

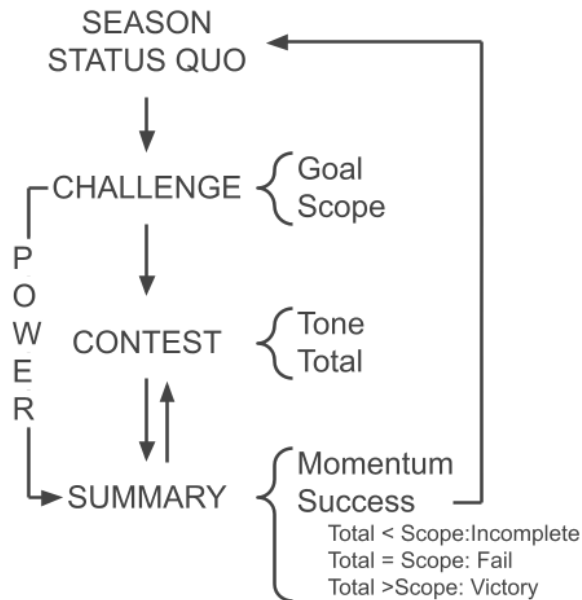
TERMS

- [ORIGIN] Describes the Character's Origin.
- [PURPOSE] Describes the Character's Ambition, Aspiration or Goal.
- [POWER] An ability; unique, potent and extraordinary. Typically requires an investment of some kind by the Character to recharge after use. Not all games use Powers.
- [DESCRIPTOR] A word or phrase linked to [ORIGIN], [PURPOSE] or [POWER] to set boundaries and context for application.
- Host: The arbiter of Challenges and coordinator of the story.
- Player: Represents a character or faction. Disrupts the Status Quo.
- Status Quo: The current state of all things in the story of the game. Moderated by the Host.

CHARACTER : The Disruptor

- Use lists appropriate to the genre and tropes of the game, provided by the Host.
- Choose an [ORIGIN] and [PURPOSE]. Write them in separate circles and link with a line. Add [DESCRIPTORS].
- Draw 5 circles equidistant along the length of the line, these represent episodes or waypoints in the character's Journey from [ORIGIN] to [PURPOSE].
- If applicable choose a [POWER] and link it to [ORIGIN], add [DESCRIPTORS].

RULES FLOWCHART



RULES DETAIL

STATUS QUO

1. The Host describes what is happening, using Season to flavour descriptions. Players dictate Character choice and actions. Play continues in this way, a conversation and negotiation between the Players and the Host to tell a shared story. If Player(s) are not satisfied they can Challenge the Status Quo.

CHALLENGE

2. One or more Players interrupt the Status Quo by declaring a Challenge. They clarify the Goal and outline a Plan. A Challenge without substance will fail, it must be feasible.
3. A Challenger can spend an applicable [POWER] to accomplish the Challenge. The Challenger bypasses the Contest stage and automatically succeeds, goto Step 9.
4. The Host declares the Scope: 6/12/18+. Scope is a measure of change to reconcile the Goal and Status Quo.

CONTEST

5. A Challenger announces the Tone of the Contest. Do they want the Contest to add a new element to the Status Quo or subtract a current one?
6. A Challenger and the Host play out a Contest. Both parties select a number 1-5 and then simultaneously reveal them. Add them to make a Total.

SUMMARY

7. If the Total is Odd the Challenger wins Momentum, otherwise it goes to the Host. The party with Momentum decides how to apply the Tone of the Contest.
8. Compare the Total to Scope. If Total is higher, the Challenge succeeds. If they are equal, the Challenge fails. If Total is less than Scope, the Challenge is incomplete and the Challenger can either accept the Status Quo or continue to Contest the Challenge. Additional Contests continue to build on the prior Total until the Challenge has an outcome, goto 5.
9. The Host Summarises the events of the Challenge into the Status Quo, goto 1.

ADVANCEMENT

- ◆ When a Character achieves a significant goal, they advance one step from [ORIGIN] towards [PURPOSE]. When they reach [PURPOSE] it is time to invent a new [PURPOSE], consolidate everything about the character into [ORIGIN] and start a new Chapter. Advancing a step is a trigger that may grant a new [POWER] or other benefits depending on the game.
- ◆ Conditions on Advancement will be set by the Host at the start or during the game. For example: In some games Advancement is linked to Momentum. One or more of the steps from Origin to Purpose can only be passed by use of Momentum.

GUIDANCE: A set of suggestions and options to assist the Host to provide consistent rulings.

Why does the Status Quo (SQ) Matter?

