



Version 4.0

A simple role-playing system by Cassidy based upon "The Pool" by James V. West
Email: kellblackfoot@yahoo.com Web: <http://www.randomordercreations.com>
Forge Forum: <http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/viewforum.php?f=18>

DISCLAIMER

The Puddle is a role-playing system based upon 'The Pool', © James V. West.

Good ideas are worth sharing. Thanks to James and the other guys from the Forge for sharing theirs.

Cassidy, August 2004, Email: Cassidy@uk2.net

WHAT IS THE PUDDLE?

The Puddle is a role-playing system designed to facilitate collaborative storytelling. During play you adopt the role of a character in the story being told and through their actions become part of its telling.

The Puddle does not have any rules for hit points, skills, character classes or levels; in fact it has very few rules at all. In the absence of such rules the game relies on the commonsense and willingness of the players to moderate the actions of their characters. It is the responsibility of all players to portray their characters realistically and fairly based on an understanding that the primary goal of the game is for everyone to work together to create an interesting and engaging story.

Another key aspect of the game is that the ability of the players to influence events in the story is not limited solely to the actions of their characters. At times the players can actively guide the narrative and direct the story, essentially assuming the role of the GM.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

One person in your group needs to act as the Game Master or GM. The GM is responsible for guiding and directing events, setting up scenes, creating situations, developing plots, playing other characters, making judgments and generally ensuring that the game runs smoothly and that the story being created is engaging and enjoyable to everyone involved.

Before the first session everyone should agree upon setting for the story. What kind of story do you hope to create? Where will the story take place? What role will the characters play in the story?

You will need, about 6-8 6-sided dice per player. Have some paper and pencils handy for scribbling down notes. Minatures and maps can also be used to help visualize events that occur during play.

At the start of every game session the GM gives each player six dice. As a player these dice represent your **dice pool** and play a crucial part in the game since they allow you to influence events in the story so that things happen the way you want them to happen.

The number of dice in your dice pool will go up and down during the course of each session; however, you always start each session with six pool dice.

YOUR CHARACTERS STORY

Since the game is all about creating and telling stories the first thing you need to do is write a short introductory story about your character. Their story only needs to be a few sentences at most, just enough to get a feel for who they are, a little of their background, and how they fit into the setting. Try to focus on the most important aspects of your character and any significant events in their life.

CHARACTER TRAITS

Next, you need to make a list of your characters defining traits. A trait is a short definitive statement about your character, something important, something that makes them who and what they are. During play your characters traits provide a focus for their actions and help define their role in the story.

Initially you can list up to six traits for your character although you will have the opportunity to expand on that list as the story unfolds.

Traits can be aspects of your characters personality, their profession, attitudes and beliefs, quirks, skills, talents, abilities, enemies, allies, possessions; in fact anything that helps you bring your character to life.

Try to make your characters traits pertinent to their story and reasonably specific and descriptive. For example, saying that Gillian is 'A thief', does not tell us very much at all, whereas saying that Gillian is 'An adept thief; exceptional pickpocket' gives us a little more detail about Gillian without being too vague.

Having decided on a Middle-Earth setting the players write brief stories for their characters and list six key traits.

Here are two sample characters and their stories...

GILLIAN'S STORY:



Gillian was a low ranking member of the Guild of Thieves in the town of Strayhold. A child of the streets, she was an orphan, and for as far back as she can remember she has lived by her wits and the money she earned picking the pockets of the wealthy merchants that frequented the town. Gillian showed early promise as an

adept thief, a fact that brought her to the attention of Vlesic, an exiled Dunedain Ranger who was one of the masters of the Guild. Vlesic took Gillian under his wing and became her mentor.

Gillian was only thirteen when the 'Purge of Strayhold' occurred and the armies of The Witch King sacked the town and either slew or enslaved its inhabitants. She was one of the few to escape the slaughter and has spent the last five years moving from town to town, city to city, surviving; her skills as a thief standing her in good stead. Recent events have brought Gillian to Rhudaur and after a chance meeting with her former mentor Vlesic she finds herself a member of the mercenary band that he now leads.

GILLIAN'S TRAITS:

- *An adept thief; exceptional pickpocket; incredibly sneaky.*
- *Former member of the Thieves of Strayhold.*
- *Born survivor; very streetwise; lives by her wits.*
- *Four throwing knives; deadly accurate at 10 paces.*
- *Brave and very determined.*
- *Extremely perceptive; Can usually tell when someone is lying.*

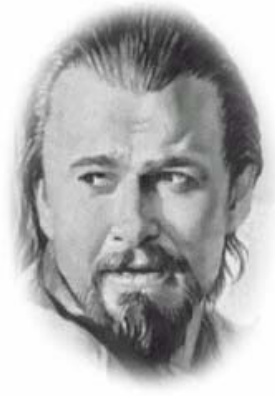
RESOLVING EVENTS

As you play the game and the story unfolds events will arise where the outcome is in doubt or the event itself is potentially a key turning point in the story.

