

THE WILD WORDS ENGINE
Felix Isaacs

PART ONE SYSTEM LICENSING

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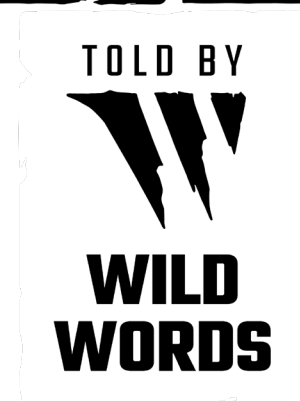
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PART TWO

INITIAL CHOICES AND CORE SYSTEMS

General Overview

The following pages detail the choices you should make before beginning to develop a Wild Words game. These core systems are essential to understand - even if you don't end up using them, multiple smaller elements of the game refer to or rely on these in order to function. And we'll say it here, but you'll find reminders dotted through the text as well: this is a rough guide, not a full instruction manual. Whatever you choose, even if you hew as closely to an existing game (like **The Wildsea**) as possible, you'll have some choices to make and some things you'll want to change.

This section covers...

- Setting, Genre, and Tone
- Core Concepts
- The Conversation
- Scenes
- Tracks
- Dice, Pools, and Rolls
- Actions
- Backgrounds
- Edges
- Skills
- Aspects
- Meters
- Impulses
- Resources
- Wealth
- Metacurrency
- Creation Methods
- Twists
- Damage (and Resistance)
- Impact
- Shared Assets
- Hazards

A Few Words on Setting Creation

You can use whatever setting, style, or genre you like for the Wild Words Engine, but I've found that setting creation works best when you have **Pillars**, **Details**, and **Not Much In Between**.

Pillars

These are the big ideas that are easy to grasp, and that hold the rest of the setting and the basics of the narrative up. Players should be able to latch onto and use them to understand the basics of a weird or unusual world very quickly. Three is probably a good minimum, seven or so a good maximum (especially if some of the pillars stand close to each other in terms of theme), and ideally they should be laid out as close to the start of a book as you can get them to act as a good foundation for later details (see page XX, Core Concepts).

Remember, there's no inherent depth to pillars. They might *imply* depth, but that comes later. They're big, bold, and even if they're kind of weird they should be easy enough to grasp.

Example: **The Wildsea** has seven pillars, ranging from 'the sea is made of trees' and 'plants grow fast and rampant' to 'open flames are forbidden' and 'the world is extremely weird, but not traditionally magical'.

Details

These are the tiny but intriguing bits that make up the rest of the setting, and should ideally be scattered throughout the book. They come in a hundred forms (well, not quite a hundred) - fictive inserts, setting-based writing, character building options, creatures, resource names... the list goes on. If it's specific but optional, it's a detail.

Why? Because no single player ever really needs to know more than the details that apply to their own character. If every player knows their own details due to character creation and having the character sheet in front of them, the action and story naturally rises out of a combination of those same details (plus the details of the other player characters and the specific details that the GM gives when crafting or guiding elements of the story).

Not Much In Between

Wild Words settings ideally have very little in the 'medium' range of ideas that's essential to play. In the case of **The Wildsea**, play might take place in a Reach - a more detailed and in-depth area of the sea complete with NPCs, places, and specific factions. But every reach is optional - if the players or GM don't want the Foxloft or the Kremich Surge in their world, those places simply aren't there.

Why? Because these are the bits that are hard to remember, and that have to be checked in the book by newer players or GMs. For some styles of play they can be really useful, but (in general, for narrative-led experiences) the medium-sized stuff that sits in between pillar and detail is created by the GM and players working together, through the conversation and narrative.

SETTING, GENRE, & TONE INITIAL CHOICE

The Basics

- Wild Words was created to power **The Wildsea**, a narrative-heavy game with a bit of crunch to it that rewards player creativity. The setting is weird fantasy, focusing on the unusual and rarely-explored, and the tone is one of bright horror – terrible things happen, but the crew of characters should always be able to triumph in some way.
- ... But your game *doesn't have to be anything like that*. Wild Words can (and has been used) to support different settings, tones, genres, and even methods of play.

You've Likely Made These Choices Already

And that's absolutely fine. Great, actually – the clearer your vision of what you want to design is, the easier this SRD will be to use.

And if you haven't made all of these choices yet, that's fine too – keep them in mind for the rest of this page, while I tell you why each of these fiction-based components is important for more than just set dressing and themes.

*While working on **The Wildsea**, tone changed dramatically due to early playtesting – and the rules change with it. The world stayed just as potentially harsh, but player characters were given more options and tools to deal with or mitigate that harshness.*

Deciding on Setting

Wild Words is made to be setting-first, and it's flexible enough that the setting doesn't have to be 'sea of trees'.

But on top of all the usual worldbuilding-style setting questions you'll be asking and answering as you create a game, you should keep the player-facing mechanics in mind. We recommend theming certain elements (especially the names of some systems and roles) to your world. Not too much! There's a reason skills are still called skills in **The Wildsea**, after all. But just enough that players can lose themselves a little in the uniqueness of what you're making.

***Iron on Stone**, a mech-based combat game, renames certain character elements to better fit its world. Aspects (which track damage and give special abilities) are referred to as Components, to fit with a tech-heavy setting.*

Deciding on Genre

Though setting might have a decent amount of impact on the way you present things, genre will likely have a larger one on the actual *mechanics* you choose (and how you might adapt them).

If you're making something that evokes hard-boiled private eye fiction, you'll want to choose scene types that reflect the activities core to that genre. Perhaps a unique scene for investigation, or for sifting through clues and making connections. Whatever rules the game runs on, the pace and mechanics used in those types of scene will probably be different from those used for a brawl in a back-alley when the mob catches up to the characters.

*In **The Sword Spiral**, which draws from classical knightly quests and dramatic character bonds, there are distinct scenes for combat that follow honourable rules. These scenes are similar to, but slightly mechanically different from, scenes that include combat against wild beasts or honourless bandits. They're also run on a very different set of mechanics than those that describe settling in for a night in the woods, huddling around the campfire or under tent-canvas to have attendants polish armour while characters drink, boast, pay compliments to each other, and deepen those PC on PC relations.*

Pace is particularly important here too. Some genres take a more measured and methodical approach to unfolding events, others want fluidity and momentum. Try to balance the archetypes of the genre you choose with the play experience at the table, and remember that emulating every feature of a particular genre isn't always the best idea. Not everything translates.

Deciding on Tone

Tone can impact a vast array of functions within Wild Words, everything from who shoulders narrative weight in particular situations to whether additional safety tools are needed.

Tone also impacts the writing style of a book or document, or at least it should. Weird fantasy, for example, tends to stray a little further from the more anthropological dryness of some high fantasy games, and games created to evoke or recall a particular era might (or arguably, should) thread the language and art styles of that era throughout.

Tone also has mechanical impact. If you want something laid-back and relaxing, do you need mechanics for death or serious injury? If you're going hell for leather with blood and guts, a specific system for stress or horror might be on the table.

***Streets by Moonlight** has a Lovecraftian hue to proceedings, where characters are doomed from the outset merely by interacting with the horrors and mysteries of the world. The tone is lurid when it comes to the trials they go through, detached when it comes to their deaths – for when an investigator falls (and they fall often), another can be ready to replace them by the beginning of the next scene.*

Adopting Existing Work

If you're hacking something that already exists into the Wild Words Engine, the majority of these decisions are already made for you. Emulate the tone of the source material, and adapt the rules to fit as you need to.

Striking Out Alone

And if you're doing something entirely of your own, I have a single piece of advice for you.

Don't be afraid to get weird with it.

CORE CONCEPTS INITIAL CHOICE

The Basics

- A set of three to ten written statements about your chosen setting, informed by your choices of genre and tone and relying heavily on your choice of pillars (page XX). Seven is a good number to aim for.
- This is one of the best ways to start off a setting-heavy book, and additionally an extremely useful tool for players in a rush to understand the world. You don't have to start a Wild Words game with a set of Core Concepts, but we heavily recommend it.

Big Truths Go Here

As they're drawn from your choice of pillars, Core Concepts tend to encompass the largest, most important truths about the setting. Boil each of them down into a single statement, and then use those as headings for a few additional sentences that help clarify and explain them. It's best to order these from most to least important – but even the least important ones of these are going to be pretty world-defining.

PICO has seven core concepts, presented at the very beginning of the first chapter. Number one on this list is 'Everyone Is Bugs', because it's absolutely core to the PICO experience.

How Big Is Big?

A core concept should do more than tell a potential player or GM about the world in an abstract form – it should help to inform them about *the game they're going to be playing*.

Imagine, for example, the world in your setting is secretly run by a cabal of elder gods. If they're just there in the background, as a bit of set-dressing or an element of the game that rarely comes up, they probably won't be mentioned as a core concept (at least, not on their own – they might be a part of a larger one, like 'There's Turht In The Divine' or 'Higher Realms Exist'). But if they are a main focus of the game, or if they transcend narrative fiction and enter into important mechanical territory, they should probably get a core concept of their own (such as 'The Gods Watch Over You').

One of the core concepts of Drift reads 'Districts Aren't Built; They Bloom'. This is an important narrative element, but also plays into methods of mapping and scouting used in play.

Grabbing Attention

The other thing a core concept should do is help inform a potential player about whether they're going to vibe with the general setting. Keep this in mind as you write a Core Concept, and the sentences of additional text accompanying it – each should highlight something about the world that might draw a reader in, or spark some curiosity in them that will keep them reading to find out more.

In The Wildsea, the very first Core Concept lays out the fundamental conceit of the setting and provides some potential hooks at the same time. It's written like so...

The Treetops are a Sea

*Though made up of branches and leaves rather than water, the treetops still act as a traditional sea in many ways; there are **waves** (formed by the natural contours of the canopy), **ports** (built onto what little solid ground remains), and a vast number of **ships** (their hulls supported by branches). While it's possible to move through the canopy without a vessel of some kind, to do so for any length of time is a huge risk.*

... With the statement giving fundamental information, and the additional sentences providing some attention-grabbing details in bold while reinforcing the unusual nautical and natural themes that run through the entire setting.

THE CONVERSATION CORE SYSTEM

The Basics

- The conversation describes and encapsulates the dynamic at play at the actual gaming table (or medium of your choice). When and how players talk to each other to get things done, and what elements of the game, rules, and world they control.
- It's a natural part of playing a TRPG that all but the newest players will be familiar with, but there are still a few conventions that the Wild Words engine follows in this regard.
- At its core, think of the conversation as the action of playing the game itself - a verbal exchange that drives a narrative forward.

