into their own, individual conflict, but not worry about each swing of the sword or shot of the gun.

### **Slow-Motion**

Slow-Motion conflicts are vital to the story. The chance of death, if a physical conflict, is very real. The iconic example of this is when the heroes finally reach the primary villain. Every strategy the players and villain can use to put their opponent off-balance should be another conflict. Every blow might be detailed, depending on the group.

## Using Conflict Scope

Conflict scopes should be varied frequently. And always remember: it is the importance to the story, not the intensity of the physical combat that matters.

One moment you'll be doing the Time-Lapse as the Stars sneak through a village full of enemy soldiers.

Then someone fails a conflict and they're spotted by four soldiers playing a game of cards. The soldiers are not really a match for the Stars, especially since they're tripping as they're getting up from the card game they were playing, so you slip into a Normal conflict and the players all describe their wonderful antics as they quickly defeat the soldiers. But not before they manage to yell a warning.

The difficulty is harder now, but you Time-Lapse again. Finally, the Stars reach the gorge the soldiers were guarding. The Amulet of Eradu is said to be just across this old, rickety rope bridge. The soldiers rush in on the Stars as they're making their way across the bridge. Here, death is imminent, and failure to cross the bridge and retrieve the Amulet is crucial to the story, so you go into a Slow-Motion conflict. The soldiers are cutting the ropes; a Star throws a dagger into the man's neck; a trap is set off and the Stars each have to react; and so on...

Scene 3:

## Time Frames

While the system is designed to be flexible, frequently a reference is needed to how long a conflict lasts, or a spell effect lasts. To handle this, we use the following terms for defining time:

**Action.** A variable length of time that allows a character to perform some task.

**Episode.** A single playing session.

**Pilot.** An adventure meant to be played out in a single Episode. These are often referred to as "One Shots".

**Scene.** A series of character Actions that all take place in the same location.

**Series.** The overarching story for the game, synonymous with a campaign in other systems, made up of one or more Stories.

**Story.** A self-contained adventure with a beginning, middle and end. It may take several Episodes to complete.

Scene 4:

## Energy

### What Is Energy?

Whether we are physically exhausted, hurt, or simply mentally drained from hours of magical research, our current ability to perform is hampered in nearly everything that we do. The amount of energy that a Star can put into their actions is determined by the current score in the attribute they are using. As conflicts are failed, and risks taken, the current attribute score will vary, but will never exceed their actual attribute score.

When a Star suffers some form of damage, the damage is subtracted from the current score of the attribute used during the conflict. If you're in our fantasy world, and have a Brawn of 3 and fail a combat, you might lose 1 point of Brawn. That would reduce your current Brawn score down to 2. Any new rolls made using Brawn

would only have 2 points added to them, instead of the previous 3 points. While this has the potential to create a death spiral, there are some simple ways to recover the lost energy.

## Recovering Energy

Attributes can be recovered in two simple ways, described below. Special situations may arise where your Director may also reward you attribute points as a bonus for success. Also, some types of equipment may be able to restore lost energy.

### Rest

Eight hours of sleep will fully restore all lost attributes points. If the sleep is interrupted, the Director will determine how much is restored.

### Healing Scenes

In order to recover lost attribute points between scenes, your character must make a Healing Scene. This is a simple narrative that the player makes showing how their character got their confidence or energy back. This will fully refresh one attribute.

Only one Attribute can be healed between scenes. To recover other Attributes, you must either rest for 8 hours or heal a different Attribute after each scene.

When a player wishes to have a healing scene, they first let their Director know. Then they give a short narrative about what it is they did to restore those points. The narrative should be appropriate to the Star, relate directly to the attribute they want to restore, and be something the Star could do at their current location, unless the Director says they can go other places.

The key here is that it should be appropriate to the Star. Some Stars might restore lost *Social* points by taking some quiet time for themselves and meditating or by going to a rave where they can be around strangers where they can hit on people, or even by diving into the drink. They might restore lost *Brawn* by exercising, meditating, or even sparring.

The players should be creative in their narrative and have fun.

## Death and Dying

Dying does not happen randomly in *C.O.R.E.* Instead, it will be the result of a failed conflict where the players and the Director agreed upon the terms. This allows the players to choose to make their deaths matter. It might be a sacrifice to save their party, or it might be the result of a specific spiritual ritual or quest that ends in the character's transcendence.

Scene 5:

# Story Points

## What Are Story Points?

All of the Stars are involved in a heroic story. While they can't always succeed, the game would not be much fun if they always failed. Story points are a way for the Stars to get directly involved in the game. They can be used to increase a Star's odds at success, keep them from getting killed or badly injured, or even alter the story in small ways. Remember, though, that the Director gets story points for the supporting cast, too.

Story points should be represented by something physical like cards, poker chips, beads, or even your favorite candy.

