F#: a very simple tabletop roleplaying game system.

by R. Hunter Gough, v1.2

The GM and the players are all working together to create a fun and exciting story.

Each game setting has three tag lines. These establish the theme of the game.

Each PC starts with up to three catch phrases, and up to three backgrounds.

Tag lines, catch phrases, and backgrounds are collectively called “aspects”. Every aspect has a value, and these initial aspects all start with a value of 1. Mechanically, all aspects are identical; the names “tag line”, “catch phrase”, and “background” are only there to give an idea of how those aspects should be thematically structured. The values of aspects are ONLY important during die rolls.

Each player starts each session with three tokens. Tokens do the following things:

- A player can give the GM a token to make something unexpected but not unreasonable happen.
- The GM or another player can give a player a token to compel that player to do something unexpected but not unreasonable in line with one of his aspects.
- The GM or another player can give a player a token as a reward for going out of his way to do something cool in line with one of his aspects or one of the setting’s aspects.

Die rolls occur when a player is trying to do something where success and failure both have dramatic potential, or when a player is trying to do something that their character could conceivably do, but would be a major effort or minor miracle for them to do successfully. Die rolls work like this:

1. The player tells the GM what aspect he's using for the roll. If he has no applicable aspect, he must make one up on the spot, with a value of zero.
2. The GM tells the player the difficulty of the action, between 0 and 6, but usually around 1.
3. The player rolls three FUDGE dice, adds them together, and adds the aspect’s value.
4. If the result of the roll plus the aspect value is equal to or greater than the difficulty, the player succeeds. Otherwise, he fails. The severity of the result (positive or negative) roughly depends on how far the roll was from the difficulty.

When a player makes a roll using a new aspect made up on the spot with a zero value (regardless of whether or not the roll succeeds), he has the option of buying it as a permanent aspect with a value of one for 3 tokens. When a player makes a roll using an aspect he already has (also regardless of whether or not the roll succeeds), or receives a token for using one of his aspects in a clever way, he has the option of increasing its value by one by spending a number of tokens equal to the new value.

A player shouldn’t buy more than one new aspect per session, and shouldn’t improve more than one aspect per session.

The GM can also force new aspects on players -- usually a mostly-negative aspect as the result of a badly failed roll. These new aspects also start out with a value of one. As above, though, the GM shouldn’t force more than one new aspect on each character per session.

Aspects (especially the mostly-negative ones imposed by the GM) can change or even go away with enough time, explanation from the player, and/or expenditure of tokens. Of course, players can also figure out ways to turn mostly-negative aspects into advantages, and even increase their values.

That’s everything you need to play, all in only one page! The rest of this document contains deeper explanations of these core rules with examples, and an optional advanced rule.

F# In-Depth (it's pronounced “F sharp”)

As you probably gathered from the one-page rules above, F# is a game for people who are already familiar with tabletop roleplaying games. Plenty of other games have big sections on how to keep your players happy and make up adventures as a GM, how to play well as a player, etc., that can be applied to any roleplaying game. If you need such a thing, I recommend the GM section of *Spirit of the Century* by Evil Hat Productions. In fact, *Spirit of the Century* and the *FATE 3.0* system it uses were the primary inspirations for F#, so I would recommend reading their section on “coming up with good aspects” as well.

F# also doesn't have its own specific setting. Most of the examples given here are from popular movies and TV shows, but F# is designed to be versatile enough to apply to any setting you want to use.

The GM and the players are all working together to create a fun and exciting story.

One important note is that F# is designed to be more collaborative than most roleplaying game systems, and to take a lot of the crushing burden of coming up with and keeping track of **everything** off of the GM. The players of an F# game are involved in the storytelling and creating challenges for each other almost as much as the GM is, although the GM has the general structure of the adventure in mind and keeps things on track. To this end, I recommend that all of the players have some experience with GMing, either in a previous roleplaying game, or by playing this game as a round-robin with the GM changing every session or two. For a great crash course, your group should play a few games of *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* by Hogshead Games, a very simple RPG with **no** GM, in which players reward and complicate each others’ stories through the use of tokens very similar to the ones in F#.

F# also, unfortunately, isn’t really a good game for kids. It’s not that the game is inherently “racy” or “deals with mature themes” (although you’re welcome to make your settings as racy and mature as you want), it’s just that kids usually don’t understand sharing the spotlight, maintaining tone, playing up (but not overplaying) their characters’ flaws, and striking the right balance between competitiveness and cooperation that a good game of F# needs. Of course, some of those “kids” are over 30, so be careful when you structure your group, and conversely if your kids are “wise beyond their years” and capable of playing a game like F# then by all means make it a family event!

To play F#, you’ll need one person to be the GM, about two to four other players, some paper and pens or pencils, at least three FUDGE dice (more on this later), and a pile of “tokens” (glass beads, buttons, old bus tokens, small stuffed animals, etc.).