What Is The Conversation For?

Telling stories! But also bringing the narrative to places where it interacts with the rules.

There's nothing wrong with collaborative storytelling, but the Wild Words Engine has rules for a reason - they help to direct play, to solve problems, to offer opportunities, and to define limits. The conversation is what brings those rules into play, and helps reinforce them during a game.

*As an example, most scenes in **Drift** are narratively quite free. Players have their characters explore the world, interact with NPCs, and generally move the story of the game along at their own pace. But when one of them wants to have their character do something difficult, dramatic, or dangerous, the rules need to come into play. The rules are introduced to the fiction, and the conversation containing them continues.*

Flags

A flag is the idea of a player signalling that they want something in particular to happen, which can help the GM and the other players adapt both the conversation and the general narrative of the game to fulfil those wants. If someone describes how their finger is on the trigger, and they're ready for anything, they probably don't want a leisurely stroll through the park. If your game is *all about* leisurely strolls through the park, they're likely going to be disappointed.

Make the kind of experience your game offers as clear as possible - through art, through text, through GM advice and resources, and particularly through character options. It makes flags easier to read and react to in play.

Control

This can be a tricky thing at times, but it's absolutely essential for smooth play - as a designer, you need to know which elements of the game are controlled by which people at the table. Narrative control is usually weighted toward a GM figure, and moment-to-moment decisions toward players with characters, but this doesn't necessarily need to be the case.

*For example, many systems have a GM in control of almost every aspect of the narrative that isn't touched on by direct character actions. **The Wildsea** doesn't do this - it specifically includes systems that spread some narrative agency around the table in terms of establishing fictions and truths about the setting, and sometimes even an immediate locale.*

It's also useful to work out if there are any mechanical elements of a game that might be treated in an unexpectedly narrative-first fashion, or vice-versa. All but the newest players come to the table with a lot of preconceptions, and knowing how your rules will appear (and how easily they might be followed) by particular styles of player can have an impact on the raw playability of your game.

*Though damage and injury in **The Wildsea** are handled mechanically, character death is an explicitly narrative event that's completely under the control of a character's player. If it's not the right time for a character to die, they don't - as far as the Wildsea is concerned, moments with such gravity should always be in service of the story, not potentially in spite of it. Damage and decisions still have consequences, sometimes terrible ones, but none that signal the end of a character without the player's permission.*

Focus

The 'narrative spotlight' of the conversation, focus passes from player to player as they interact with the world. It can also be held by the GM when they're describing things, playing NPCs or enforcing rules (or just joining in with the general chatter at the table - the GM is as much of a player as anyone else, just with a different set of resources!).

Focus moves naturally from player to player, but a GM can direct it at a particular individual if they need to. Similarly, as a designer you can direct and control focus by writing rules that rely on it. The most common of these would be a fixed initiative system, perhaps determined by a stat or roll, for a given scene - if characters act in a particular order, focus moves in that order as they speak.

That said, Wild Words treats focus as an inherently fluid thing. If a GM needs a way to 'balance' time in the spotlight, especially for high-stakes situations like combat or chase scenes, there's the option to use a Focus Tracker (a subsystem that combines the core systems of focus and tracks, described later in this document).

Hijacking Focus

You might also write abilities that allow focus to be 'hijacked' - taken away from another player or element of the world if a specific condition is met. Unless you're intending on making a very adversarial game, we recommend...

- Players having focus hijacked from them by another player have to agree to it
- The focus always returns to whatever it was hijacked from when the hijacking is finished

SCENES CORE SYSTEM

The Basics

- Scenes divide play into recognisable chunks, like the scenes of a movie, play, or an episode of a TV show.
- A game can have different types of scenes, which might encompass different periods of time, require different kinds of actions or decisions from players/GM, or run on different rules and mechanics.
- Scenes can help to establish a loop of activities for a game, or merely serve as breaks between bits of action or story.

Do I Need Different Types of Scene?

When creating a Wild Words game, one of the first things you need to consider is what kind of activities the game focuses on. The more important an activity is, the more likely it will have unique mechanics that govern it. The more unique mechanics that apply, the more likely it is that players will find the action and rules easier to follow if those rules are limited to a particular type of scene.

*Using Wild Words to create **Streets By Moonlight**, a game of cthulhuesque cult investigation and growing madness, will likely focus on those elements of play above all others. It has a specific type of scene dedicated to gathering and processing clues, another to represent a raid or the exploration of a significant location, and another for dealing with the growing challenges to the sanity and stability of the characters in the wake of their experiences.*

The Wildsea is a game of exploration and survival on an endless treetop sea. As well as general scenes that handle most of play, the game defines two additional types of scene; Montages, that handle larger complex actions and periods of downtime with a single roll or stated intention, and Journeys, which focus more on the ship that the characters share, using it to travel the rustling waves in a far more structured way than a normal scene would allow.

You might have a particular scene and set of rules, conventions or unique mechanics to govern...

- Combat and times of high tension
- Periods of downtime, study, or exploration
- Sections of in-character worldbuilding
- Time spent travelling from place to place
- Moments of relaxation and healing
- Time spent building up a base, hide-out, or home

Establishing a Loop

When using different types of scene, you may want to aim to create a loop – a set structure that the game follows, something to mold the story and action of play around. You might choose...

A Core Loop

This sets scenes as happening in a specific order, so players always know what's coming next. Core loops hold structure first and narrative second – the story is still important, but it will follow a particular set of repeating beats.

Streets By Moonlight follows a core loop – characters have time to prepare and investigate, then to confront whatever they've discovered, then to recover from the confrontation's aftermath. Once sufficiently recovered (or perhaps before), a new investigation begins.

A Fluid Loop

With this method specific types of scene will reoccur, but in an order that is dictated by the narrative. This puts the story and the decisions of the players and GM at the forefront of an experience, but might be more difficult to balance mechanically (as certain characters may be better suited to a particular type of scene, but the story could lead play away from those scenes occurring often).

The Wildsea follows a fluid loop – basic scenes, montages, and journeys happen whenever they feel most appropriate, allowing variable length and frequency of different modes of play. A session may be a series of linked basic scenes, with no special mechanics, or it might be a single long journey, or anything in between.

Why Use Scenes?

Humans tend to split things into digestible chunks by nature, especially narrative. Shows have episodes and switch focus from one group of characters to another, books have chapters and differing viewpoints. Scenes in Wild Words simply codify the way a lot of people already play, allowing for groups of complementary mechanics and easy key phrase usage.

Complementary Mechanics

One of the easiest ways to define a scene is by restricting or delineating the kinds of mechanics used within it. This allows you to use mechanics to change the flow of a game and the focus of a table.

*A montage in **The Wildsea** is a particular type of scene that runs very differently from usual play. Instead of taking actions in any order, as the narrative dictates, each character has the opportunity to undertake a single Task – a larger, more complex action that's boiled down to a single description or dice roll. Once every character has taken a task, the montage ends and the next scene begins (usually based in some way on what was accomplished during the montage).*

If you do use scene-specific mechanics, we recommend keeping them in the same ballpark as the rest of the game in terms of how they work. If every other roll in the game treats high results as better, for example, don't have high results mean something bad in one particular type of scene.

Key Phrases

When thinking of abilities and rules, the various types of scene in your game can act as keywords for easier understanding and for setting durations. An ability might say, for example...

- ... Until end of scene.
- For the duration of a scene...
- During a _____ scene, you can...

TRACKS CORE SYSTEM

The Basics

- A **track** is a named string of boxes or circles that are filled, or 'marked', to measure progress towards an event, accomplishment, or danger.
- They're one of most fundamental and flexible tools you can use when designing a Wild Words game.
- Impact (page XX) relates to how many boxes are marked at a time, especially when character actions are involved.

What Are Tracks For?

Anything iterative that either the players or GM need to keep track of.

Tracks are an excellent visual reminder of change or opportunity. When creating a Wild Words game, think about what elements of the game you want tracks to be integral for, and also which situations you'd suggest a GM uses them in.

Some common elements for an integrally used track are...

- The uses or resilience of **aspects** (page XX)
- The attributes or benefits of a **shared asset** (page XX)
- The time until an **impulse** takes effect (page XX)
- The health or potency of a **hazard** (page XX)
- The health, stamina, stress, or magic of a character (Core Wild Words assumes these are handled by the tracks on aspects, but individual tracks can handle these elements if you're aiming for a more traditional TRPG experience)

Tracks are also an excellent GM tool. Consider advising GMs to use tracks to aid in keeping track of certain elements of the world, which might be marked by...

- A character's actions
- The passage of time
- The results of a die roll
- A decision made
- The use of a resource
- Events in the wider world
- An advancing story or plotline

Marking a Track

Marking a track is as simple as putting a line through one of the boxes. It usually represents the idea that *something* has happened, and that whatever it was is leading up to a *bigger* something. The bigger something will usually be prompted by the final box on the track being marked.

Here's an example of an empty track...

Taming the Megashrew ○○○○

A partially filled track...

Taming the Megashrew ○○○○

And a fully marked track.

Taming the Megashrew ⊗○○○

In the above examples, a party is trying to tame a savage megashrew. No matter what method they use, a success of some kind marks a box on the track. When the track is empty the megashrew is completely wild, when it's partially marked it may regard them with wariness, and when it's fully marked the beast has come to trust them.

Burning a Track

If you want the game or GM to be able to mark a track permanently, or at least with something *extremely* hard to remove, the option to burn a box on a track is there too. This is shown with a cross through the box rather than a slash, and represents a change that's almost impossible to undo (or that would take significant effort or serious narrative attention).

Here's a partially burned track.

Taming the Megashrew ⊗○○○

Clearing a Track

Marks on a track are temporary – they can usually be removed in some way (by healing if a track represents damage, for example, or by passing time if a track represents something that needs constant upkeep). To clear a mark on a track, simply erase the line that goes through the rightmost box.

For some tracks, like those on a character sheet, this removal of marks is often as important as how they're made. For other tracks (like one leading up to the start of a local festival) you might simply remove the entire track once it's fully marked, and not worry about how a single mark might be cleared.

As an example, once the megashrew is tamed your rules might offer the GM an option – is the track removed, and the beast remains tamed for the foreseeable future, or is the track kept despite being fully marked, representing the possibility of the creature returning to a wilder state as passing time or specific actions clear some of those marks? In the second example, giving the players the ability to burn a box on the megashrew's track would ensure it would likely never return to a completely savage state, even if marks started getting cleared.