Story points are also used in character growth, described earlier. At the end of an Episode, you may choose to either save the story points for the next game, or spend them to improve their character, create items, etc. No more than 5 points may be spent directly on your character at the end of any Episode. If you have talents that let you create items, spells, etc. you can spend extra story points on this.

## Getting Story Points

At the beginning of each Episode, the Stars are given 5 story points to use. If they have saved some points from previous episodes, these are added to their stack.

During the game, the Director will reward Stars for several situations, but the general rule is that they are handed out to reward good roleplaying. Here are some examples:

**Good Roleplaying (1)** There are times when a Star does something that has the players (or the Director) saying "That was so cool!" and they should be rewarded. Maybe they did some excellent in-character roleplaying, or came up with a brilliant way to solve a conflict that no one had thought of. Toss them a story point to encourage this!

**Good Storytelling (1-3)** When a Star does something in that is natural for their character to do, but they know will make things hard for themselves or their friends, they deserve a point.

**Completing a Personal Goal (2-4)** Whenever a character successfully completes one of their personal goals, they should be rewarded. This might be for finding a crucial piece of information that helps them move forward in realizing a bigger goal, or defeating a hated foe.

**Completing a Party Goal (3-5)** When the Stars all complete one of the goals for this Episode or Season, they all should be rewarded with story points.

## Using Story Points

There's only one thing more fun than getting story points, and that's spending them. You can use them to pull off some dangerous moves, help stay alive, or change the story.

## Improving Actions

Story points can be used to give your Star a better chance at succeeding in a conflict. By spending 5 points, a single bonus d10 is used on that roll. Only the single highest roll is kept. While this can be the difference between success or failure, remember that you could always roll a 1.

After a conflict has been rolled, and failed, story points can be spent to raise the result to a success. Each story point spent adds one point to the skill check.

## Activating Weaknesses

Everyone has weaknesses attached to their attributes. By spending two (3) story points, you can make sure their weakness comes into play at exactly the right time for you, and the wrong time for them. When you want to activate a weakness, you get to describe to the Director how this weakness would get activated and what the results are. The Director gets the final word on how it happens or if it is relevant to the conflict at hand.

## Staying Alive

Sometimes the damage dealt to your Star may be more than they can handle. In order to stay active in the scene, you have the option of spending story points to reduce that damage. The cost is two story points for every point of damage you want to shake off.

Story points must be spent to reduce damage immediately after your Director tells you the amount of damage. You can't go back later and make it all go away. And, no, you cannot spend story points to restore lost attribute points. They can only bring you back up to whatever your current attribute score is.

## Being Talented

Some talents will require the use of story points to work. Still others will give you a choice of using either story points or attribute points to use them. If the talent doesn't even mention story points, then you are out of luck. They can't be used for that talent.

Scene 6:

# Difficulty Numbers

## What are Difficulty Numbers?

Difficulty numbers represent how difficult a conflict is. This is the number that the Star must meet or exceed in a skill check in order to be successful. There are two methods for determining the difficulty of an action, depending on if it is a direct conflict with another creature, or another type of conflict.

## Opposed Conflicts

If the conflict is directly with another creature, this is called an opposed conflict. The difficulty is determined by adding the opponent's relevant Attribute + relevant Skill + 5.

Some exceptional equipment is also treated as an opposed conflict. These are always for unique items and never for something that can be bought off of the shelves. In this case, the difficulty is determined by adding the relevant attribute and skill that was needed to create the object, and adding 5.

## Un-Opposed Conflicts

When the conflict is not directly with another person, we must use a different method. These conflicts add an amount of difficulty based upon the amount of story change.

- Minor: +5
- Significant: +10
- Major: +15
- Critical: +20

This number is added to 10 to determine the final difficulty.

The players may choose to lower the difficulty by accepting a larger amount of damage. The difficulty is modified by -2 for each point of damage.

It may seem that critical conflicts can be too difficult for a single Star to accomplish, but this is not necessarily true. By spending story points, taking damage, performing Stunts, or working with other Stars, every conflict should be able to be resolved. In rare cases, however, the difficulty might be so high that the Stars cannot meet this conflict head-on. In these cases, the Director is encouraged to let the Stars revise their action and learn the better part of valor: running away.

## Scene 7:

# Handling Conflict

The process of resolving a conflict is an interactive one, where the player gets a chance to influence how the game moves forward. It is handled in four simple steps that are meant to make it quick and fun. The four steps are:

1. The player states their intent
2. The player lays out the success and failure terms
3. The player and Director barter the terms
4. A roll is made

## Stating Your Intent

When a conflict has reared its ugly head, the first step is for the player to tell the Director what they're trying to accomplish and how they are trying to do that. They should make sure to tell what motivations are behind it. It is two very different tasks to dance with the Princess with the intent of impressing her father with your etiquette, or dancing with the intent to seduce her. Both situations would require a different set of skills and attributes to be used.