Each game setting has three tag lines. These establish the theme of the game.

Tag lines are the kinds of single-sentence descriptive text that would go on the box if this setting were a movie or video game:

- “In the Grim Darkness of the Far Future, There is Only War!”
- “When romance is in the air, anything can happen!”
- “A handful of unlikely heroes, on a quest to save the world!”
- “Who is the Mesmetismian?”
- “Stop the Nazis from changing history!”
- “Gothic horror... Furry-style!”

Or they can be broad, short statements about the setting:

- "Berlin. 1984. Five years before the wall comes down."
- "Action-packed pulp adventure in the roaring '20s!"
- "The 21st century that the 1950s were expecting!"
- "No realistic torture, suicide bombs, gruesome deaths, or other major moral dilemmas. This is supposed to be escapism, damn it, and we get enough of all of that on the news!"

You're welcome to have more than three tag lines, and it's OK to have some that are just simple statements about the setting, but be sure to throw in at least a couple that can be milked by the players for tokens. You're also welcome to either come up with all of the tag lines on your own as the GM, or let the players help you mold the kind of game they want to play.

Each PC starts with up to three catch phrases, and up to three backgrounds.

Catch phrases should be short and evocative, just like movie characters' catch phrases. They can either be quotes from the character, or quotes about the character:

- "I'll be back."
- "Snakes! Why does it always have to be snakes?"
- "That's not a knife. THIS is a knife!"
- "I never say no to a pretty face."
- "I'm going to kill you using only my left thumb."

Backgrounds should also be short and evocative, and more personalized than just sterile, stat-like things like "Sword fighting" or "Medicine":

- World's greatest lover
- King of the hobos
- Retired replicant hunter
- Always the bridesmaid, never the bride
- Raised by kangaroos
- Armchair chemist
- Gentleman thief

If a player can't think of three good catch phrases and three good backgrounds during character creation, let him fill them in for free later as they develop naturally during the first couple of sessions. Make sure he gives you lots of good explanation and description for how they come about, though.

As a player, it's important to keep three things in mind while choosing aspects for your character:

1. The easiest way for the GM to come up with adventures that play to everyone's strengths is to base the plot on the characters' aspects, so your choice of aspects tells the GM what kinds of things you want to do in the game.
2. "Bad" aspects are actually good for you, since they're easy to trigger, usually easy to roleplay, and you get a free token every time one is triggered.

3. The **best** aspects are ones that suggest fun adventures, have a downside, **and** have a versatile upside that can be applied to die rolls. These are really hard to come up with, but they can be done!

   "Gentleman Thief" is a good example of this: it suggests exciting, *Ocean's 11*-style adventures to the GM, it lets the GM and players put the whammy on you by dangling sparkly objects in front of your character, and it can be applied to a wide range of rolls including things like sneaking, breaking into places, hiding, sleight of hand, being convincingly dishonest, having a collection of rare gems, socializing with other gentleman thieves, and, of course, stealing things.

Tag lines, catch phrases, and backgrounds are collectively called "aspects". Every aspect has a value, and these initial aspects all start with a value of 1.

Aspect names indicate what characters think of themselves as much as what they are *actually* capable of. Therefore, a character with the aspect "World's Greatest Lover", could consider himself the World's Greatest Lover, even if its starting value of 1 suggests that he's not. There's a lot of great plot and aspect-compelling potential to a character who thinks he's the world's greatest lover, and as the adventure / campaign progresses and the player gradually increases the value of that aspect, it can eventually become true. Likewise, a character with the aspect "armchair chemist" could eventually increase that aspect's value high enough to be capable of Nobel-prize-worthy feats of science, even though he still thinks of it as just a hobby.

You're probably going to end up with a couple of aspects that are only really useful in a handful of specific situations; Indiana Jones, for instance, would almost never have an opportunity to apply his aspect "Snakes! Why does it always have to be snakes?" to die rolls, because although it's good for getting a token every time he's dropped into a snake pit, it's not really applicable to many actions. However, for the sake of entertainment, things can be stretched a little; if Indy falls into a pit of spiders, for instance, he could glibly comment "well, at least it's not snakes!" and add that aspect to his rolls for retaining his composure and climbing back out without getting bitten.

Notice at this point that your **entire** "character sheet" is the character's name, and the character's aspects. You could fit this on a 3x5 index card. Or a cocktail napkin.

The values of aspects are ONLY important during die rolls.

An aspect's value denotes how well that aspect prepares the character for doing things in stressful situations that require die rolls, but it doesn't indicate how important that aspect is to the character. For example, a character who's a pilot could have "Seasoned Pilot" with a value of 4, and "Family Man" at a value of 1, but you can bet that given a choice between ensuring his family's safety and flying an airplane, he's going to choose his family every time.