As a good rule of thumb, clearing a mark from a track should be a *little* more difficult or time-consuming than making one. For example, if a character uses an action to mark a track, removing that mark might take an action plus a resource of some kind. Basically, reversing a change should usually be a little harder than making it (though this is, of course, situational).

While clearing a *mark* should be relatively easy, clearing a *burn* should be something as memorable as the burn itself, and should usually take a significant amount of additional effort. This might come in the form of...

- A small quest or specific activity aside from the main narrative
- The use of a particularly rare or limited resource
- An effort from every character working together
- An achievement that means something to the character

Track Length

If tracks are intended to be marked one or two boxes at a time, the following rough guide should help.

1-2 boxes: Likely to be filled by a single action roll or event in the world. Not meant to hang around for long.

3-5 boxes: Will need multiple things happening, usually, to end up fully marked. Good for elements of a character, such as aspects.

6+ boxes: Will usually define something for a good amount of time, and take multiple interactions to fill.

If multiple boxes on a track can be marked at once, especially if that track represents an obstacle players are trying to bypass or a threat from the world that needs to feel hefty, **double or triple these values**. This gives you a track that can withstand multiple instances of increased **impact** (page xx), and that might be suitable for **track breaks**.

Open, Hidden, or Secret?

As a designer you'll need to decide how much information players know about the tracks that are in play.

An **open** track can be seen by anyone at the table, and are most often found on character sheets and scribbled down on pieces of paper to track world events that the players have a good amount of knowledge about.

A **hidden** track can only be seen by one person, usually the GM. These are most often used for things like the health of an NPC or the resilience of a hazard, where the effect the characters are having need to be recorded but you don't want them to know how close they are to a 'win' to avoid spoiling the surprise.

A **secret** track can usually only be seen by the GM, and the players don't know it exists.

In Streets By Moonlight, the big bad of a campaign grows in power as the investigators try to discover and stop it. This growth is known to the players, but how much time they have left is hidden... until they're close to the end.

Track Breaks

Track breaks allow you as a designer (or the GM) to create tracks representing multiple states of a situation, or to combine what would have been several small tracks into one longer track. For example, the tracks...

The Rumbling Begins



Surviving the Earthquake



Might be combined into a single track...

The Earth Is Moving



When there are no marks on the track, the situation is calm. When the track is first marked, the early warning signs of an earthquake appear. The players will have time to react to these before the second mark is made, upon which time the track break is reached and the earthquake truly begins. The third, fourth, and fifth marks cover the duration of the earthquake, with the event ending after the fifth mark is made.

Track breaks save space and offer options, both in terms of tracking narrative and in terms of creating a more complex mechanical base for your game.

Gauges

A special kind of track that has an associated level, gauges are useful in situations where a track filling will have ongoing, but not permanent, effects. A gauge might look something like this...

Stress 

In this example, the stress gauge has no boxes filled and stress is sitting at level 1. If all of the boxes are filled, the stress level might increase to 2 - perhaps a character now has a mechanical penalty due to their growing stress, which remains until they can decrease that stress level to 1 (or even zero). Boxes are then cleared so the track can be filled again.

In Drift, the Paradox Gauge tracks how much a character has been affected by the weirdness of the city. Every time the paradox gauge goes up a level, they take a special kind of injury that can only be healed through a particular in-universe event.

Ratings

A way to tie tracks into a game's dice system, a rating is a track that allows a specific number of dice to be rolled depending on the amount of boxes it has and whether those boxes are filled or not.

Here's an example...

Speed 

If a character wanted to roll something related to speed using this rating, they'd usually roll 3d6 (dice equal to the number of boxes on the track). However, in the above example one of the boxes is marked - because of this, the character would roll 2d6 instead (dice equal to the number of unmarked boxes).

Ratings allow you to vary dice rolls depending on how a track interacts with a situation. You might even have it so that a certain part of the rules allows a player to roll dice equal to how many marks there are on a track instead. Be careful with ratings - anything above a six-track has the capacity to allow players to roll a dice pool that will always result in doubles.

In The Wildsea, a crew's ship has six ratings. They start with one box on each track, and the way a ship is constructed allows them to gain five additional boxes. Ratings rolls allow a player to roll dice equal to the unmarked boxes on a rating, to determine how well the ship performs in a certain situation related to that rating.

In Streets By Moonlight, a character has a rating to track their Insight - the level of understanding they have when it comes to the occult forces that secretly run their city. Marks on this track represent their deepening knowledge, but filling the track also represents their dwindling sanity. An Insight roll allows them to roll dice equal to the number of marks on an insight track, turning their horrifying realizations into a useful source of information.

DICE, POOLS, & ROLLS CORE SYSTEM

The Basics

- Wild Words runs on a dice pool system, where multiple elements contribute dice to a pool, which is then rolled for a set of results. The highest result is (usually) the final outcome of a roll, though other results may also play a part.
- Core Wild Words assumes a dice pool of d6s, with a maximum number of six dice (thus ensuring that doubles are never a complete certainty).
- Dice only come into the game as a response to uncertainty or drama – there's a rule of three Ds that you might find it useful to stick to in the text below.

What Are Dice For?

Bringing an element of randomness to proceedings.

When the outcome of an action or event is uncertain, it's time to roll some dice. There are other situations you might choose as a designer for dice to come into play, of course, but this is the easiest guideline.

This can be clarified further with a reference to the three Ds, three situations in which players will likely want to be rolling dice.

- When a situation is **Dangerous**, so they can partake in the thrill of uncertainty.
- When a situation is **Difficult**, so they can show off how they've made their character to tackle such difficulties.
- And when a situation is **Dramatic**, so there's an element of added tension.

The Wildsea calls out these three Ds directly in the text within the book as a good guidelines for GMs as to when they should be asking for rolls.

Laura thinks that her character, Hayk, has had quite enough of the mystic that's trying to oversell them on his services. She tells the group that Hayk strides forward, grabs the mystic by the collar of his shirt, and demands a fair price. This action depends on how intimidating Hayk can be, and the Mystic's resistance to being strong-armed, so the GM calls for a roll.

There's a fourth situation where dice can be particularly useful as well, though – when a character's edges, skills, and aspects have absolutely nothing to do with the result of an action or situation. This is when Fortune dice come into play, rolls based on pure luck.

Who Rolls?

Core Wilds Words assumes that players will be rolling more often than the GM, but this doesn't have to be the case. Asymmetric play benefits a game in play by keeping speed higher (usually by treating hazards and the environment differently to characters in terms of agency and roll frequency), but it isn't the only way.

Other Rolls

There are many other situations where dice might be rolled. There's no way we could list them all here, but as a taste you might want to involve dice...

- In damage-based rolls, for when you want unexpected amounts of damage to be dealt.
- In rolls for the potential harm or reward of a situation, such as when determining how much treasure lies within a chest or how many poison darts are shot from a wall.
- In situations where players or GM can use a random table to determine what happens, from a pre-made list of some kind.

In The Wildsea: Tooth & Nail, the kind of weather a settlement experiences can be decided narratively by the GM and players or with a roll on the Weather table, a d66 table where two dice are rolled and the results are read as a number between 11 and 66 (corresponding to an entry on the table).

In Rise, GMs roll for the danger and effectiveness of roving barbarians if one of the nation-states at the table moves into new territory. Outside of that situation, GMs rarely roll dice, but may affect the dice pools of players at the table.

Choosing Your Dice

When designing the mechanical side of your game, dice are usually an important component. You might want to go diceless, which Wild Words can definitely *support*, but without direct experience of it myself I wouldn't be able to give much advice on how to do it effectively.

So assuming that you're using dice, you're going to need to decide on the size of them. D6s are a classic for a reason – easy to find and easy to understand – but they're not your only option.

When choosing dice, consider whether results, doubles, and an odd/even split are going to be important. There's a lot you can do with dice, so instead of telling you exactly what you *should* do, I'll show you a few things I've done myself...

Core D6

The 'Wild Words standard' that powers **The Wildsea**, dice pools are made of between 1 and 6 D6s. The highest result of a roll is most important, as are doubles. Odd/even results don't matter, and triples give no benefit over doubles. Results are split into three distinct bands – 6s give a triumph, 5s and 4s give a conflict, and 3s, 2s, and 1s give a disaster.

Quarter Eights

Made for **Streets By Moonlight**, dice pools are made of between 1 and 4 D8s. The highest result of a roll is most important, and the lowest sometimes comes into play too. Doubles and triples add a level of safety that would otherwise be absent for actions. Results are split into three distinct bands, with 7-8 as a triumph, 3-6 as a conflict, and 1-2 as a disaster.

Clash

Made for **Iron on Stone**, dice pools are made of any number of d6s. Highest and lowest results don't matter, but evens and odds do (with evens representing a mech's output and odds a pilot's acuity). The number of evens and odds that can be contributed changes the actions that can be taken. Results are split into two bands – anything above a 3 is a useful result, anything a 2 or below is useless.

Words Before Rolls

Wild Words is designed for fiction-first gaming, and one of the core tenets of this is that the story (and player agency in that story) is paramount. Most dice mechanics assume that a player decides on what they're going to do, and then the dice come into play to tell them how it goes (or an element of the world does something, and the GM or players use dice to determine the ultimate effect of it).

You can turn this on its head if you do it carefully, as in the Iron on Stone example in the previous column, but I can't fully recommend it.

For Iron on Stone, non-combat scenes are fiction-first but combat is far more mechanical, with a turn order deciding who acts in what sequence, and the result of rolls offering a suite of potential actions to mech pilots.

Pool Sizes & Dice Draws

Once you've decided on the size of your dice, you need to set an upper limit on the pools that players (and maybe the GM) will be rolling. Remember, any pool larger than the highest die outcome will necessarily result in doubles. And if doubles are important, the smaller the pool (and the larger the dice), the less likely they are.

You also need to work out where dice are being drawn from in different situations. If the dice are rolled by a player they're probably coming from their character elements, most likely edges, skills, aspects, and resources (pages xx to xx). If the dice are being rolled by the GM, or by a player in a way that's unconnected to their character, you as a designer need to work out how everyone at the table can put together a dice pool quickly and without breaking the flow of play.

Oracle only allows players to roll two dice at a time, but their size can vary depending on the type of action they're taking information drawn from the character sheet). Doubles in Oracle are bad, and high results are good – the larger the dice players roll, the more likely they are to get a high number and the less likely they are to roll doubles. Difficulty in Oracle comes from the GM adding dice to player rolls to break that cap of two, increasing the chance of duplicate results, but there are limited situations in which the GM can pull this off to keep play speed high.