The SQ is a tool for the Host to quickly mentally ‘package’ whatever matters at that moment and consider the implications of Player actions. It is a benchmark for making consistent decisions in an abstract, shared imagination game. Considering the Status Quo, what are the consequences and costs of the choice or action? Describe how this plays out and the Players will either accept or Challenge the outcome. Clear communication from the Host will result in a clear goal and Plan from the Challenger(s)

SEASON: An Optional Rule for the Host

Season is a thematic ‘clock’ that sits above the Status Quo. At the outset of Play the Host draws a circle with Summer, Autumn/Fall, Winter and Spring at cardinal points, each separated by 6 dots. The Host selects a starting Season. When a successful Challenge is summarised the Season advances Total-Scope dots. Season sets the descriptive ‘Mood’ for how the Host presents the Status Quo. Season should be a subtle guide for the Host to balance the feel of the game. Scope may be higher or lower based on the compatibility of a Challenge to the Season. The Host can swap out seasons for any thematic set or cycle, eg: emotions, moon phases, Arcana, colour wheel, Pantheon of Deities, etc.

What is a Challenge? Who is the Challenger?

A Challenge is raised by one or more Players who are not satisfied by the emerging consequence of their action. It is important for the Host and Players to understand that FreePlayer relies on Players challenging the world. Challenges are goal based, not action based so they will typically encompass as much time and activity as is appropriate for the goal.

When considering the Goal and Plan the Host should consider;

- ◆ Does the Challenge have substance? Do the Players know what they want? If not, Ask them to clarify. It is important that the Host understands what the Players want to achieve. Doing a risky thing is not necessarily a Challenge, it may have a cost but if it doesn’t disrupt the SQ, it probably isn’t a Challenge.
- ◆ Are the Goal and Plan Feasible? Is it reasonable that the Characters have the means to achieve them? This is not a test of ambition or likelihood, it is a test of whether it fits with the genre conventions/ tropes of the story. Consider the SQ, is this a unique, first time this kind of Challenge has been issued? How does it fit with the story? Ask the Challenger(s) to rephrase, rework the Challenge if it doesn’t fit.

What if a Challenge is too ‘Big’ or Ambitious?

One of the early tasks for the Host in learning the game is to become comfortable with Goal oriented play. Encourage big and ambitious Challenges. Where this may be difficult is if the Challenge overlaps with the priorities of other Players. Eg: A Challenge encompasses a period of time that overlaps with a different Player’s priority.

In this case either:

- ◆ Ask the Players to consolidate everything for the set period into the Challenge- Set a Scope high enough that there will be several Contests and use them to cover each Player’s priority. If the Challenge Fails, consider how this will impact the different Priorities- the failure does not have to be shared.
- ◆ Negotiate a cost or consequence with one or more of the Players so that they withdraw their Challenge.

What is Scope?

Scope is the abstract measure of how much change is required to reconcile the Challenger’s Goal and the Status Quo. Scope is the ‘Fail Number’ for the Challenge.

A Host might use a higher Scope to:

- ◆ Increase the dramatic impact of the Challenge.
- ◆ Increase the number of Contests so invested Players can get involved (by choosing Tone).

Consider the ambition of the Challenge: Minor = 6, Significant = 12, Major = 18.

Why have a bidding system for Contests?

FreePlayer uses a diceless bidding system to resolve Challenges. This introduces a strategic element to play as there are several competing priorities:

- ◆ In order to win, the Challenger must build a total greater than Scope without matching it.
- ◆ Bidding low means more Contests and opportunities to hold or lose Momentum. This can also lead to more opportunities for Character Advancement if applicable in the game.
- ◆ Bidding High means fewer Contests and a faster resolution.
- ◆ Bidding Odd or Even will have a role in deciding Momentum.

The Host can use bidding strategies to add a sense of character to individuals and factions. Eg: Bid matching- when a Player Challenges a particular faction, it will match the Player’s previous bid, representing them reacting to the tempo of the action. A different Faction may escalate, increasing their bid by +1 each Contest. The starting Bid may represent a 1-5 score of how prepared the Opponent was for the Challenge and then follow a pattern from there.

The Host must decide if they are actively seeking to win the Challenge. At its core each Contest is between the Host and a Player and, like rock/Paper/scissors, there is a degree of social engineering and competitive prediction at play. The Host must consider the dramatic value of this competition and use it to build on the emotional impact of the Challenge.

What is Momentum?

Momentum is the key impact of each Contest. At the Start of the Contest a Challenger announces the Tone of the Challenge - will something be added or removed from the story? Momentum (decided by whether the Total is odd - Player or even- Host) is the application of the Tone. Momentum can be anything that is in some way relevant to the Goal or can at least be contextualised by it. It might be immediate and directly related to the Contest such as a particular resource or turn of events or it may be quite remote and indirect such as how a NPC who is not present reacts to the contest or an emerging and future consequence of it. Momentum is an opportunity for the Host to develop character relationships and motives and to introduce pilot seeds. The Host can choose to have some degree of editorial control over Player use of Momentum and can do this at the time or at the end of the Challenge during the Summary.

