

QUAD

The Single-Sheet Pick-up RPG, Version 1.1 – FREE!

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RPG Review Edition! Now with 150% More Freeness!

"Quad RPG" means "Quick and Dirty Role-playing Game." This simple RPG is designed to be picked up and played with not even a moment's notice and only a modicum of necessary rules-checking. All you need is a mechanism for generating a set of random numbers (dice and cards are common), maybe a handful of pennies or just a notepad to mark some tallies, and this two-sided page (and hopefully if I've done my job well enough, you won't even need that after a good read-through). Pen and paper can also be quite useful.

To run a Quad game, you don't need pre-statted monsters or scenarios. You just need folks who want to play *right now*, and at least some amount of ability to think as you go. This very un-crunchy system works best for an unexpected seat-of-the-pants sandbox-like style of gaming. Just think of an initial situation, describe it, and then ask the players "What do you do?" and go from there. This game needs a **GAME MASTER** (probably you) and at least one or more players. The role of GM has a lot of in-game power, so use it responsibly and don't be a jerk to the players.

This is hardly a revolutionary system, so why write it? I needed a good game to pick up and run with no books at all. Nothing out there did the trick for me. Thus, I created this game, and hopefully you'll find it equally as useful for your own insta-games. Are you waiting in an airport with some buds for a layover? Camping in line overnight for concert tickets or that new gaming console? Killing some time in-between scheduled games at a con? Drunk and awake with some buds at a party after most of the other guests have left? Personally, I keep a folded copy in my wallet, just for these unexpected moments. I find it's great for playing a game where I just don't want to think about the mechanics *at all*, and with players who usually hate the long process of character creation (yes, they do exist).

CHARACTER CREATION

Mechanically, each character is little more than a list of **TRAITS**. A Trait is anything quick you can say about your character: something you can do, a flaw, an old friend, a lucky hat. Any statement that can be made about your character can be a Trait. "Good" Traits tend to help you, "Bad" tend to hinder you, and "Neutral" tend to just be simple facts, although there can be exceptions to all three (see the Gameplay section). When the game begins, pick any 2 of the following Good Traits, answer them for your character, and write down those answers (see below examples). Then pick any 2 Bad Traits, and do likewise. If the GM wishes, she can assign or have you take 1 or more Neutral Traits, too.

Good Traits:

- 1 talent you're good at doing (*I can play a mean banjo*)
- 1 person you like (*I love my wonderful wife very much*)
- 1 item you have on your person (*I've got a ridiculously complicated and ornate knife I bought at the con*)

- 1 characteristic you really like about yourself (*I have a really expressive face.*)

Bad Traits:

- 1 activity you're bad at doing (*I can't swim at all*)
- 1 person you dislike (*I owe a whole lot of money to a bookie*)
- 1 thing you're afraid of (*I am paralyzingly terrified of clowns*)
- 1 dirty secret (*I accidentally killed my brother when I was seven and my family covered it up*)

Neutral Traits:

- 1 thing folks notice about you upon first meeting (*I have a face full of tribal piercings*)
- 1 place you've been (*I traveled to Tibet after college*)
- 1 chronic habit (*I snap my fingers all the time when walking*)
- 1 thing you want to do (*I need to find my way to Ket*)

The above are just examples, of course. Traits can be called upon during game play to add bonus pulls and/or degrees of success in tests. You can buy more Traits as the game is in play, too, allowing you to tailor the character more to your liking as the story moves on. In fact, the GM can just skip this part entirely, starting the game with totally blank character slates and letting it all be revealed as the game is played.

TIKS

Each player starts the game with ~12 or so (GM's choice) tokens (called **TIKS**) of some sort, like pennies or poker chips or even just a notepad tally. These tiks are used to add **ELEMENTS** to the game and purchase more character Traits. If the GM skipped character creation, increase starting tiks by +2 for each player. GMs of course do not have, use, or need tiks.

Add Traits: At any point during the game, regardless of what is happening, you can permanently spend 1 tik to add a new "Good" Trait to your character sheet. You can add a "Neutral" Trait for free, and adding a "Bad" Trait gains you a bonus tik. GM can also give out Traits during play.