Each player starts each session with three tokens.

Any unspent tokens at the end of a session are lost, and everybody starts the next session with three tokens no matter how many he had at the end of the last session. You are, however, welcome to make up your own house rules, like "he who ends the session with the most tokens buys the pizza" or "whoever has the least tokens at the end of the session has to GM the next session".

A player can give the GM a token to make something unexpected but not unreasonable happen.

Here's an example:

> The players are pinned down by Nazi machinegun fire in an ancient temple, and because there are several Nazis the fire is continuous, so the GM has put a high difficulty on getting a clear shot at them without taking a bullet. A player spends a token, saying that the racket of the

machineguns awakens a swarm of giant bats hanging from the temple ceiling, who swoop down and attack the Nazis. Distracted by the bats, the Nazis are now a lot easier for the players to pick off.

Because this is an exciting turn of events, it will probably help the players even more than if the player spending the token had said something more mundane, like "their machineguns jam" or "their commandant calls them from another part of the temple and they leave". It also establishes that there are giant bats in the temple, which can be re-used for dramatic effect later. Also, if the player spending the token had said "giant rocks fall on the Nazis and kill them" or "the Nazis accidentally shoot each other", the suggestion would probably get vetoed by the GM, because although it is *possible* that one of these things could happen, it's too *deus ex machina*, and it's just not as fun to have a problem solved entirely by a "coincidence" (even if a player did buy that coincidence with a token) as it is to have a fortuitous turn of events give the players the boost they need to solve the problem themselves. A player can also use this rule to tweak a challenge to play directly to his (or another player's) aspects:

> Zatoichi, the blind swordsman, has the aspect "master of blind fighting". On a dark and stormy winter night, he crosses blades with another legendary swordsman at a mountain inn. Normally, it would be a significant challenge for him to defeat this adversary, but he spends a token to make a gust of mountain wind blow through the inn, extinguishing all of the candles and plunging the room into darkness. Now that he's in his element, Zatoichi has the upper hand, and the difficulty of winning this battle drops dramatically.

The GM or another player can give a player a token to compel that player to do something unexpected but not unreasonable in line with one of his aspects.

Here's an example:

> The A-Team needs to go to beautiful Hawaii for a mission. B.A. Baracus has the aspect "Hates Flying", so the GM decides to create some conflict by giving B.A. a token, activating this aspect and compelling him to refuse to fly to Hawaii. After debating how much trouble it would be to take a boat to Hawaii instead, the team remembers that B.A. also has the aspect "Loves Milk", so Hannibal throws B.A. another token, compelling him to drink a cool, refreshing glass of drugged milk. They bundle the sleeping B.A. onto a plane, and when they touch down in Hawaii B.A. wakes up, groggy and grumpy but two tokens richer (one from the GM, and one from Hannibal). Those tokens will come in handy later when the team is locked in an old barn by the bad guys, and have to cobble together a bad-guy-clobbering tank from the old trucks, hacksaws, welding torches, and dynamite that just happen to be lying around in the barn thanks to B.A. spending his tokens to modify the scene.

The GM or another player can give a player a token as a reward for going out of his way to do something cool in line with one of his aspects or one of the setting's aspects.

This one is basically the same as the last one, but with the sequence of events reversed. In the above example, it could've been B.A. who took the initiative to point out that he "Hates Flying", garnering the reward of a token from the GM, rather than being paid a token by the GM first and then being compelled to Hate Flying.

Players can also be rewarded with a token for playing heavily to one of the aspects of the setting. For example:

> In an adventure based on *The Three Musketeers*, one of the aspects of the setting is "All For One and One For All!" During a daring escape, a portcullis crashes down, separating Aramis from the

rest of the group. Aramis implores the rest of the group to ride on, and come back to rescue him in more fortuitous circumstances. But Athos will have none of that, and shouts “All For One, and One For All!”. Athos gains a token for making dramatic use of an aspect of the setting, and the group works together to lift the portcullis high enough that Aramis can slip through.

Note that the GM has a nigh-endless supply of tokens, and the players only have the tokens in front of them, so when the players are giving each other tokens, they’re coming out of one player’s pool and going into another’s, and when players are giving tokens to the GM or getting tokens from him, they’re going to and from the GM’s vast supply. If you’re the GM, it’s better to be too generous with tokens than too stingy, so try to actually be a little too generous your first session or two, and then figure out the right balance from there. This will have the added benefit of giving your players a surplus of tokens for the first couple of sessions that they can use to cover for the mistakes they will inevitably make while getting a feel for the system.

Die rolls occur when a player is trying to do something where success and failure both have dramatic potential, or when a player is trying to do something that their character could conceivably do, but would be a major effort or minor miracle for them to do successfully.

