

Levels of Intensity

Pick one to use for an action. Which one you do is up to you and how invested your character is. You can up your intensity based on the declaration of others, but you can't lower it once it's declared. The levels are:

Calm D6

Invested D8

Passionate D10

Fanatical D12

Traits

Pick a trait to roll along with the intensity die. Main characters have three traits, one at D10 and two at D8. Examples: Smooth Talker D10, Gladiator D8, Love for Jila D8. Minor characters have 2 traits at D6.

Actions

Everyone says who they're acting against and then rolls at the same time and compares highest single die. Highest number goes first (second die breaks ties). The defender can pick up one or both of their rolled dice to defend against the action. Dice used for defense can't be used for offense anymore, so picking up both dice means forfeiting the action. Defense dice can be rerolled against any following attacks that round. A successful attack (i.e., one with a die showing a higher number than the defense's highest-rolled die) causes an impact.

Impact

The successful attacker chooses an impact up to the rating of the action, effective immediately. The rating is determined by adding the highest actual single die result of the attacker to the intensity die maximum of the defender (i.e., the highest he could have rolled: 6 for calm, 8 for invested, 10 for passionate, 12 for fanatical). The defender can negotiate not suffering the impact in exchange for a fictional behavior or event.

<i>Any</i>	Tax a trait (one step down in die size; ends after 5-minute rest period after the scene)
<i>12</i>	Gain 1 advantage point (AP) against the defender (used for special effects; see below)
<i>14</i>	Damage a trait (one step down in size until healed) – must be the one defender just used
<i>16</i>	Wound (all trait dice treated as one step lower; needs healing)
<i>20</i>	Fatal. Total control over the fate of the character: death, mutilation, incapacitation, etc. – this impact can be “held” until end of scene and used as negotiation material (see example 3)

Special Effects

Spend AP for the following effects with the character you have AP against. AP last until they are used up.

<i>1 AP</i>	Reroll one defense die.
<i>2 AP</i>	Count your own highest-rolled die as maximum value for impact purposes only.
<i>3 AP</i>	Add four points to your defense after your roll.
<i>4 AP</i>	Add four points to your highest roll after you roll for attack and impact purposes.

Healing

Characters need prolonged care and/or overnight rest to heal damage or wounds. One of these can be healed at a time. It needs to make sense in the fiction to do this, and you can't do it more than once a day. Whenever a healing moment is requested by any player, all of the characters get to heal one impact. If a major character does not have a wound or damage, however, that character earns one (if opponent heals damage) or two (if opponent heals wound) advantage points against all of the healing characters with whom she was in conflict since the last healing, whether or not she was the one who inflicted the damage or wound.

Example 1: Basic Conflict

Sarah and Steve both want to grab an item. Sarah acts with calm intensity (D6) and Smooth Talker D10—she distracts Steve with talking before grabbing the item. Steve acts with passion (D10) and Bad Temper D8. He pushes Sarah away in anger.

Sarah's player rolls 9 on the D10 and 3 on the D6.

Steve's player rolls 7 on the D10 and 5 on the D8.

Sarah's action goes first, and Steve decides to pick up the D10 to defend. He rolls a 3 and gets hit. Sarah's impact rating is 19 because her highest roll is 9 and Steve's intensity maximum is 10 (the maximum of the passionate D10; it doesn't matter what he actually rolled with it). With that rating, Sarah can inflict anything up to a wound. The players negotiate and determine that Sarah takes the item and escapes out the window, with no impact caused (otherwise she'd have caused an impact but the possession of the item would be unresolved).

Sarah now rolls both dice to defend against Steve's standing 5. She meets it with a 5, so there's no impact.

Example 2: Social Conflict

At a social affair, Steve spreads implied rumors about Sarah's fidelity to her husband. He acts with invested intensity (D8) and Social Manipulator D8. Sarah in turn puts him on the spot about his opinion on the host's recent cosmetic surgery, talking calmly (D6) and with Smooth Talker D10.

Steve's player rolls 8 on the first D8 and 2 on the second D8.

Sarah's player rolls 3 on the D10 and 6 on the D6.

Steve goes first with his 8. Sarah's choice to defend is easy, because her higher-rated die rolled lower, so she rolls the D10 in defense. She only gets a 2, however. Steve's impact rating against her is 14 (8 from his highest roll plus 6 from her maximum intensity). He damages her Smooth Talker trait, knocking it down to a D8; people won't listen to her as easily now that they think she might be a cheater. She'll have to work on repairing her reputation (i.e., heal).