Skills are not tied directly to a specific Attribute. A situation often will be able to be solved using several different approaches, and the Director, paying attention to the player's description of how they want to accomplish the task, will have the flexibility to choose the best one, or to modify the player's choice.

## Success and Failure Terms

Once the player has stated their intent, the Director states the results for both success and failure. Directors are encouraged to make failure more than “No, you don’t succeed.” Instead, the failure result should set the player up for more difficulties.

## Bartering the Terms

Often, what the Director states for success or failure is not what the players had in mind. In this case, they have one chance to barter for different results. After hearing that they will do only 1 point of damage to their opponent, the player might want to try going for a more difficult shot for more damage. Of course, with more damage comes a larger penalty for failure. The player is encouraged to be creative with their suggested terms for failure. A good penalty for failure is often one that will provide more roleplaying opportunities in the future, like a scar that marks him permanently. When trying for more damage, the player can not reduce the cost of failure, but might be able to change the way the failure affects them. As always, the Director has the final approval for the success and failure terms.

## The Roll

Once the terms have been set, the player makes a Skill Check against the assigned Difficulty to determine their success. Skill checks are resolved by rolling 1d10, and adding the value of the Skill and the relevant Attribute, plus any other bonuses that may be appropriate, such as for higher-quality tools or materials being used.

This resulting number is compared to the Difficulty Number the Director has assigned the task. If it equals or is greater than the Difficulty Number, the skill check is a success. If it is lower than the assigned Difficulty, the roll is a failure.

## Scene 8:

# Taking Damage

When a character fails a conflict, his penalty often will be to take some damage. By default, the amount of damage done is 1 point. This damage is taken from the attribute that represents the type of conflict they lost. If they were in a fight, the damage might be taken from their *Brawn* attribute. If it was a great debate in the Roman Senate, it might be *Influence* damage.

There are no direct penalties associated with reaching zero (0) in any of the attributes. Instead, they no longer have any bonuses to their die rolls. However, should a character reach 0 points in an attribute and take more damage, they are considered incapacitated.

The exact result of the incapacitation is up to the Director and will be specific to that attribute. A *Brawn* incapacitation might result in the Star falling unconscious. An *Influence* incapacitation might leave the character with no support from his usual network; perhaps even to the point they no longer trust them and must regain that trust.

## Scene 9:

# Boosting Your Chances

Since the goal of the game is to partake in heroic, cinematic adventures, we have provided a few ways to increase your chances, outside of relying on story points.

## The Money Shot

When you really want to make sure that something gets done right the first time, you can increase the damage done during a conflict. This is not without risk, though.

Before they have made their roll, the player has the option of expending extra energy from their attribute to hedge the bet and help ensure a win. For every attribute point the player spends, they get a +2 bonus to the result. The attribute point must be from the same attribute that the roll is being made against. Whether they succeed or fail at the conflict, the attribute points are lost, just like the Star took wounds from the conflict. This is in addition to any damage the Star receives directly from the conflict.

This is obviously something that should not be used all of the time, as it will leave your Star weak and unable to do much more in that scene. Instead, this is something that should be saved for just the right moment. It works great when spending story points to ensure a success.

## Stunts

Combat in stories is filled with exciting battles as martial artists evade opponents with acrobatics among the pipes, and with swashbucklers swinging from chandeliers. Cowboys slide across the bar, cups shattering as they are shoved out of the way. To help players enter the thrill of these situations, they are rewarded for creative use of their surroundings.

When the Star uses their surroundings in creative and dramatic ways, or take a risk in a fun and dramatic way that enhances the game for everyone, the Director may give up to 3 bonus points to add to their roll. This provides a gentle encouragement to players to have fun and take part in the game, which makes it a richer experience for everyone. In addition to the stated failure result, the Director should provide another failure result directly related to their use of the environment.

## A Helping Hand

When a situation allows for it, multiple characters can assist in creating a successful conflict. This may be everyone helping to pull on the rope and topple the ancient statue, or everyone searching through the library for one particular manuscript, when only one player is able to describe the tome needed.

While other characters are lending a helping hand, they add their appropriate attribute or skill score to the results. The primary character makes the roll as usual, but the total of all of the helpers' scores are added to his results. It is up to the Director to determine whether it is an attribute or skill. Only one or the other can be used to help out, not both.

The Helping Hand rule only applies when all participating Stars could logically be a help. For instance, trying to pry a small grate off of a wall would not work if four Stars were trying to get a grip on each corner.

There simply isn't enough room. However, if they attach a rope to the grate, and everyone pulls together, then it would work. The Director has the final say on when this rule can be applied.