There’s an important point here that *Spirit of the Century* does a good job of hammering home, and which I’ll make an effort to emphasize too:

If failure is boring, or if “failure is not an option”, **don’t** make the player roll for it!

> Let’s say that a player is casing the streets, looking for the bad guy’s blue 1983 Chevy Malibu. If there’s no big rush to find it, then don’t make him roll for it, because if he fails the roll then he’ll just have to repeat the roll and the search again the next day, and the next day, and the next day… which is terribly terribly **boring**. So don’t make him roll, just base how long it takes him to find the car on the value of his appropriate aspect. If he wants to find the car faster, then he can burn a token to have it cruise past the front window of the restaurant where he’s stopped to have dinner after giving up on finding it for the day. On the other hand, if it’s imperative that he find the car by six o’clock tonight or ANOTHER MIME DIES!!!!, then he definitely should roll for it, because if he succeeds, he could save a mime's life and catch the killer, but if he fails, then there will be a dead mime, with a crime scene full of clues, one of which might be a better lead to the killer than randomly searching city streets for a blue 1983 Chevy Malibu. Both of those potential results are fun and exciting!
>
> Likewise, let’s say that Indy is running through a ruined temple with a gigantic boulder rolling behind him. If failure means he gets squished, then don’t make the player roll, because if the roll fails and Indy gets squished, then the game ends right there, and you and the player are just left sitting there staring at each other sheepishly. Surprisingly, die rolls are NOT absolutely necessary for fun and excitement; it’s exciting for Indy to be running away from the boulder even if he does know that he’s going to make it (after all, when you saw that scene, YOU knew he was going to make it, because he’s the hero of the movie, but that didn’t make the scene any less exciting). If you do want to add a roll to a scene like this, then, again, make it something that’s exciting either way; if Indy succeeds, he outruns the boulder, gets to his plane, and brings this beautiful, priceless, golden idol back with him to the university. If he fails the roll, then he barely escapes the boulder by crashing through a spiderweb-filled crevice, rolling down a hill, and landing right in front of his arch-rival Belloq, who snatches the idol out of his hands and sends him empty-handed and screaming back to his plane, pursued by a mob of angry natives. I think you know how **that** roll went.

One more thing about rolling is to make sure the dice move around a lot between players. If there's only one player doing things that require rolls while the other players are doing equally-exciting things that don't involve rolls, then that's fine, but if there are multiple players doing things that require rolls, then each player should only get one roll before the dice – and the action – move to the next player. (Unless you're using the optional "Chaining" rule explained later in this document.)

The player tells the GM what aspect he's using for the roll. If he has no applicable aspect, he must make one up on the spot, with a value of zero.

Forcing players to make up a new aspect on the spot makes them choose something that will help the action, but is also a good fit for their character, which will help flesh out the character, and also create a more colorful and interesting description of how they accomplish the action. Here's an example:

> Fresh from a lifetime spent in the jungles of Borneo, Mongo the ape-man suddenly finds himself smack-dab in the middle of Chicago, fighting gangsters alongside Doc Daring. In a tussle with a gangster, Doc's pistol is knocked from his hands, and spins across the warehouse floor to Mongo's feet. "Quick, Mongo!" Doc says, "Shoot him!"
>
> Mongo's "Lord of the Treetops" and "Secret Language of the Apes" aspects aren't really applicable here, so he has to come up with a new aspect fast. To reflect his befuddlement with technology, he calls his new aspect "What this ma-sheen do?" Mongo rolls, and succeeds! After chewing on the pistol for a bit and very nearly shooting himself in the face, Mongo slaps the gun against the ground. The gun goes off, and just happens to hit the gangster, while Mongo, terrified by the bang, scampers up into a dark corner of the warehouse's catwalks.

The GM tells the player the difficulty of the action, between 0 and 6, but usually around 1.

Here's a quick difficulty chart. The vast majority of challenges should have an "Average" difficulty. Note the "Nigh" in "Nigh Impossible"; if something actually should be impossible, then just tell the players it's impossible and don't let them roll for it. Of course, they're welcome to weave you a colorful and exciting explanation of how they can use an aspect and favorable circumstances bought with tokens to achieve the impossible in an attempt to make you let them try it.

0	**Easy**
1	**Average**
2	**Tricky**
3	**Hard**
4	**Flawless**
5	**Masterpiece**
6	**Nigh Impossible**

Also note that the GM actually tells the player the difficulty before the roll is made. This is different from most RPGs, and is in keeping with the "collaborative" aspect of F#; it lets players plan how they're going to do things, how likely failure or success is and what they'll do in each case, and even lets them change their minds and do something else if they've over- or underestimated the difficulty of an action. This all has the effect of making the result of the action more exciting and more satisfying, and keeping the story moving.