Results Bands

The outcome of a dice roll is usually determined by the results band it falls into. Here's an example of a results table that shows off various bands (for ease of reference this table is drawn from **The Wildsea**, which uses the **Core D6** presentation on the left.

Action Roll Results	
6	Triumph A complete success with no drawbacks. If you're affecting a track, this lets you mark or clear a box.
5	Conflict Still a success, but with a drawback of some kind (such as taking damage or losing a resource). If you're affecting a track, this usually still lets you mark or clear a box.
4	Disaster A failure that also introduces a narrative complication or drawback of some kind. If you're affecting a track, this usually doesn't let you mark or clear at all.
3	Twist An unexpected outcome in addition to the usual result, often something small but potentially useful. This twist can be suggested by any player at the table, but the Firefly has the final say.
2	
1	
Doubles	

The results bands above are weighted toward bad outcomes (with everything from a 1 to a 5 representing some sort of penalty), with only 6 being a perfect result, but wildsea players tend to be rolling at least 3 or 4 dice as standard. There's also an extra band given for doubles, which the Wildsea uses to bring in narrative-focused twist rules (page xx).

This brings up the most important point where results bands are concerned – players will likely be rolling multiple dice. Even if it looks harsh on paper, it might well be forgiving at the table. Playtest your dice systems!

PENALTY Vs CUT

With a dice pool system linked to non-flexible bands of results, the 'target number' staple of many dice rolling systems is out (though you could engineer it back in if you feel like it). Instead, more difficult challenges in Wild Words are more easily represented by Penalty or Cut.

Penalty

This allows difficult situations or poor choices to remove dice from a pool before they're rolled.

Cut

This allows difficult situations or poor choices to remove results from a pool after the dice have been rolled (usually starting with the highest).

The Math vs The Feel

- Penalties are easier to math out for players and GM at the table, but they ultimately result in fewer dice being rolled. And people tend to really enjoy rolling dice.
- Cut is a little more dramatic, a little more cruel. It lets players roll the same number of dice, but by targeting high results after a roll it removes the chance of high-band successes and tends to bring outcomes further down the table. It's a bit gritty, but it's also dramatic – a player knows they were *this close* to an excellent result, and can bring that into their description of what goes wrong.

Both systems can work here as an indicator of difficulty, but Core Wild Words leans toward the drama inherent in Cut (even if the maths is a little wonkier).

Removed Dice / Results

When using Penalty or Cut the dice or results removed are usually just discounted, lost to the aether – but they don't have to be. Consider adding a new dimension to dice pools by using these discarded dice or results for something new.

In The Wildsea: Storm & Root, characters cut more results when under Scrutiny (the gaze of certain terrifying entities). The results they cut feed directly into the Scrutiny system, allowing the GM to take particularly damaging actions based on whether the cut results were triumphs, conflicts, or disasters.

ACTIONS CORE SYSTEM

The Basics

- In its simplest form, an action is anything that a player has their character do within the game.
- Some actions that are difficult, dangerous, or dramatic in nature (as described on the previous page) should likely intersect with the rules in terms of dice.
- Core Wild Words assumes that most actions are freeform in nature - they're decided on and described before the rules come into play.

What Are Actions?

Anything a character does during a game.

... Well, probably.

For most Wild Words games, anything a character does within a scene is an action. They're assumed to work out if they suit the world and story, unless the outcome or performance of that action runs into the territory of the three Ds, in which case dice are usually involved.

Harley has her character walk across the room and leaf through a book, looking for the date it was published. This is an action that doesn't require a roll - the information is there in the book, and it won't be that hard to find. In terms of the narrative, it can be assumed that Harley's character will find this information without too much trouble.

The example above describes an action that doesn't need to involve the dice. But, if the circumstances were a little different...

Harley needs her character to find the date a particular book was published, and she's only got moments to spare before dire consequences ensue. She describes how her character leafs frantically through the pages - she knows the information is in there, but where? The GM asks for a roll based on her character's skills.

Though the action in this second example was pretty much the same, the simple act of finding information is made dramatic by the looming consequences and time-critical nature of the scene.

When writing your rules, make this distinction clear. It helps both players and GMs settle into a good rhythm.

Flexible Actions (Fiction-First)

Wild Words is a fiction-first system at its heart, meaning that it prioritizes story and creativity over mechanics. Even in mechanics-heavy games, the narrative and the choices of those around the table should be dictating when the rules come into play.

This is most easily demonstrated with a flexible action system. A character describes what they're trying to do, and then either they or the GM decide whether that needs to involve the dice and the elements of their character.

Sometimes a player will describe what they want to do based on something their character has access to, and that's absolutely fine. But they should never feel limited to choosing actions specifically because their character is good at something - edges, skills, aspects, resources, all of these should be more weighted toward offering options rather than imposing mandatory moves and choices.

*In **The Wildsea** a specific skill, wavewalk, determines how good a character is at moving through the leafy waves on their own, without the aid of a ship. The action of wavewalking isn't closed off to characters that lack ranks in this skill, they're just a lot more likely to take damage or run into narrative trouble while doing so (due to their inherently lower die results, and wavewalking being the kind of dangerous activity that will almost always require a roll).*

"HOW MUCH CAN I DO?"

One of the most frequently-asked questions when it comes to actions is how many things a character can do with one of them, or what they might encompass, or how many in-game seconds they represent.

Chuck all of that out of a window for Wild Words, we've got a single critical rule.

An action is long enough to give a player time to make their character shine.

What does this mean? In essence, that every action should be a character doing something interesting, or even just cool or tone-setting. Walking across the room to read a book isn't two actions, it's one - the act of walking isn't particularly cool. *Striding* across a room with a flourish of your cape might be an action on its own, because it shows off something about that character - but that's up to the player.

Forced Actions (Mechanics-First)

The partial exception to the flexible action standard is where impulses are concerned (pg XX). These are specifically designed to encourage (or in some cases require) certain reactions or behaviours from characters, either narratively or mechanically. But even in these situations, the action suggested by an impulse should ultimately be flexible.

*In **Streets By Moonlight**, characters are compelled to interact with certain dangerous occult objects and individuals by their impulses. There isn't a roll to resist this, but instead to determine how well they weather such encounters - they are required, narratively, to engage, but it's up to them to colour the action and describe how this actually comes about.*

You might have more mechanics-first moments in your game, but try not to rely on them too heavily. They can be great for structuring certain scenes, but they are inherently restrictive.

Adding Action Types

Though actions are a useful catch-all for 'characters doing something', you might want to add a little more structure to proceedings by classifying some types of action as narratively or mechanically different to others. Here are a few pre-made examples of differently-typed actions that you might find helpful when designing the moment-to-moment gameplay of a Wild Words game.

Reactions

A specific type of action that's called for by the GM in response to a character becoming the target of damage or an effect from the world.

Reactions are still quite fluid - a character should be able to decide how they react rather than be forced into a particular specific action - but they're good at representing immediacy and urgency.

*In **The Wildsea**, when a hazard attacks one of the characters the GM doesn't roll. Instead, the GM describes what's happening and asks the player to roll a reaction, stating how they mitigate or escape the incoming attack. A player might have their character dodge, block, or use the environment in a clever way, but if they choose not to react they just get hit with the full potential force of whatever is coming their way.*

Tasks

Sometimes a time-scale is important. Tasks are longer actions, covering larger periods of time than an average action and allowing characters to accomplish more complex, multi-stage procedures (likely still with a single roll, if a roll is required at all).

Tasks are usually best kept to their own type of scene that allows only tasks to be performed, such as a montage, but this doesn't technically have to be the case.

*In **Drift**, characters that want to explore a station in between journeys will usually do so by using a task. A single player might be able to have their character wander around, find a shop, and purchase something all with a single roll.*

Sometimes an accomplishment, like building a house, might take multiple separate tasks to complete. This is usually known as a **project**, and likely has a track of its own that needs filling before completion.

Decisions

Shorter than a usual action, and far more restrictive, these usually take the form of the GM (or an element of the world) demanding a choice between A or B. A decision might happen at the speed of thought, or need some physical action from a character to be effective.

Decisions are perfect for scenes with stricter rules or a ritualized format to follow.

*In **The Wildsea**, part of a journey is working out which character takes the helm and which goes on watch. These are simple decisions that the players have to make - even if, narratively, the entire crew is gathered around the helm poring over maps and controls, there's still a single player whose character is 'at the helm', and who decides the speed a ship is travelling.*

Flashbacks

Useful if you want layers to be able to plunge into situations with the minimum of downtime, but you also want the characters to benefit in-universe from the idea of planning.

A flashback action involves a player describing something that their character did in the past that sets up a useful event or moment in the present narrative. Depending on the type of game you're creating flashbacks might not be a thing at all, or they might be freely available to use, or perhaps even tied to the spending of a metacurrency of some sort (page XX).

*In **Rise**, a metacurrency (moments) can be spent during combat between nation states to establish that the populace belonging to one player had worked on or achieved something that's secret to the other players, with the action skinned as this project being revealed at just the right time.*

Actions and Focus

As previously mentioned, when a character has the spotlight they should be able to do something cool.

But how often do they get to do those cool things?

Usually the balance of who gets the spotlight will sort itself out naturally at the table - some scenes might put certain characters at the fore, others a different set. That's the nature of stories. But in a tense action-based scene such as a fight or chase, GMs won't want to leave players out.

To aid them with this, you can use the idea of a focus tracker - an optional system that records which characters have acted, and how many times they've had the spotlight (if you're using actions and reactions, one action is roughly equal to two reactions due to the amount of player agency involved). Here's an example...

- **Garth:** AARA
- **Cho:** RRAAR

The A on these tracks stands for action, the R for reaction. Garth hasn't had as much time in the spotlight as Cho, but has had more agency - more self-determined actions. A GM seeing this might give Garth a reaction next, or Cho an action. This is something for a GM to worry about, but you as a designer to potentially suggest.

CHARACTER ELEMENTS

There are multiple elements that make up an average Wild Words character, most made from combinations and interplays of the previous core systems described within this document. Whether you use all of these for your own game is entirely your choice – the following categories can be chopped, changed, or even left out entirely if they don't fit the kind of game you're going for – but including something close to the following presentation gives a solid base.

What Are Character Elements?

The narrative and mechanical pieces that come together to make a playable Wild Words character, usually presented for players in the form of a character sheet for ease of use during play.