Why have Powers? What is the point of Contests if they can be bypassed by using a Power?

Powers are the ‘Skip’ or ‘Press F to Win’ mechanic. A Power can only be used if the Descriptors attached to the Power make it applicable to the current Challenge. Using a Power should feel suitably epic and earned considering the effort involved in gaining access to the Power.

One consequence of using a Power is that there is no option for the Challenger (or Host) to hold Momentum. It means that the success is ‘flat’, it achieves the goal but without the wider implications that Momentum can bring.

What is the Summary?

The Host provides a brief summary at the end of each Contest to recap the events and help the Players decide if they will continue or abandon the Challenge. At the end of the Challenge is a summary that consolidates the contests into the Status Quo. This final Summary contextualises and sets the relevance and interplay of Momentum and the overall outcome of the Challenge into the Status Quo.

DRAFT FREEPLAYER [210718]

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

The example is set in a Fantasy Realm. It is a summary of play to illustrate the Rules in Play, not a verbatim reproduction of all the conversation during play.

The Player and Host have played Freeplayer long enough to develop strategies for how to play and use the rules to gain different outcomes.

Isldr is a Warrior [DESCRIPTOR] Beholden to the Tiny Queen [ORIGIN] wielding the Bladelance [POWER] - Blazing Under the light of the Moon [DESCRIPTOR]. She Burns with a Righteous Rage [PURPOSE].

CHALLENGE

While enroute to a neighbouring hamlet she hears the clash of battle from a nearby logging camp. As she gallops around the bend the Host describes that dozens of Longsnout Raiders are clambering up the palisade and before the day is done the Camp will be little more than a pyre for the dead.

GOAL

Isldr's Player says this will not stand. Isldr is a warrior who rides a warhorse and even though the Bladelance will not blaze under the light of the sun, (she cannot use it as a Power to resolve the Challenge) it is still a formidable weapon. She is a trained warrior who wears the brand of the Tiny Queen on her forehead for all to see. Her goal is to turn the tide of battle and drive the Longsnouts back into the woods.

SCOPE

The Host listens to Isldr's Player and considers that the Challenge has substance; there is a chance of achieving this Goal. The Challenge is not so strong that Isldr automatically succeeds. The Host considers that the goal is to drive the Raiders away, not to eradicate them, yet they are many. The Scope is set at 10.

Strategy- The Challenger wants to break the Challenge into several Contests to help with advancing the Character. The Host has decided that the Longsnouts are surprised and will initially be slow to react and then turn their focus to the new threat.

CONTEST 1 Tone: Add something new

Challenger 2, Host 1, Total 3: Challenger has Momentum, Total is less than Scope.

Momentum:- Isldr has Momentum, the Player has added a new element into the story; the loggers will join her Church- if they survive.

Summary:- As Isldr circles the palisade, slashing down longsnouts, she hears screams from within as many breach the interior. A roar rises from the defenders as they see her fighting in their defense. The Challenger chooses to continue.

Strategy: If the Total of the next Contest is 7, the Challenge will fail. The Challenger decides to bid low and so the Host's bid can't make the total.

CONTEST 2 Tone: Add something new

Starting Total:3 Challenger 1, Host 4, Total 8: Host has Momentum, Total is less than Scope.

Momentum:- Host has Momentum; Isldr is wounded.

Summary:- The longsnouts turn their focus to the fey warrior who has carved into their ranks. Overwhelmed for a moment, she is wracked by pain as one of them sticks her in the leg with a spear. The Challenger chooses to continue.

DRAFT FREEPLAYER [210718]

Strategy: The Challenger knows that with a total of 8, by bidding 3 or more she will win the Challenge. The Host continues to present the Longsnouts as mostly focussed on Isldr

CONTEST 3 Tone: Remove something

Starting Total:8 Challenger 3, Host 4, Total 15: Challenger has Momentum, Total is more than Scope.

Momentum:- Challenger has Momentum; Longsnout leader is defeated.

Summary:- Isldr wades through the Longsnouts. The Bladelance sings as it opens them up. Finally before the Longsnout leader, she cleaves his head and they route even as it settles in the dust.

Challenge Summary: The loggers cheer and offer Isldr respite. She applies a poultice to her thigh and the loggers daub the symbol of the Tiny Queen on their gate. The Host is using the optional Season rule so the Season advances 5 points from Summer towards Fall (Total 15 - Scope 10). Isldr feels a chill, this wound will not heal as quickly as her last.

Provide Feedback at:

<https://darkpatterns.home.blog/>

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