For example:

> While chasing the bad guys, Indy runs into a swordsman. The swordsman flourishes his scimitar, and clearly wants to test the power of his blade against Indy's whip. Indy says that he wants to whip the sword out of the swordsman's hands, and the GM says that'll be a difficulty of 4. Indy's good with a whip, but not **that** good, and besides, the bad guys are getting away, so Indy says "how about I just shoot him, instead?" the GM says that has a difficulty of 1, so Indy plugs the swordsman and continues with his chase. The sword versus whip fight would've been cool, but "bringing a gun to a knife fight" also has a certain charm, and lets Indy jump back to what he

really wants to be doing (the chase) faster. This also creates some great future plot opportunities; the GM takes note of the fact that Indy "took the easy way out" this time, and in the next adventure the GM throws **two** swordsmen at Indy, **after** Indy loses his gun!

The player rolls three FUDGE dice, adds them together, and adds the aspect's value.

FUDGE YOU AND YOUR FUDGE DICE!

FUDGE dice are six-sided dice with two "plus" sides, two "minus" sides, and two blank sides. They're pretty good for giving the kind of randomness that works best for F#; if you roll three of them, you're going to get a result somewhere on a bell curve between negative 3 and positive 3, with the peak at 0.

Like most things, FUDGE dice can be ordered off the internet, but if you don't want to special order special dice you have numerous other options. My "FUDGE dice", for instance, are just special dice from a miniatures game I never played called *HeroQuest*, that have two skulls, three shields, and a blank. I blacked out one of the shields with a sharpie, and just treat the shields as plusses, the skulls as minuses, and the blank or blacked out side as blank. You can also use regular six-sided dice, and treat 1-2 as a minus, 3-4 as a blank, and 5-6 as a plus, but that's kind of awkward. You can also buy blank wooden cubes from a craft store and draw plusses and minuses on them with a sharpie. If you're not doing **too** much rolling, you can also just play three rounds of rock, paper, scissors with the GM; win is plus, lose is minus, tie is blank. This can slow things down too much if you're doing a lot of rolling, though, and it's easier to cheat at rock, paper, scissors than at rolling dice, so you should only use it in a pinch.

If the result of the roll plus the aspect value is equal to or greater than the difficulty, the player succeeds. Otherwise, he fails. The severity of the result (positive or negative) roughly depends on how far the roll was from the difficulty.

A success is a success, and you're welcome to describe a success as anywhere between a "close shave" and "seemingly effortless" regardless of how good the roll is. If you're using the optional rule of "Chaining", however, bigger successes get you bigger "links", as described in the "Chaining" section later on.

Failure, on the other hand, should scale depending on how far the roll was from the difficulty, since the player knew in advance what the difficulty was, and went ahead with the roll anyway. The consequences of a failed roll are up to the GM, but a good rule of thumb is that being off by just 1 is an "oh, so close!", being off by 3 or more hurts the player a **lot** and gives him a negative aspect if you haven't already given him one this session, and being off by 5 leaves the player teetering on the brink of death, even if the action was just flirting with a pretty girl at a cocktail party.

OMG HOW YOU HAVE COMBAT WITH NO HPS AND THAC0S??????

Here's a revelation for you that very few tabletop RPGs except for *The Whispering Vault* have figured out: bad guys don't need anything more than difficulty ratings. Do you want to shoot that group of Nazis dead? Then that's gonna have a difficulty of 3. If you fail, then maybe you miss some of them, or just wing some of them, depending on how much you miss by. If you succeed though, then BAM, they're all dead. No wounds, no soak, no armor class, no reflex saves, just dead Nazis. Likewise, if they're all shooting at you, and you don't wanna get shot, then that's gonna have a difficulty of 1 (because they're rotten shots). One roll. If you succeed, then you don't get shot! If you fail, then the GM will maybe give you a nasty aspect like "bullet in the thigh" or "mild concussion" that you'll have to work around for a while. At the VERY worst, you'll get shot somewhere bad, pass out from blood loss, and wake up tied to a chair with someone with a monocle and a riding crop standing over you and gloating.

There you go; a whole fight starring you and a bunch of Nazis, resolved in one, maybe two rolls, depending on who gets the drop on who and how well those rolls go. Just like in the movies! Seriously, how many action movies have you seen where the good guys run up and bop the bad guys and then run back, and then the bad guys run up and bop the good guys and run back, and this repeats for about half an hour? That is **boring**.

So, what about when you're fighting the Big Boss? Do you want to shoot him dead? Then the difficulty on that is "impossible". He's just too strong / fast / smart / powerful / made-of-pudding. You're going to have to be clever, and figure out a way to weaken him, and use the environment against him, and work together with your teammates to do something totally awesome. Because F# is all about doing fun, exciting things, and even if you could just go toe-to-toe with the Big Boss and trade blows with him until one of you keels over you shouldn't because that would be **boring**.