Add Elements: At any point **not** during an active test, temporarily spend a single tik to add some Element to the current in-game situation. Examples: A giant worm bursts from the ground; one of the guards is someone we've seen before; behind the painting is a hidden safe; the evil baron's minion walks through the door, oh no! The GM can veto any Element deemed too ridiculous.

Recovering/Increasing Tiks: At the end of a session, any tiks used to add Elements are returned to the user, while any spent to purchase Traits are lost. Additionally, the GM should reward 1 to 5 tiks to players as she fits, and even 1-tik gifts during the game as rewards for awesomeness.

Removing Traits: Sometimes a Trait has to go, like when a possession is lost or a goal is resolved, for example. If the GM ever forcefully takes away a Trait, the player immediately gains 1 bonus tik. If you ever *resolve* one of your Traits, write in a new one based on it, *and* gain a free tik.

GAMEPLAY

This is a role-playing game, and you should already know the basics of that kind of game. The GM narrates, and the players react and respond and even narrate a bit on their own. You all work together to tell a story, and given the focus of these rules, that story is likely made up on the spot.

Conflicts: A conflict (called a "Test") happens when the outcome of something in-game is uncertain. The basic mechanic for resolving this involves players pulling numbers against each other (frequently against the GM). The term "PULL a number" could mean "roll a die" or "draw a card" or whatever your chosen random number thingy is. In a test, first identify the Active Player (who initiated the conflict). The two sides first state what they think should happen, and then they both simultaneously

pull numbers against each other. **The active player's highest pull must equal or exceed their opponent's in order to win.**

Pulls: Each participant gets one base pull. Characters get bonus pulls for each Trait working in their favor. Any traits working against them likewise give their opponent bonus pulls (opponent must evoke them). **"Good," "Bad," or "Neutral," any Trait can be a bonus or penalty with clever narration.** Players evoke their favors before their opponents evoke their weaknesses. The GM has carte blanche authority to give out any bonus or penalty pulls to any participant based on other situational factors of the scene at hand, too. In short, each thing working for the character gives a bonus pull, each thing working against gives a bonus to the opponent.

Degree of success: If you win the test, your version of the outcome holds true. Sometimes it is good to know how well you succeeded, and thus you can use the following to determine Degree of Success (**DoS**): If you succeed in a test, your degree = 1 for Active Players, 0 for Defenders. You get +1 for each of your **own** pulls that you can **subtract** from **your** highest and still win. (**Example:** *Sam pulls 17, 13, 7, & 3 versus Chris's 14, 13, & 7. Sam wins because $17 \geq 14$, however Sam can subtract the 3 and still have a 14, thus earning +1 DoS, for a total of 2.*) This means that you want to pull both low and high at the same time.

DoS and Traits: If you win the test, you can call upon applicable Traits that were not used for pulls to add DoS, with the GM's final approval. Any Trait called upon can add +1 to your DoS. You can't evoke your opponent's Traits for DoS, however.

What does DoS do?: This depends on the focus of the game. If this is more of a **"Story" Game**, then each DoS allows you to add a simple fact to the moment. I strike him, he drops his sword, she convinces the guard to let her pass, he is actually my brother, she dies, etc. Facts are a bit like free Elements, but much simpler, and less broad.

If this is more of an **"Action" Game**, then each DoS allows you to hurt your opponent, be it physically, mentally, emotionally, or any combination. In such a game, everyone has **"SUBSTANCE"** which serves as general all-purpose health. I suggest Substance for characters = 1/2 the maximum pull size (die size), with lesser characters having 1/4, mooks having 1/8, and greater opponents and mentors having 2x. Substance can be depleted with tests and clever application of DoS, and typically when you're out of it you are incapacitated or dead. Since all tests can result in DoS, I guess it is theoretically possible to kill someone with words alone. DoS can likewise be used to restore Substance, given proper narration.