Events are typically very broad in scope, for example, "Do I manage to win the duel?" or "Do I evade my pursuers?" An event could be a conflict where the outcome is likely to be either success or failure or it could be a situation with lots of possible outcomes, some good, some bad. Events can even occur simply as a result of someone asking, "What happens next?"

Whenever the outcome of an event could have a significant effect on the course of the story the GM will ask you to 'Roll the Dice'.

VLESIC'S STORY:



Vlesic is the quintessential mercenary; a sword for hire ever willing to sell his services to the highest bidder. Born 60 years ago, he is the 2nd son of a prominent noble family of Arthedain and in his youth was a respected Dunedain Ranger in the service of the King. Three decades ago he was forced to flee Arthedain following his role in blood feud

with a rival noble family. He settled for a time in Strayhold where his formidable skill as a swordsman and qualities as a born leader saw him rise in the ranks of the Thieves Guild.

After the 'Purge of Strayhold', Vlesic travelled east to Rhudaur and drawn by the prospect of war and gold he formed a mercenary band. Over the last three years he has been in the service of the few remaining Rhudaurian nobles still trying to cling to what is left of their realm following the Witch King's initial invasion. The situation is hopeless. Vlesic knows that the Kingdom will eventually fall and yet the blood in his veins draws him to this noble cause.

VLESIC'S TRAITS:

- *Exiled nobleman of Arthedain; Seeks to reclaim birthright.*
- *Former Dunedain Ranger; Formidable swordsman.*
- *Born leader; Strong willed and proud.*
- *Considers Gillian to be his daughter.*
- *Former Swordmaster of the Thieves of Strayhold.*
- *Wields a Mithril edged sword; dwarven craftsmanship.*

Vlesic's mercenary company find themselves in the employ of a Rhudaurian noble who is desperately trying to protect the realm from the insidious influence of the Witch King. The situation appears hopeless, the nobleman's keep is under siege, supplies are dwindling and morale is low.

Vlesic tasks Gillian with venturing to the nearest city so that reinforcements and supplies can be sent to aid them. It's an extremely risky venture. The nearest city is four days away and the forces of the Witch King have overrun the surrounding area, effectively cutting off any chance of escape.

Does Gillian manage to complete her task? What happens next? It's time to roll the dice and find out.

ROLLING THE DICE

Rolling the dice determines whether it is you or the GM that gets to decide the outcome of an event.

Before you roll any dice first check to see if your character has a trait pertinent to the event at hand. If they do then the GM will give you a die to add to your dice pool before you make your roll.

You can roll some or even all of the dice in your dice pool; the choice is yours. The more dice you roll the greater your chance of guiding the outcome of the event. However whenever you roll the dice there is also the possibility that you may lose some (or even all) of the dice you roll thus affecting your chances of guiding future events. The more dice you roll the greater your chance of achieving your desired outcome but the greater the chance of losing dice from your dice pool.

ROLLING THE DICE

When you roll the dice count up how many 5's or 6's you roll. This number determines whether it is you or the GM who guides the outcome of the event. Any dice you roll that show a 1 or 2 are handed back to the GM; all other dice are returned to your dice pool.

If you fail to roll a 5 or 6 then the GM will guide the outcome of the event. The outcome could be good for your character, it could be bad, it's entirely up to the GM to decide.

If you only roll one 5 or 6 then the GM will guide an outcome to the event that it is generally beneficial or favorable to your character in some way.

If you roll two 5's or 6's then you get the opportunity to guide the outcome of the event. It's up to you to decide what happens. The outcome could be good for your character, it could be bad; it really doesn't matter. What matters is that the outcome you decide upon should create a memorable and exciting event within the story.

If you roll three or more 5's or 6's then in addition to guiding the outcome of the event you may list a new trait for your character or modify one of their existing traits. Any changes you make should be relevant in some way to the event itself and reveal some new aspect or detail about your character.

SOME EXAMPLE DICE ROLLS:

The GM asks Gillian to make a dice roll to see if she manages to sneak out of the keep and avoid the forces of the Witch King as she tries to seek help. One of Gillian's traits is 'Incredibly Sneaky' so the GM gives Gillian a die to add to her dice pool.

Gillian initially had four dice in her dice pool so the extra dice the GM gives her increases her dice pool to five.

It's up to Gillian to decide how many of her five pool dice she wants to roll for this event.

Lets assume Gillian decides to roll four of her pool dice and rolls 5, 2, 6, and a 4. Since two of the dice show a 5 or 6 Gillian gets the opportunity to guide the outcome of the event. The die that shows a 2 would be handed back to the GM and the other three dice would be returned to Gillian's dice pool.

If Gillian had rolled 5, 3, 1 and 2 then the GM would guide an outcome to the event that was generally beneficial or favorable to Gillian in some way since she rolled one 5 or 6. The two dice that show 1 and 2 would be handed back to the GM and the other two dice would be returned to Gillian's dice pool.

If Gillian had rolled 2, 1, 3 and 2 then the GM would guide the outcome of the event since Gillian failed to roll a 5 or 6. It's entirely up to the GM to decide the outcome of the event. The dice that show 2, 1 and 2 would be handed back to the GM and the remaining die would be returned to Gillian's dice pool.