If you want to position yourself strategically on a grid of squares, and choose attacks from a big long pre-defined list, and min-max the best possible combination of those pre-defined attacks for the enemy you're fighting, then go play *Disgaea*. Seriously, it's one of the best games for the PS2. There's nothing wrong with wanting to do that, and video games are the best place to do it.

If, however, you want to leap off a balcony onto a chandelier that's only there because you just **said** it's there, swing down into a swarm of villains, best them all with a baguette because they don't deserve to taste your steel, throw a rose you just happen to be carrying to a beautiful barmaid and then leap out the window onto your waiting trusty steed and gallop away, then you'd better play F#, because you sure can't do that in a video game, and the few other RPGs that would let you do all that would make you roll too much and take about an hour.

When a player makes a roll using a new aspect made up on the spot with a zero value (regardless of whether or not the roll succeeds), he has the option of buying it as a permanent aspect with a value of one for 3 tokens. When a player makes a roll using an aspect he already has (also regardless of whether or not the roll succeeds), or receives a token for using one of his aspects in a clever way, he has the option of increasing its value by one by spending a number of tokens equal to the new value.

This is how character advancement occurs in F#. It's not mandatory to buy up an aspect *immediately* after it's been used, but the player should give some justification for why it's increasing, and having just used it is a very easy way to justify it. For example:

> Mongo is pleased with his new aspect, "What this ma-sheen do?" It has a lot of versatility, and also a lot of potential for mischief and plot hooks. He could just keep using it at zero whenever he needs it, but now that he's in the big city, he's going to be interacting with a lot more machines than he did in the jungle. He decides to "make it official", and spends three tokens to buy its value up to one. It's been a little while since he accidentally shot the gangster fighting Doc Daring, and he's now riding in Doc's car, so he justifies increasing the aspect by inquisitively sticking his finger in the cigarette lighter in Doc's car, quickly learning what *that* ma-sheen do the hard way.

This initial three token investment represents the difficulty of learning something new, or revealing something new about yourself that you've never revealed before. Note that players should **not** be rewarded with tokens for using aspects with a value of zero, and can not be compelled to use those aspects, either. Zero-value aspects are "one-time things", or new ideas that the character is "trying out", and won't become an official part of that character's repertoire or background until he buys its value up to one.

> Mongo cleaned up this session, and still has tokens to spare by the end when he and Doc Daring are racing to stop the Big Boss from activating his doomsday device at the top of a radio tower. Doc is taking the stairs, but Mongo is scaling the side of the tower in leaps and bounds. After barely making a tricky jump that required a roll with his “Lord of the Treetops” aspect, Mongo decides that with all the climbing he's been doing he should raise that aspect's value, so he spends two tokens to buy it up from 1 to 2. From now on, climbing will be a little easier for him.

You can improve an aspect you've just applied to a roll **regardless of whether or not the roll succeeds**; you can learn from your mistakes just as easily as you can learn from your successes. Also, some games of F# will have a lot less rolling of dice than others, so it would be unfair to tie the improvement of existing aspects exclusively to successful die rolls. Therefore, a player has the option of improving an existing aspect either right after he's made a successful roll using it, or right after he's been rewarded for using it – or compelled to use it – with a token.

A player shouldn’t buy more than one aspect per session, and shouldn’t improve more than one aspect per session.

This rule simply discourages players from advancing their characters faster than the story can keep up with them, and also keeps players from hoarding tokens to buy up a bunch of aspects rather than keeping the tokens flowing and keeping the story fun and exciting.

Remember that there's no point in hoarding tokens past the end of a session, so when the big climax comes, it's time to blow any tokens you have left over on making everything huge, exciting, and over-the-top, just like a big ending should be.

Hey, stop snickering at that last sentence.

Here's an example from something I just watched that ties all of this together in a more over-the-top setting:

> In the giant-robot anime *Gurren Lagann*, one of the setting aspects is "Kick logic out and do the impossible! That's how Team Gurren rolls!". Simon has the starting aspect “Drill Miner” with a value of 1, and after he uses it to find a mysterious key while digging tunnels, he decides to spend two of his three starting tokens to buy its value up to 2. This comes in handy soon afterwards, when he proceeds to find a giant robot buried in the rock. Later in the same session, a bad giant robot attacks the village, and the only hope lies with using Lagann – the giant robot that Simon found – to fight it. Since Simon found Lagann **and** the mysterious key that just happens to start Lagann, the team elects him to pilot it. He goes into battle against the bad robot, and makes up a new aspect, “Pilot Lagann”, with a value of zero, to try to dodge the bad robot's attack. He fails, and the bad robot smashes him against a wall, sending his teammates flying off their perches on the sides of Lagann.
>
> Things look dire, but fortunately Simon only failed his roll by 2; not enough to injure himself or Lagann. To psyche himself up, Simon shouts the tag line, “Do the impossible! That's how Team Gurren rolls!” in such a dramatic fashion that the GM and both of Simon's teammates award him with tokens, bringing him up to a total of four. Since he's still in the cockpit, he has no trouble justifying spending three tokens to buy “Pilot Lagann” up to a value of one, which helps him a moment later as he uses the aspect to defend his teammates from the bad robot's attack. Having “Pilot Lagann” at a value of one is a lot better than having it at a value of zero, but it sure would be nice if he could use his “Drill Miner” aspect with a value of two instead. He blows his last token to make a change to the scene, declaring that he uses his new, better understanding