Test Example: *Sam and Chris want to kill each other. Sam charges at Chris and is the Active Player. Sam wants to chop Chris with his axe, Chris wishes to get to better ground. Both get a single base pull. Sam evokes "Fast" and "Skilled" to get two bonus pulls. Chris evokes "Heroic" and gets one. Chris evokes Sam's "Clumsiness" for a bonus pull, and Sam evokes Chris's "Overconfidence" for the same. Sam has 4 pulls, Chris has 3. Sam pulls 12, 11, 4, and 2, while Chris pulls 16, 9, and 3. Chris wins! Because $13 (16 - 3)$ is still greater than 12, Chris's DoS is 1 (defender base 0, +1 bonus). Chris succeeds in getting to better ground, and uses the 1 DoS to state that Sam charges off a ledge into the river far below.*

Helping: Characters can help each other in tests all they want, and narrate accordingly, but this only bestows a mechanical bonus if either character has the other one written down as a Good Trait. In such a case, the helping character gives the Acting Character 1 bonus pull or DoS for every 2 of their own traits evoked. A 3rd character can likewise help, but he must evoke 3 traits for every bonus given. A 4th can help, and more, and the required trait evocation increases similarly each time.

Initiative: Sometimes you might need to know who goes first. Flip a coin and have a player call it (or roll a die or whatever). If GM wins, play starts

with the GM and proceeds to the right. If GM loses, play starts with the player to GM's left and proceeds left. Re-flip each time the last person goes (at the end of each "round"). Note that if a character helps another in the round, she can't initiate a test on her turn, and vice-versa.

Gear and Loot: Characters might acquire stuff as the game is played. Gear is just Traits, and handled accordingly. The player can choose to spend ticks and add the new gear as a Trait. If the ticks aren't spent, the gear is unimportant, and can't be used unless the GM decides to let you. GMs can give and take stuff as they please, but once it's been paid for with a tik, it's bound to the normal tik and Trait rules.

Special Effects: Magic and High Tech and such are easy: they're just Traits, only with more imaginative narration. You use them like any other Trait, and must narrate their use accordingly. "I am a mystical acolyte of the Path of Flame" is a good example a magical Trait.

QUICK SESSION STARTER

Here's a quick way to kick off a brand new session. All you need is a good opening scene with all the characters, and to do that, you need to know **When** it is, **Where** it is, and **What** just happened. Here are three super-quick tables to use with a single six-sided die to help you answer these questions:

When?

1. Modern Day (*hometown, overseas, the arctic*)
2. Recent History (*recent wartime, turn of century*)
3. Ancient History (*Mayan, Egypt, Babylon, Rome*)
4. Near Future (*cyberpunk, alternate history, post-apocalypse*)
5. Far Future (*space opera, twisted aliens, mars colony*)
6. Fantasy (*swords and magic, no elves, steampunk, planar*)

Where?

1. Lodging (*apartment, inn, old mansion, penthouse, basement*)
2. Wild Outdoors (*beach, glade, mountainside, underwater*)
3. Wild Indoors (*cave, pit, forest shack, tomb, ruins*)
4. In Transit (*boat, airship, horseback, train, submarine*)
5. Business (*office, restaurant, bakery, warehouse*)
6. Institution (*school, government office, prison, army academy*)

What?

1. Current Violence (*combat, middle of war*)
2. Past Violence (*someone just murdered, find a corpse*)
3. Loud Sound (*crash, roar, explosion, helicopter rotors*)
4. Quiet Sound (*water drip, footsteps, scraping metal*)
5. Voice (*scream, whisper, applause, debate*)
6. Natural (*earthquake, lightning, tidal wave, landslide*)

And now the last bit: "It's a (When) setting. You are all (Where). There's a (What). **So, what do you do?"**

END NOTES

That's it! You have probably by now memorized this incredibly quick and simple RPG and are ready to run it for your friends. If any rules seem left out, I probably thought they didn't really matter to a pick-up game, and encourage you to make stuff up as you go. If you have any questions or comments at all, please drop by my website and I'll be glad to help you however I can: <http://nathanaelcole.com>.

Now, go play!

Thanks to Sam and Chris for being great, and also for having gender-neutral nicknames.

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