The average Wild Words character is made from the following components...

- **Backgrounds**, to describe who and what a character is within the setting or world
- **Edges**, to describe broad areas of competency that help start action rolls
- **Skills**, which give more focused competencies and act as the middle contributor action rolls
- **Aspects**, which contain special rules, act as health, and work like permanent resources in terms of adding dice to action rolls
- **Meters**, which track a build-up of something setting-related that may have ramifications
- **Impulses**, which set narrative goals and drawbacks for a character that definitely affect the roleplay, and may play into the game mechanics
- **Resources**, which are a fluid system of named, temporary equipment, useful for barter, creation, and enabling certain actions
- **Wealth**, which tracks how a character can gain or spend some kind of income
- **Metacurrency**, a player-facing resource that impacts the setting mechanically
- And a **Creation Method**, an additional page that helps you decide on the way you want players to actually make their character using all of the aforementioned elements

We'll tackle these one by one, and give examples of how they might appear in different games or genres. Most of these sections refer to certain core rules, so make sure you've read those first.

Other Considerations

Those may be the main bits of a character, but there are a couple of other things you might want to consider as well. We've listed them on this page, along with a little guidance on how you might want to interact with them.

NAMES

A character's name distinguishes them from the player that's controlling them. Names can usually be anything, unless you're going for a particular feel for the world or setting – if this is the case, advice for names (along with examples) can often help players as they make their choices.

*In **The Wildsea**, characters can be called just about anything. However, there are sample names listed for the various languages that a character might speak in the book's appendix, giving aid to players that want a solid, appropriate, in-universe name.*

***Streets By Moonlight** is set in some version of the real world, and expects characters to have 'realistic' names. However, it also makes it clear that nicknames are entirely acceptable, especially for underworld types.*

SET-UP QUESTIONS

A quick way of having a player think about the history of their character is to sprinkle a few questions into some of the options presented. These questions might be for a player to muse over alone, or to share with the group in order to build some kind of shared backstory.

***The Wildsea** does this in two ways – with questions in each background about a character's history, and with a round of 'Unsetting Questions' at the start of a session that helps players get into the same creative space as they discuss rumours and possibilities connected to elements of the world.*

BONDS

Characters might have bonds with each other, or with important NPCs or factions within the setting. A character might even be bonded to a particular element of the world, such as a religion or a place.

If you want to include bonds in a Wild Words game, we recommend that they're narrative first, mechanical second. They might strengthen other attributes of a character in certain situations, or give permissions to take certain types of action that would otherwise be unavailable, but the roleplay benefit of them should shine more than anything.

*In **The Sword Spiral**, characters are bonded to each other in various ways, both positive and negative – they might be siblings, rivals, or even lovers. Roleplaying these bonds allows for a mechanical boost toward healing and recovery during downtime.*

*In **Drift**, the impulse system revolves around the Bonds characters have with other NPCs and elements of the setting. Characters can call on these bonds to establish connections in unfamiliar places.*

*In **Streets By Moonlight**, the death of one character leads directly to the creation of the next – a new investigator steps into the shoes of their dead friend or colleague. This mechanic, the Call, sets up a series of Bonds from character to character created by the same player, strengthening each character in a lineage.*

BACKGROUNDS CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Backgrounds are both a character element and a book organizational tool – distinct sets of aspects and other elements, or suggestions for them, based around a particular theme (such as a character's job).
- Backgrounds have a narrative element, in that they help tell a player who and what their character is.
- Wild Words assumes characters will have multiple background choices mixed together into a single background.

Compartmentalization

A character's background describes who they are, in broad strokes, but it has a mechanical purpose too. Backgrounds in Wild Words are used to compartmentalize special abilities and suggested skills, splitting all of the cool things you can have a character learn to do into more manageable chunks than pages and pages of lists would achieve.

The Wildsea has three different types of background, Bloodline, Origin, and Post. Each of these work the same way – they contain suggestions of edges, skills, languages, resources, drives, and mires, along with a list of aspects that relate to that background – but describes a different part of the character's life. It's the combination of one bloodline, one origin, and one post that makes a traditional Wildsea character.

Hard Limits or Suggestions?

Backgrounds are mostly used during character creation, as a way of narrowing down the choices a player has to make. But how narrow do you want these choices?

- **Hard Limits** force a player to choose only from the options within the backgrounds they've chosen.
- **Soft Limits** allow a player to take the options within their chosen backgrounds, but may allow them to take from other backgrounds too – maybe in a limited way, or by spending additional character creation metacurrency (more on that later).
- **No Limits** treats a background as a suggestion or guide. Players can choose anything from anywhere when building their character.

The Wildsea has no limits on character creation. Players choose three backgrounds, but can go outside of them as they like when making their decisions.

How Many Background Choices?

Core Wild Words assumes characters will be made from multiple background choices, each determining something important about them. **Three** is a good number here, allowing the building of a character to ideally consist of picking equally from among three distinct collections of 'cool stuff' – enough for a lot of variation, but not enough to be overwhelming. Two could also work, especially if you want characters to exhibit some sort of duality, but four or five is likely too many.

In Streets by Moonlight, characters are paranormal investigators among the labyrinthine lanes of New Knossos. Their early lives don't matter much, as characters aren't expected to last more than a few sessions before madness takes them, so each is comprised of only two backgrounds: their Job, and their Talent.

In The Wildsea, character backgrounds are split into the more traditional three choices. These are defined as Bloodline (determining what a character is physically), Origin (which describes their early life and formative years), and Post (for clarifying what they do on the ship they crew, the skills and abilities that make them useful for sailing the rustling waves).

In PICO there are no backgrounds. Instead, cool stuff and abilities are grouped according to the parts a player chooses for their bug to have (like spikes or hard shells). Although appearing different from the usual background set-up of Wild Words, the function is the same – collections of cool stuff are split into manageable sections by theme.

What Goes In a Background?

A mixtur of narrative and mechanical information.

Narrative: What does taking this background mean for the character? Where does it put them in the setting, and what does it say about their history and who they are?

Mechanical: What special things does this background give access to? Are there aspects that only characters with this background can take, or special rules that only they can benefit (or suffer) from?

Backgrounds in Streets by Moonlight are focused on the bad as much as the good. Characters get benefits from them, but also drawbacks that will likely lead to their eventual downfall.

Does My Game Need Backgrounds?

No, but they're useful for the core presentation of Wild Words. If you're using playbooks for character choices, these will take the place of backgrounds. If you're doing a point-buy system, you might replace backgrounds with themed lists. Just be aware that the fewer 'big' choices like background that a player has to make during character creation, the more 'small' choices they'll end up reading through – and this can lead to choice paralysis or unintended complexity.

Chop & Change - Backgrounds

When adding a background system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Have certain backgrounds accessible only to characters that have a particular achievement or event in their history.
- Change the cost of purchasing other character elements depending on whether they feature in a chosen background.
- Allow different characters to take different numbers of backgrounds.
- Not allow background duplication between characters.

EDGES CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Edges are areas of general competency that relate to how a character tackles obstacles or approaches situations.
- Mechanically, an edge adds 1d6 to an action roll if a character is acting in a way that matches it. Only one edge can apply to any one roll.
- Edge names are, ideally, themed after the setting they're used for, in order to reinforce elements of the world as they're used.
- Edges are broad by design and flexible to a fault, and players are assumed to almost always have access to an edge to give them their first d6 of a roll.

Edges Define An Approach

The first true mechanical choice for a character, the edges a character gains should match how the player wants to tackle problems in a game. Taking an edge named 'Stealth' would be great for an assassin- or thief-type character, probably useful for a ranger or detective, and rubbish for a barbarian. In this way, edges define the approach a character usually takes. It doesn't mean they always have to hew to their edges, just that they get an extra d6 on action rolls when they do.

The Wildsea has seven edges; Grace, Iron, Sharps, Instinct, Teeth, Veils, and Tides. Kicking open a door might be done savagely with the Teeth edge, with great force using the Iron edge, or by applying smart pressure at the right location with Sharps. Using Veils to kick in a door, an edge of stealth and secrecy, might be a tough sell.

How Many Edges

There's no perfect number for how many edges should exist, or how many a character should have, but 7 edges in total (with each character having access to 3 of them) has worked well so far.

The more edges a game has, the narrower they will likely become. Too many edges and they might as well be skills. Too few edges and they might as well not exist.

Rise, a game of nation-states, has six edges - War, Commerce, Culture, Plenty, Faith, and Progress. Each of these edges describes elements a nation might hold dear, and each player chooses two of these to represent their nation's broad characteristics.

Naming Edges

Edge names are important, but that doesn't mean they have to be dry. When naming an edge, try to balance...

- A feeling that it belongs to the world or setting
- A clarity of meaning
- A distinctiveness from other edges
- A sense of brevity

The ideal edge feels right for the world, is easy enough to understand, feels unique, and is probably a single word.

No pressure, then.

One of Drift's edges, Smoke, is a good example of this. It's an edge of dirtiness and stealth, of crawling through gutters and keeping things hidden, of obscuring your movements and intentions. It could have been called 'Stealth', but the city can be a grimy, dirty place at times, so Smoke draws allusions both to hidden things and the feeling of the wider setting it's designed to fit. There are other edges in Drift that might be useful for stealthy actions and lying, but none of them are dedicated to it like Smoke is.

The edges of Rise are named more simply than most, as the setting of the game isn't as important as the individual cultures and developments of the nation states involved in it. They're informative, but purposefully trade flavour for absolute clarity.

PICO doesn't have edges - it wants players to roll fewer dice and the characters to be very specialized, so it has an expanded skills system instead.

Edges as Stats

Edges are close to what some TTRPGs would call stats, very broad areas that a character excels in. In fact, you can treat edges as more traditional stats if you want to by having them describe the strengths of a character's own body and mind.

The Mountain Road, a game of medieval travel, uses edges like basic stats. Characters might choose Strength, Reflexes, Guts, or Wisdom.

Chop & Change - Edges

When adding edges to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Add a special rule to each of them, so that using each edge works slightly differently
- Have characters take all the edges, but assign them different sized dice (if you're using variable dice sizes)
- Limit the number of edges a character takes to one, if you want to encourage hyper-specialization
- Tie the use of certain skills to the use of particular edges (though this will vastly decrease flexibility)
- Allow multiple edges to contribute to an action roll
- Make edges into a one box track, that are marked when used and can't be used again until unmarked.