If Gillian had rolled 3, 4, 4 and 3 then the GM would guide the outcome of the event since Gillian again failed to roll a 5 or 6. All four dice would be returned to Gillian's dice pool since none of them showed a 1 or 2.

GUIDING THE OUTCOME OF AN EVENT

When you guide the outcome of an event you decide what happens and you can direct the story in precisely the same way that the GM normally would. You can create situations, add complications, make use of established story elements or even introduce entirely new elements of your own. Whilst the event is being resolved you are effectively in charge of the story.

Here are some suggested guidelines that will help ensure that when you guide an event the story develops smoothly and is enjoyable to everyone involved.

1. Guide the event so that it consistent with the established facts and tone of the story and with what your character can realistically accomplish given what is known about them.
2. Make your narrative interesting and significant to the story. Be inventive and creative and make things happen that will create opportunities for the story to progress.
3. Roleplay the event just as the GM would and involve the other players wherever possible.
4. Do not alter or intrude on the characters of the other players.

AN OUTCOME GUIDED BY GILLIAN

"Under cover of darkness I manage to sneak out from the Keep. It is a moonless night and utterly silent yet I can sense the presence of the enemy nearby. The river is to the west, and I head that way since it leads to the city. I move silently and cautiously, pausing every now and again, my senses alert for any sound of pursuit. There is none. Come morning and some five miles south of the Keep I run across the remains of a large Orc encampment. Judging by the size of the camp I estimate that a force of easily 1000+ must have been here and very recently. Their trail is all too easy to follow, and with a sense of despair I realize that it leads back the way I came, towards the Keep. I know that trying to hold the Keep against a force that large would be nigh impossible."

ANOTHER OUTCOME GUIDED BY GILLIAN

"In the dead of night I manage to sneak out from the Keep. Although I cannot see the enemy I can sense their presence, lurking in the darkness. The river is to the west, and I head that way since it leads to the city. Moving as silently as possible I near a copse of trees bordering the river and detect movement in the shadows; I freeze. There is the harsh sound of metal against metal as if a sword is being drawn from a scabbard and by the dim light I make out three hulking figures emerging from the tree line. In the darkness the feral gleam in their eyes marks them as the enemy. Orcs!"

A FAVORABLE OUTCOME GUIDED BY THE GM

"You leave the Keep an hour after dusk and although you run into some of the Witch Kings Orc patrols you manage to evade them without discovery. You travel all night and by morning your body aches from fatigue and weariness. In the distance you become aware of the sound of horses approaching and from cover you see two outriders of the King heading your way at speed."

GILLIANS DUEL

During one particular story Gillian found herself in a duel to the death with one of Vlesic's estranged kinsfolk; a swaggering, over-confident but lethally adept young swordsman by the name of Jerrard.

Gillian knew she was hopelessly outmatched and that the smart thing to do would be to flee. Gillian however rarely does the smart thing, she does the sneaky thing. She knew that Jerrard would be expecting a clean, fair fight. More fool him since Gillian never fights fair.

At the time Gillian had four dice in her dice pool and chose her 'Brave and determined' trait as the focus for the event. As a result the GM gave Gillian an extra dice to add to her dice pool, giving her five pool dice in total. She chose to risk everything and rolled all five of her pool dice.

Gillian rolled 6, 3, 5, 1 and 6. Since three of the dice showed a 5 or 6 Gillian guided the outcome of the event. The die that showed a 1 was handed back to the GM and the other four dice were returned to Gillian's dice pool.

Gillian chose to guide the event so that through bravery, determination and a hefty slice of her own streetwise cunning she managed to win the duel. Gillian fought dirty and used Jerrard's own over-confidence and misplaced sense of honor against him. Although wounded, battered and bruised the duel ended with Gillian's dagger at Jerrard's throat poised to take his life. Rather than kill the young nobleman Gillian chose to spare him in exchange for a debt of honour.

Since Gillian rolled three 5's or 6's she also chose to create a new trait linked to the event and keeping it simple she wrote 'Jerrard owes Gillian a debt of honour'. Gillian hopes to make use of that trait in the future to further her goals and drive the story forward.

AT DEATHS DOOR

Although characters do not have hit points or any other measure of health they can (and sometimes will) die.

If you fail to roll a 5 or 6 for an event that the GM deems utterly lethal then your character will find themselves teetering on the brink of oblivion.

All is not lost though. The GM will give you a die to add to your dice pool so that you can make a last ditch dice roll to see if fate intervenes to save your character.

Roll all your pool dice. If you roll one or more 5's or 6's then your character lives to fight another day and you get to guide the event detailing how they manage to cheat death.

If you fail to roll a 5 or 6 then fate deems that death is indeed inevitable. You get to guide the event detailing how your character actually dies so take the opportunity to make it a defining moment in the story. If your character does die then the game isn't over. Just create a brand new character and let the story continue.

COMMENTS & FEEDBACK?

Feel free to drop me an email: Cassidy@uk2.net