Sarah's 6 still stands. Steve can roll both D8s in defense because he's already acted. He rolls a 3 and a 4, failing to block. Sarah's impact rating is 14 (her high roll of 6 plus his intensity maximum of 8). She could damage a trait as well, but instead she decides to gain an advantage point against him. She's planning to hit him with something nasty later on, after accumulating advantages in subtle ways. So he comes out of the awkward moment okay, but Sarah now has found a little weak spot she can exploit later.

Example 3: Conflict with Many Characters

After much fighting back and forth, Sarah and Steve have grudgingly teamed up together against a bigger threat. And in this moment, they're being jumped in the street at night by Rick, Louise and Crystal, who are suburban cultists. Rick is driving a car toward Sarah while Louise and Crystal come at Steve from behind with kitchen knives. They're all fanatical (D12), but they're minor characters who only have D6 traits.

Sarah pulls her gun and shoots, passionately, at the incoming Rick: D10 for passionate, D8 for Don't Push Me. Steve tries to wrestle with Louise: D8 for invested (he cares about living), D8 for Bad Temper.

Results: Rick 3/3, Louise 9/3, Crystal 6/4, Sarah 6/5, Steve 8/3.

Louise is first. She attacks Steve with a 9. With his two D8, he can't possibly defend against her, so he lets them stand. Louise's impact rating against him is 17; her knife inflicts a nasty wound in his side.

Steve is up next. Louise gets to roll both her dice for defense because she's already acted. She fails to roll at least an 8, however, and Steve's impact rating against her is a whooping 20 (his roll of 8 plus her maximum intensity rating of 12). This would allow Steve to kill her outright; that's the risk she took for a fanatical attack. Steve's player and Louise's player decide that Steve wrestles the knife from her and uses her as a shield. Steve can hold the fatal impact until the end of the scene, so he can declare her killed at any time.

It's Sarah's turn (her second die is higher than Crystal's). She shoots at Rick with her 6. Rick, driving at her in his car, swerves out of the way; he uses both dice to defend, so he forfeits his action. Bad luck leads him to roll a 1 and a 4, however, so he gets hit. Sarah's impact rating is 18 (her roll of 6 plus his maximum intensity of 12). Her bullet tears through Rick's shoulder and inflicts a wound, lowering Rick's traits to D4s (next time his traits would become 0s and thereby unusable; not a good place to be in). Rick's player describes how he crashes the car into a brick fence post.

Crystal is faced with Steve holding Louise. Her roll is a 6, and Steve gets to roll both of his D8 to defend against her. Steve manages to fail his defense. Crystal's impact rating is 14 (her roll of 6 plus his maximum intensity of 8). She could damage one of his traits. Instead, she and Steve negotiate. Steve still holds his fatal impact on Louise, with which he has total control over her fate. He agrees to use the impact to inflict only a wound on Louise and have her be unconscious for the rest of the scene in exchange for Crystal not hurting him now. Steve pushes Louise against Crystal as she charges, causing Crystal to cut Louise instead of him. Louise sinks to her knees, looking wide-eyed at Crystal, before she passes out.

Rick can't act because he used both his dice for defense. So off we go into the next round!

Example 4: The Quickshot Hostage Rescue Maneuver

Later that scene, Rick, who crawled out of the wreck, caused the highest impact on Steve. He's holding him hostage now, gun to his head, like Steve was holding Louise earlier (and Crystal is out, in case you're wondering). Rick is threatening to kill Steve, and he's holding the fatal impact, so he could do it at any time. First round: Rick and Sarah roll. Sarah wins and achieves fatal impact on Rick. She pulls up the gun and aims straight for his eye. Rick and Sarah negotiate: both give up the fatal impact they're holding. Second round, a tenth of a second later: Rick's eyes widen, his arm moving to shoot her now. Sarah wins again, with fatal impact: Rick is blown away, Steve saved. Sarah took a big risk: if Rick had won the first round, he might have killed Steve and shot her, too.

Acknowledgements

This system is a complete and utter ripoff of four other games:

Intensity levels – *Dogs In The Vineyard* (escalation was the inspiration, even though it's different)

Core dice mechanic – *Agon* and *In A Wicked Age*

Initiative included in roll – *In A Wicked Age* and *Sorcerer*

Choose to defend more by trading attack dice for defense – *Sorcerer*

Negotiated outcome as alternative to damage – *In A Wicked Age*

Damage – *Dogs In The Vineyard* (fallout according to escalation/intensity level) and *In A Wicked Age*

Healing – *Agon* (opponents get bonus when you heal)

Thanks John, Ron, and Vincent!