SKILLS CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Skills add a number of dice to an action roll equal to their rank (a rank one skill adds 1d6, two ranks in a skill would add 2d6 etc).
- Only one skill can be used for a particular roll, and the maximum they can add is 3d6 at rank three.
- Skills are more specific than edges, but still broad. A skill called *Swordsmanship* might add dice for someone attacking with a blade, maintaining their weapon, or spouting off about the history of classic instruments of war. They're flexible, in that they can definitely do X but could also do Y or Z.
- Players should find out exactly what a skill means to their character as the game progresses. Different characters might habitually use the same skill in slightly different ways.

Skills Define Actions

Edges are broad so skills can be narrow. Skills have both mechanical and narrative purpose; they add dice to actions, and they help inform players of the *kinds* of actions they should be taking in game. If a character has a skill that helps with stealth, the player is more likely to choose stealthy approaches to situations in order to roll the most dice, and have the highest chance of success.

Skills Define Worlds

A good skill list acts as an introduction, or at least a reminder, to the average player on what the world is about. Is *Shoot* a skill? The setting has ranged weapons and that's important. Is *Arcane* a skill? Magic exists.

Nothing Wrong With Overlap

Creative approaches are the name of the game here, so some overlap and fuzziness on skills tends to help players (especially new players) explore the methods and limits of their character.

In The Wildsea, the Sway skill is specifically there for convincing others to do as you want, usually by making friends and earning trust. But the Outwit skill could get you similar results, and dipping into the cultural information provided by a language could also help. So if a character doesn't have Sway, that doesn't mean they're inherently rubbish at making friends or convincing people – it just means they'll have to be creative in doing so, or that such events might need a little extra set-up, or the right situation.

How Many Skills?

There's no specific amount of skills required, but roughly double the number of edges is probably a good target to aim for. Keep in mind that the more you add, the more specialized they'll tend to be. Always think of skills with the setting in mind – if it's a world of hard-boiled detective types, there should be at least one skill (if not more) that would allow for the finding of clues or processing of information. If you're making a game about worms having a tea party, you probably don't need a skill for katana use.

Skills, Languages, Lores...

Skills are usually described with a verb (such as Tend, Fight, or Climb). If you want more specialized skills, they might be two words instead (Arcane Lore, Computer Use). But skills don't even really have to be... Well, skills. The ranks-give-dice set-up of skills could work for using a particular type of gear, or speaking a language, or being wise on a particular subject. There's nothing stopping you from having skills and 'something else that works the same as skills but is technically different'.

The Wildsea has Skills and Languages, with skills named with verbs and languages given setting appropriate names. Wildsea skills tend more toward involving actions, while Wildsea languages allow understanding, communication, and also offer cultural information about certain groups of people. Mechanically both groups are treated the same, in that you can only add one skill OR one language to a roll.

THE INVERTED PYRAMID

Edges, Skills, and Aspects in Wild Words are an inverted pyramid of specificity. Edges are very broad, and can be applied in many situations. Skills are more narrow, and help tell a player what kind of actions their character is good at. And aspects are even more narrow, containing specific abilities that usually help in specific situations or with particular types of action. Messing with this pyramid is entirely possible, but might have ramifications when it comes to playability. Having fewer edges or less flexible skills might leave players feeling like they're missing out if they're not taking a particular approach, for example. Making the scope of these things too broad might invite choice paralysis in terms of potential actions or approaches, slowing the pace of play.

As a designer, you'll know your own game and own world best, so feel free to tailor these elements of the engine (as with all others) to suit the feel you're going for. But keep in mind that these are designed, and ordered, to make the process of making a dice pool flow as easily as possible.

Chop & Change - Skills

When adding a skill system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Have some skills available only to certain backgrounds or character types.
- Have each rank of a skill give a particular bonus that goes beyond adding dice to an action roll.
- Have players make custom skills for their character using a couple of words or a short description.
- Restrict the number of ranks a starting character can take, choose, or buy in a particular skill.
- If using a currency system to buy character elements, increase the cost of rank two or three skills.
- Name particular skill ranks (such as 'Journeyman', 'Expert', or 'Master').
- Split skills into smaller categories that are inherently tied to a particular Edge.
- Remove skills entirely in favour of an entirely different kind of system for gaining additional dice.

ASPECTS CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Aspects combine information about a character, special rules, tracks, and the ability to add an extra 1d6 to action rolls. Most characters have multiple aspects, and they're usually split into groups based on background choices.
- The track of an aspect gets marked as a character takes damage, or sometimes as they tap into the power of the aspect itself. Tracks typically range from one to eight boxes in length. When an aspect's track is fully marked, the character loses access to the special rules that aspect provides, and it can't be used to add advantage dice to a roll.
- Aspects are very specific in nature, describing the most important traits or pieces of gear that a player never wants their character to be completely without. Aspects have a type word to help describe what they are (such as 'gear').
- An aspect's ability to add 1d6 to an action roll is determined by its name and presentation, not the special rules. Special rules should do something more interesting than just adding dice.
- Aspects change as a character grows in power and experience, and are at the core of the Wild Words character progression system.

The Look

Aspects have a name, type, track, and special rule (and maybe a bit of flavour text). They are generally set out similarly to the example below...

Acid Tongue 3-Track Trait

The truths you spit cut to the core. Treat conflicts as triumphs when engaged in an argument, and you can mark this aspect to create a whisper based on any topic you've recently argued over.

Aspects Define Actions

Edges are broad, skills are narrower, and aspects are specialized. An aspect is a unique thing; a feature of a character's learning or biology, or a piece of gear they rely on, or a companion that accompanies them. Players can use them to help choose the actions their character might take.

*In **The Sword Spiral**, the 'Grit' edge lets us know that a character can approach things in a rough and ready way. The 'Bladework' skill informs us that this character has some familiarity with edged weapons. And the 'Bastard Sword' aspect tells us that if there's a problem to be solved, this character might well try to slice their way through it - the existence of the sword as an aspect helps the character rely on those edge and skill choices.*

Aspects are Special

Technically a character can have as many aspects as they like, and more aspects means a more powerful character. But it also means a more complex character - it's better to have players combine or improve their character's aspects as they advance rather than just gaining more and more.

*In **The Wildsea**, characters might have four or six aspects to start with, depending on their level of experience. No character can have more than eight aspects at a time (excluding temporary aspects).*

*In **Streets by Moonlight**, characters are made to be simple to play and easy to use. They each have two aspects - one from their Job, and one from their Talent.*

Aspects are Eternal

When a player chooses an aspect, it's central to their character. It's an assumption of the Wild Words engine that an aspect can never be taken away from a character (though the benefits it offers might be denied them for a time through damage or special rules). Even if, narratively, an aspect is lost, it should always be able to be found again if the player wants that.

Angier fully marks their grappling hook, describing how the rope snaps. When it gets repaired, this is framed narratively as the rope being mended or a new hook being added.

DO I NEED ASPECTS?

Technically, no. Like any other element of the Wild Words system, you can slightly alter, completely change, or even remove aspects as you like.

... But I wouldn't recommend it.

Aspects may not be a 'core element' of the Wild Words system, but they are a good example of tying other core systems together, a kind of emergent complexity. They marry a fiction-first approach with special rules, they incorporate tracks, they remove the need for a separate HP or wound system, they act as the 'narrow end' of the inverted pyramid of specificity mentioned in the skills section, and they're a great flag for the GM that a player wants a particular thing to feature in the game so that they can shine.

Aspect Types

Most games will have a lot of aspects to choose from. Giving the aspects a type helps manage some other special rules that exist around them (like the ability to clear marks from them with certain actions) or makes them susceptible or resistant to other elements of the world (such as a pirate's ability to disarm an opponent only working on 'gear' type aspects). Some types may even have their own built-in special rules that aren't mentioned in the text of every aspect that has them (likely to save space on the page). The type of an aspect should fit the setting it's used in.

*In **The Wildsea**, there are three types of aspect - trait, gear, and companion. Marks on a trait are cleared by healing, marks on gear by repair, and marks on a companion by whichever of those two options makes more sense. Companions also have shorter tracks than most aspects, but benefit from the special rule that they can all act autonomously, which might be a great narrative help.*

*Aspects don't have a type in **Streets by Moonlight**. There aren't too many of them to choose from, and players clear a mark from each at the end of a session rather than with some type-dependent healing rules.*

What Can Aspect-Based Special Rules Do?

Big question, easy answer – they allow a character to engage with, or even break, the rules of the game.

An aspect that describes a sword might have a damage type, or even an amount of damage that it deals when used. This would play into another set of rules within the game, concerning combat and damage.

An aspect that describes an unusual sensory organ might give the character a new method of seeing or hearing that most other character's wouldn't have access to. This allows new narrative opportunities, and maybe helps mechanically in certain situations where they have to rely on this new sense.

An aspect that describes a helpful robotic companion that blocks bullets for you might give the character the ability to treat the dice differently when they're rolling to escape harm. This breaks the usual rules of the game, telling the player that their dice work in a special way when this aspect is concerned.

Ultimately, the kind of rules you might add to an aspect will depend on the setting it's made for, the power level you want it to have, the kinds of narrative options you want to offer players, and the rules you want them to be able to bend or break.

What's a Bad Aspect?

Anything that takes away the agency of another player, or another character, that they had no choice in. Here's an example...

Human Shield 4-Track Trait

Once per scene, choose an ally to take the damage of an incoming attack that's aimed at you.

This is a bad aspect, because it allows you to negatively affect another character at the table without the permission of their player. You could fix it by changing the wording to allow another player to volunteer their character for taking that damage, or by directing the damage to an NPC (thus not removing player agency).

Strong Aspect, Short Track

The special rules of an aspect are essentially traded for by you, the designer. For every special thing an aspect can do, remove some boxes from the aspect's track – that aspect is now more fragile or can be used less often. The stronger the thing, the more boxes get removed.

*When designing aspects for **The Wildsea**, each starts with a five-box track and no special rules. Weak special rules remove one or two boxes, strong special rules three or four. If the rule has a limit on when or how it is used, or forces the player to mark the track for using it, that adds a box or two back on. This way, stronger aspects that can only be used rarely can be (roughly) balanced against cheaper ones that get used freely.*

Example Special Rules

The scope of an aspect's special rule (or rules) depends on the rest of the rules for the game. Here are a few suggestions that rely on core features of the Wild Words Engine...