of how to pilot Lagann to make giant drills pop out all over it. In a more realistic setting, that would be too ridiculous to allow, but in a giant-robot anime with the tag line “Kick logic out and do the impossible!”, it's just the right kind of ridiculous, so the GM gives Simon the thumbs-up and takes his token, and now Lagann is covered in drills. Now that he's able to apply his higher-valued “Drill Miner” aspect to the fight, Simon makes short work of the bad robot and saves the day.

The GM can also force new aspects on players, usually a mostly-negative aspect as the result of a badly failed roll. These new aspects also start out with a value of one. As above, though, the GM shouldn’t force more than one new aspect on each character per session.

These GM-imposed aspects are usually bad things, like “broken ribs” as the result of a bad fall, or “stage fright” as the result of a disastrous attempt at public speaking. But it's also a good way for the GM to give a player a personal attachment to whatever adventure he's cooking up; if the first thing the GM does at the start of a session is tag you with the aspect “recurring nightmares about Mount Rushmore coming to life”, then you know you're in for a hell of a ride, and your character's going to be right in the middle of it. You also know, however, that you're going to pull through this adventure mostly unscathed, since the GM probably won't impose another new aspect on you this session.

Aspects (especially the mostly-negative ones imposed by the GM) can change or even go away with enough time, explanation from the player, and/or expenditure of tokens. Of course, players can also figure out ways to turn mostly-negative aspects into advantages, and even increase their values.

Aspects like injuries and social blunders can usually be passed off as “healed” after a session or two and go away. Likewise, adventure-specific aspects imposed by the GM are usually resolved by the end of the adventure, and can be dropped or molded into something more useful. If aspects change into something else, then what the aspect was and what it becomes should be related, and there should be a clear reason for the change, although it's not unheard of for an aspect to change into its own opposite. After a profound experience during an adventure, for example, a character's aspect of “Womanizer” could change to “Champion of Women’s Rights”. With a little explanation from the player, the value could even stay the same, as the character recognizes the traits and habits of other, unrepentant womanizers and heads them off, and also helps women overcome the weaknesses that he previously exploited.

Chaining: The Optional Rule

You should ignore this rule for your first couple of sessions, because not only will it complicate things, but your players won't really have strong enough aspects to use it until they have a few sessions under their belts. After that, however, chaining can add a lot of fun and excitement to your F# game!

Chaining is an optional, advanced rule designed to let players use the momentum of big successes to improve their chances of further actions, or help out other players with their actions.

If a player rolls higher than the difficulty of an action, and the player is in a tense situation where lots of rolls are being made (like combat or a chase), then the player gets a number of “links” equal to the difference between the roll and the difficulty.

If a player gains links from a roll, he can either immediately “chain” the roll into another roll, or pass the links to the next player to roll. If he chains into another roll, he adds the links to the result of that roll, and subtracts the number of rolls he’s made so far in the same chain. If that roll succeeds and generates links, then he can proceed to chain into another roll, or pass the links to the next player. If he passes the links, then the next player to roll must explain how his action is benefiting from the previous player’s action, and then he can add the links to the result of his roll (but doesn’t have to subtract the previous players’ number of chained rolls).

For example:

> Somewhere in the middle of that bar fight is Weasel Wallace, the guy the players are after. Suzy Sapphire asks how hard it would be to leap from table to table, over the fight, to the bar's stage, using her “Backwards and In Heels” aspect. The GM gives her a difficulty of 2 for it. She rolls a 1, adds her aspect's value of 3, and ends up with a 4, so she makes it to the stage with 2 links to spare. She says she's going to chain that action into singing a song so amazing that everyone stops fighting and stares at the stage, using her “Face Like an Angel, Voice Like a Siren” aspect. The GM gives her a difficulty of 4 – “flawless” – for that one. Fortunately, lounge singing is Suzy's bread and butter, and the aspect has a value of 5, so she tells the band to try to keep up as a spotlight swings onto her from out of nowhere and she begins to croon. She rolls another 1, adds the 5 from her aspect and 2 from her links, and subtracts 1 because she's already made one roll in this chain, which gives her a total of 7, beating the difficulty of 4 with 3 links left over. The fighting stops, and everyone in the bar stands frozen, enraptured by her voice. She considers chaining those 3 links into another action, but she'd have a -2 penalty on it because she's already made two rolls in this chain, and she can't really think of anything that would make a good follow-up to her song, so she passes her 3 links to her teammate, Chuck Palooka. Chuck is down in the bar, and he spots Weasel Wallace, and tells the GM that he wants to sneak up on Wallace and knock him out. Chuck doesn't really have any applicable aspects, so he makes one up on the spot called “Dance Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee”. Since it's a new aspect, it has a value of zero. Wallace has spent his whole life dodging guys like Chuck, but he's currently entranced by Suzy's singing, so the GM gives the action a difficulty of 2. Chuck rolls, and gets a -1, but then he gets to add the 3 links that Suzy passed him. Even though Suzy took two actions in the chain, those don't count against Chuck, so those 3 links raise his roll just enough to meet the 2 difficulty and put the kibosh on Wallace.

If Chuck had succeeded enough to generate any links, and then had passed them **back** to Suzy, she would still have a -2 penalty from her two previous actions, because this would still be part of the same chain. Since the chain has ended at this point, then neither Chuck nor Suzy will take a penalty from it on their next roll. You don't **have** to use links, either; if a roll generates links, and you don't have another action to use them on or a good explanation for passing them to another player, you can just end the chain right there and those extra links will just evaporate.

Gone Fishin’

At some point, a player isn’t going to be able to make it to the next session for one reason or another. Or the next one after that. If a player misses one or more sessions and then comes back, you have two options: you can either leave that player’s character exactly as he was before, or you can give the player the option of telling an exciting story of what his character’s been up to, receiving new aspects and improving old aspects accordingly. If you choose this second option, then the player shouldn’t receive more than one new aspect and one improved aspect for each session he missed. Also keep in mind that the player is also due some GM-imposed aspects for the time he was gone, so as the GM you can interject during his story to drop a new aspect on him, or you can even wait to “reveal” a new, “surprise-twist” aspect until the middle of the current session.

You can also apply this “what have you been doing in your absence” mechanic to **all** of the players. If there is a long chronological break in a campaign between the end of one adventure and the start of the next adventure (even if there’s no “real time” break between sessions), you can ask your players to tell you what their characters have been up to in the meantime, adding and improving aspects accordingly.

Don’t wanna think too much about what we should and shouldn’t do.

For your first few sessions, I *highly recommend* that you stick to these rules, but as your group gets a better feeling for how things work, the story they want to tell, and the kind of tone they want to maintain, you’re welcome to mutate and bend these rules to whatever works best for you. I expect that the “once per session” limits on improving aspects, buying new aspects, and getting GM-imposed aspects will be the first things to go (which is why I wrote those rules using “shouldn’t” rather than “can’t”).

You’re also welcome to experiment with increasing the values of starting aspects, and/or changing the number of starting aspects, which will give you the F# equivalent of “high level starting characters”. You could even try a game with **zero** starting aspects, perhaps in an experimental adventure where everyone wakes up with amnesia, and has to figure out who they are as they go along.

If you do modify these rules over the course of your game, then I recommend doing so gradually, and remember that you can always snap all the rules back into place if things get too far off track.

That’s everything you need to play.

OK! I think that covers everything, so get cracking on your first great F# adventure! As I mentioned before, F# has no built-in setting, but it's a versatile system that could work for any number of settings. Since you've just read to the end of a document that's ONLY about a set of rules with no setting, then you probably already have a setting in mind that you want to apply F# to. As an example, the first game I intend to run using F# is a pulp game, and these are the tag lines I'm using:

- “In the eye of the hurricane between the two World Wars, adventure, opportunity, mystery, and danger lurk in the dark corners of the Earth that civilization has yet to tarnish!”
- “We alone keep the evils of this world at bay, and it is our unflinching courage, honor, and dignity that let us do battle with monsters without becoming monsters ourselves!”
- “The best dime novels that never existed!”

You will probably never have to look at these rules again; just remember that everything's in threes: 3 tag lines for the setting, 3 catch phrases and 3 backgrounds for each character, 3 FUDGE dice. If you forget which number everything uses, you can just remember that the # in F# is on the 3 key on a keyboard. Neat, huh?

Have fun with the system, and please feel free to drop me a line and let me know what you think of it, what you've done with it, and to let me know about any exciting discussions of it you find on the web.

Thanks for playing!

The F# RPG system was designed by R. Hunter Gough. For more of his works, visit studiohunty.com .

The F# RPG system was inspired by the FATE RPG system, which in turn uses a modified version of the FUDGE RPG system (hence the FUDGE dice).