- Deal a certain type of damage at a particular range.
- Learn information about a particular thing (this might give the player the option to make the information themselves, or rely on the GM).
- Treat a bad dice result as a better one, or reroll dice in a certain situation.
- Gain resistance or immunity to a type of damage or hazardous element of the setting.
- Treat one kind of resource as another (useful for setting up other special rules that affect each other).
- Gain a sense or way of interacting with the world that wouldn't normally be available.
- Bolster another player's character in some way.
- Allow a change of shape, size, or material for narrative effect.
- Create a resource of some kind, either by inventing it or by pulling one from a pre-made list.
- Add a special rule to, or raise or lower the impact of, a particular type of action relevant to the setting.
- Allow things that would normally take a long time to be done quickly.

Chop & Change - Aspects

When adding an aspect system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Have players name, flavour, or even entirely create aspects themselves as they make their character.
- Allow permanent damage or change to an aspect that can't be reversed.
- Decouple tracks from aspects – they can't be damaged and are always effective.
- Decouple special rules from aspects and have them simply act as flavoured HP bars.
- Have aspects bought with a kind of currency, either in-world or meta.
- Have aspects that can only be taken after certain other aspects have been taken, or after achieving something setting-specific.
- Have new aspects gained by combining in-world resources and metacurrency.
- Tie skills to an aspect, so if the aspect is fully marked a character loses access to the linked skills.

METERS CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Meters are specialized tracks, or gauges, that are filled by a character encountering or interacting with an element of the world or a portion of the wider rules.
- Meters usually nothing until fully marked, or if represented by a gauge do nothing until the gauge level changes.
- A meter might exist for an element of the world or an element of a character.

Waiting for Change

Meters filling leads to a change of some kind, just like any other track. They're similar to aspects in this way, but with the crucial difference of their special rules not coming into play until that last mark is made.

Meters might be counting up to something good, but are more often used to signal something bad. Marks on a meter might be imposed by the GM in response to a character's action or a happening in the world, but could also be voluntarily made by players.

In Drift, each character in a drifter crew (and the train they share ownership of) has a paradox meter, represented by a gauge. This measures the potentially harmful effects of the city's tendency to warp reality. The meter might be marked by moving through unstable areas, or voluntarily marked by tapping into a particularly weird or powerful ability granted by an aspect. When the meter fills the gauge level increases – zero has no impact, one shows the character beginning to break under the pressure (imposing a penalty relevant to the situation), and when the gauge hits two the character is in serious danger of permanent change in the form of an unhealable injury.

The Wildsea doesn't explicitly use meters, but a ship's ratings work in a similar way. Until they're fully marked they function as normal, after being fully marked there's usually an immediate and related catastrophe.

In Rise each nation-state has a meter representing unrest. When unmarked or partially marked there's no effect, but when fully marked a rebellion begins and the player must destroy resources to quell the fury of their populace.

Stress, Wounds, and HP

The most traditional use of a meter-style system is one that Wild Words usually bypasses, as a marker of health or longevity. Aspects are used to track character damage in most games, so while you *might* want to use a meter for an additional health-style system, we recommend leaving that kind of thing to aspects – they are built for it.

But a recommendation is not a rule. For example...

In Streets by Moonlight, the characters take damage to their Stability (a meter that combines physical and mental state) as they uncover deeper and darker mysteries of the moonlit streets, and suffer at the hands of the cryptic presences that dwell there. When a meter is full, the character dies... But will be replaced by the start of the next scene by a new character called in their stead, a more powerful individual with a fresh and unmarked Stability meter of their own. This would be an impossibly harsh punishment for most games, but frequent death and character replacement are built into the rules of SBM from the ground up. The characters are metaphorical mayflies, getting one or two moments in the sun before hubris takes them.

Meters Are Very Optional

If you've got nothing in the setting that needs tracking like a meter tracks things... Don't use them. Every character element is optional, but these are more optional than most.

PICO doesn't use meters at all – it's specifically stripped back in terms of mechanical complexity compared to some Wild Words games, and there's no element of the setting that requires a meter to manage it.

Marking and Clearing Meters

When incorporating meters, think of what a player might do during the course of an average session to manage the marks on them. You don't want meter-management to become too much of a distraction from roleplay, especially as it's a mechanical system at heart (though there may well be narrative consequences). Ideally, a meter should only start becoming *necessary* to deal with when the marks are nearing full, though interacting with it early can stave off or delay these moments.

In some cases, a meter might be impossible (or at least very difficult) to clear marks from. This suits the tone of certain games, especially if what a meter counts up to is a change rather than an ending.

Chop & Change - Impulses

When adding a meter system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Have the GM control and mark meters in secret, with their length or state a mystery to players.
- Give meters break points for additional rules-based granularity (**Drift** does something like this when it comes to Fuel).
- Tie specific meters to specific character choices, with each player managing their meters in different ways.
- Remove aspects and deal with all health and damage-related situations using a meter.

IMPULSES CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Impulses are narrative-first signals to a player that their character should act a certain way. This might come in the form of goals to be chased, rules to be followed, or vices to be indulged in.
- Impulses might have a mechanical component to them, but likely not at all times. They exist to suggest play decisions, not necessarily to force them.
- Impulses may have a track attached to determine their strength over or importance to a character.
- A player following a character's impulse should be rewarded in some way (even if that impulse might be detrimental to the character).

Scope

Ideally, impulses are there to help a player decide what their character might do in a given situation. If they have an impulse that leads them to indulging in something, and that thing is presented, it makes narrative sense for their character to be drawn to that thing.

But that doesn't mean a character should have to engage with it - that's a player agency concern. There are a few ways you can handle this...

- Leave it completely narrative.
- Reward engaging with an impulse.
- Penalize resisting an impulse.
- Let the dice decide what happens.

In *The Wildsea*, impulses are split into two sections - Drives and Mires. Drives are positive impulses that describe a character's goals, and working towards them rewards a player with milestones to advance their character. Mires are negative impulses with a small attached track - they don't affect the character until the track starts to fill, but once it does there's a mechanical penalty on actions that might be affected by that impulse.

In *Rise*, impulses are coded as the wants of a nation-state's citizens, and have a single box that's either marked or unmarked. If the box of a want is marked (such as 'Hungry'), there's a mechanical penalty associated with actions related to that impulse.

In *PICO*, a bug has one grand goal that they'll likely never achieve. There's no mechanical tie to this goal, it's just there as a little bit of flavour for the character.

Deciding on Impulses

Like all elements of a character, the impulses should be tied to the world you're creating. A setting revolving around the mean streets of a major city might have characters pulled towards engaging with their vices, or earning rewards and advancement by rising above them. Think about what social pressures, cultural expectations, and grand goals might matter to the inhabitants of your world, and craft an impulse system around that.

In *The Sword Spiral*, honour in combat is important. The impulses here are codes of conduct to follow that might get in the way of success, reinforced by cultural expectations - attacking an enemy that's unarmed or unaware might not have a mechanical downside, or might even have a mechanical upside, but will damage a character's Honour... And it's that honour that a player uses to add to the dice pool of rolls that benefit their allies.

In *Streets by Moonlight*, characters are inherently flawed. Their impulses are impossible to resist - if they come across them, they must engage with them. Whether they survive or not is down to the luck of the dice.

Leaving Out Impulses

Of all the potential character elements, impulses is the one that can most easily be left out of a Wild Words game. It's there to create conflict and drama, and to guide decision-making in an unfamiliar setting, but if your world is a more familiar one or you want absolute player agency over a character's thoughts, feelings, and actions, leaving it out might be the better choice.

Impulses as Flags

For a GM, a player choosing a particular impulse likely means that they want it featured in the game. If a player chooses for their character to have an insatiable yearning for dark knowledge, the setting and game should allow them to engage with that (even if that engagement is resisting it).

Impulse Tracks

Consider giving an impulse a track that can be marked and cleared if you want it to affect a character over time. Meters work particularly well for this. Dice rolls related to an impulse may even depend on how many boxes of the track are marked, or unmarked.

In *Drift*, the impulse system is known as the Chain. The Chain sets out six important people, places, and life events that a character can draw strength from or rely upon in darker or more confusing moments. A 'chain roll' allows them to roll a number of dice equal to the unmarked boxes on the chain to resist the unsettling effects of the living city they live in. The more that chain has been damaged (and thus marked), the fewer dice the player will have to roll with, and the less stable that character will be in these moments.

Chop & Change - Impulses

When adding an impulse system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Have players create their own positive or negative impulses during character creation.
- Have impulses reflect the bonds between characters.
- Have impulses as hard narrative rules a player must adhere to, or be penalized for stepping outside of.
- Have impulses tied to advancing, or even using, skills or aspects.
- Have impulses resisted by expending resources or currency.
- Have impulses hidden from the players, entirely in the realm of the GM.
- Have impulses change once they've been engaged with once to keep the system fresh.
- Have impulses change a character permanently, for better or worse.

RESOURCES CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Resources are simple and temporary, elements of the world that a character can pick up and keep to use later.
- Resources are usually split into several categories depending on what they are, or how they're used by the rules. Not all categories have to work in the same way, but keeping them similar helps to keep the rules-burden low.
- A resource can have one or more tags, words attached to it that describe a quality it has.
- Resources might be arranged in lists or tables in a book, but they should always be simple enough to make in the moment for a GM. Resources are a great reward for small successes during play, so shouldn't require checking a book repeatedly.
- Resources likely give a 1d6 advantage to an action roll when used, but might be consumed in the process.

What is a Resource?

In most Wild Words games, a resource is anything a character picks up during a game to keep, but that isn't vitally important. They're intended to be found, lost, bought, sold - resources are fluid, by their very nature.

Mini-Aspects

In fact, resources are a lot like tiny, temporary, uncomplicated aspects. Their names are important for working out what you might do with them, they give 1d6 advantages on action rolls when used, and they might allow a character to do something they wouldn't normally be able to.

Klyka picks up a jagged saw as a resource. He wouldn't normally be able to cut through a rope with ease with just his bare hands, but using the saw as part of an action makes that far more possible.

But, very much unlike aspects...

Resources are Fleeting

No character or rule should ever rely on a single particular resource to work *without a really good reason*, because resources are entirely temporary by their nature. A category of resources might be required for something, or a resource with the right kind of type or tag, but avoid hyper-specificity when writing resource-related rules.

In The Wildsea, healing usually consumes a resource - a specimen, to be precise. What type of specimen? One that's useful to the roll - that's all the guidance that's given, the rest is left up to the narrative and the interpretation of players.

Resource, Tag, and Category Examples

This is a lot of words to throw at you at once, but the Wild Words resource system is pretty simple (honest). First you choose a few categories of resource that relate to your setting, then think of a few resources as examples for each type, then how these resources might be modified thanks to the condition they're in. Here are a few examples, based around particular themes...

A World of Investigation and Gumshoe Hijinks

- **Possible Categories:** Clues, Contacts
- **Resource Examples:** Footprint on the Stairs, Discarded Cigarette, Marley from the Broadmix Club
- **Tag Examples:** Spoiled, Dirty, Angry

A World of Swords and Sorcery

- **Possible Categories:** Loot, Spells
- **Resource Examples:** Treasure Chest, Silver Goblet, An Orc's Tooth, Bounty Contract, Grand Levitate, Prestidigitation, Flaming Wheel
- **Tag Examples:** Tarnished, Gleaming, Empowered, Unstable, Mind-Born

A World of Treetop Seas

- **Possible Categories:** Salvage, Charts
- **Resource Examples:** Cryptolithic Amber, Broken Sidearm, Chips of Old-World Stone, A Map of the Wavetops, A Many-Folded Chart
- **Tag Examples:** Rusting, Pre-Verdant, Faded

But What Do Resources DO?

Now this is a tough one, because the answer is 'whatever you want or need them to'. But it's a bit more in-depth than that.

All resources should be able to give a 1d6 advantage when used as part of an action. They should also allow some actions to be taken that wouldn't usually be possible (for example, you might be able to hunker down and hide in plain sight under an Invisible Cloak resource).

But each category you create can also have special rules attached. Perhaps mystical Bounty Contracts turn directly into currency when their mark is brought down. Eggs might hatch when you've carried them around for long enough. Whispers can change the world in small ways, giving narrative agency to a player that's usually reserved for the GM. Resources can do... Pretty much anything.

But there should be some limits.

Using Resources

Resources come and go, and one of the ways that Wild Words enforces that is by making them limited use. Sometimes it's one-use, sometimes several. Depends on the resource. As a good guideline, resources might be...

- **Used/Utilized:** The resource remains after use.
- **Risked:** The resource remains after use, but only if things go well.
- **Tarnished:** The resource gains a negative tag after use. If it already has one, the resource is consumed.
- **Consumed:** The resource is destroyed or otherwise removed after being used.

As for which categories of resources follow which rules, or what kind of actions trigger what kind of outcome from the table above... That one's entirely your choice!

Chop & Change - Resources

This section doesn't make too much sense here, as resources are already extremely flexible in terms of the rules that apply. Just keep in mind that resources are something players have to track, but can also be a real window into the setting. Using them requires balance.

WEALTH CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- A measure of how rich a character (or an entire group) is, usually denoted by a number that fluctuates as things are bought or sold.
- The core expression of wealth in Wild Words is quantitative, in that it's represented by a simple number.
- Wealth can be seen as the flip side of resources, which are qualitative in nature. The value of wealth is in the amount of it a character has, whereas the value of resources is in the qualities they possess.
- Wealth should be named in a setting-appropriate way. A feudal society might use silver coins, whereas a space-faring civilization might rely on universal credits.

Money or Mystery?

The most obvious form of wealth is money, so that's the one we're going to explore first. Whether it comes in the form of coins, gold, credits, or weird stones, if a setting has wealth players are probably going to want to amass some of it. It's the looter's impulse in all of us, perhaps.

Drift has an in-world currency, Zen (triangular coins produced and distributed by the parasite city), which acts as a measure of Wealth for each character. They are found in gutters and vending machines slots and the spaces between sofa cushions, and are traded for goods or services at stations. It's highly granular, and a character might amass hundreds of 'zennies' at a time.

This kind of tangible wealth system, based on something characters can pick up and hold, is simple and straightforward. For better or worse, we all understand how money works. But you don't need to use wealth to represent something that's purely physical if it doesn't work for your game.

Rise measures a nation's wealth with a specific currency, Yield, which can be spent on expanding empires or creating buildings. Yield represents many things, from time spent working to stacks of gold coins, but it's still an in-world currency and is represented by a single number. The actual nature of the Yield, or where it's drawn from, doesn't matter. It's also low on the granularity scale, and a nation might only have 4 or 5 Yield to spend at any one time.

Spending, Saving, and Interaction

Whatever you're using to represent wealth, players are going to want to spend it at some point. But what can they spend it on?

Think of what other parts of the game wealth might tie into. Is it involved in every transaction? Does it take the place of barter? How is it earned, and carried? Is it spent on anything that a player might not expect? Does having a certain amount of wealth give any bonuses, or does having none bring downsides beyond not being able to afford things?

Zen in Drift is used to buy food from vending machines, to pay for train repairs and medical services, all the stuff you might expect. But it also ties into a character's luck – the more Zen they have, the more likely it is that Fortune rolls will go their way (the parasite city doesn't quite understand the relationship between money and opportunity, but it's giving it a go).

Broke By Choice

Wealth isn't essential for a Wild Words game. If your setting focuses on rangers in the wilderness who never visit cities, who cares how many discarded coins they might find on their travels?

Removing wealth means fewer numbers to handle for a player, and less of an economy to balance for a designer. And if you're not entirely comfortable getting rid of money with nothing else to stand in for it, the box on the right offers some handy alternatives.

IN THIS ECONOMY?

If you don't want a single standard currency but still want trade or commerce, there are a couple of routes you can take...

Barter System

This removes numerical wealth from the game, instead using Resources (pg xx) to make a more quality-based system. How much is a chicken's egg worth? No idea, but I'll trade you one for that handful of herbs.

The Wildsea doesn't have a wealth system. Resources are traded for other resources, or used to accomplish tasks. The 'worth' of a particular resource is decided narratively rather than numerically, according to what the resource is and any special tags it might have.

Wealth Ratings

This also removes numerical wealth, replacing it with a ratings track. When the characters find something that might make them 'wealthier', a box on the track is marked. When they need to see if they can afford something, they roll dice equal to the number of marked boxes. A Triumph means they can afford it no problem, a Conflict means they can afford it by erasing one of the marks and lowering their overall wealth, and a Disaster means they can't afford it at all.

The Sword Spiral tracks wealth with a single rating in this way. Not every coin is tracked, and any valuable stuff just gets tossed into a treasure chest rather than being recorded by name.

Chop & Change - Wealth

When adding a wealth system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Make multiple currencies that can be spent on different things
- Have multiple denominations of the same currency that are recorded separately
- Specify that characters are assumed to always have enough for basic transactions (the Wildsea does this with the Scratch rules)
- Have wealth grow or degrade naturally over time

METACURRENCY CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Metacurrencies aren't an element of the world of the game. Instead they're spent by players to affect their characters, alter rolls, or change elements of a scene - they're an element of the rules.
- Metacurrencies are usually recorded on a character sheet, but they're not something a character has access to, they're for that character's player to use.
- Earning a metacurrency might be done by making certain choices, or it might be linked to entirely out-of-world actions (like beginning a session of play).
- A metacurrency might be numerical, like wealth, or descriptive, like a Resource.

Metawhat?

If it's something a player gains or uses rather than a character, it's probably a metacurrency. It doesn't appear as an element of the world or story, but can be used to affect those things.

*In **The Mountain Road**, each player gets a point of Divine Favour at the beginning of a session. This can be spent when their character is about to take serious damage or consequences from an action. Spending Divine Favour allows a player to describe how their character avoids this outcome, regardless of the rest of the rules.*

Some metacurrencies are recorded and spent as basic numbers like Wealth, or have individual names and qualities like Resources. They can be qualitative or quantitative, but remember that this changes how they're recorded on a character sheet.

***The Wildsea** uses a metacurrency for character advancement, known as Milestones. They're earned by satisfying drives and taking part in big moments, and they're recorded on a character sheet in the form of a small phrase that harkens back to the event that earned them. 'Defeated the Pinwolves' might be a milestone, or 'Survived the Sinking of the Heron'. Characters aren't aware that they've earned a milestone, they're just happy they weren't eaten by pinwolves or consigned to the Under-Eaves.*

Made for Flexibility

Metacurrencies exist to give players a little flexibility. Their character might be in an impossible situation, but that doesn't mean that they are as a player if they have some kind of game-affecting metacurrency to spend.

Galstaf is bound securely in the back of a bandit's cart. He's got no way of escape, and can't reach any of his gear. His player, however, has a point of Divine Favour to spend - she spends it, and the cart jostles over a stone in the path. It allows Galstaf to shift position just enough to roll out of the back of the cart. He's still trussed up, but at least he's not being taken back to a bandit camp.

The Uses and Limits of Metacurrency

... Are pretty much whatever you want them to be. They might add dice, change rules, turn back the clock... Anything you want. Something important to consider here though is that metacurrency spending can actually take players out of the game - it stops them thinking about what their character might do and gets them thinking about what they as a player might do. It puts the rules above the fiction for a moment, if handled poorly.

A good golden rule to follow is this: metacurrency should never affect a character that isn't your own, at least not without that character's player giving their consent.

GM Metacurrencies

It's not just players that might gain and spend metacurrency throughout a session! GMs might be able to as well, earning it after certain player actions or decisions and spending it to introduce complications to the world or story.

*In **The Wildsea: Storm & Root**, acting under scrutiny might mark a particular track. The Firefly can clear these marks to introduce dangerous stuff to a scene, like an instance of damage or the appearance of a hazard. Players might be able to unmark them to, through the actions of their characters - it adds a kind of race to proceedings that's unique to this area of the game mechanics.*

Is Metacurrency Right For Your Game?

The big question to ask yourself when it comes to metacurrency is 'do my mechanics need it'. Only you can answer that.

*The base game of **The Wildsea** doesn't use a metacurrency system for anything outside of developing characters and adding to ships, and even the metacurrency for adding to ships is mostly gained through trading away in-world cargo (a special kind of resource) to shipwrights at port.*

Chop & Change - Metacurrencies

When adding a metacurrency system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Have it so the GM can only introduce certain elements to a scene by spending a metacurrency
- Have a metacurrency that's tracked for an entire group of players, rather than player by player
- Have metacurrency earned through player actions rather than character actions, if you want to evoke a very 80s 'but I brought the pizza' vibe

CREATION METHODS CHARACTER ELEMENT

The Basics

- Once you've decided every element that a character should have, you need to work out how they get put together.
- There are two main creation methods – point-buy and choice-based. You might use one, the other, or a mix of both or something entirely different that I haven't thought of!
- The creation method you choose will impact how information is organized and presented to the player – keep the flow of character creation in mind when deciding on this.

Point-Buy vs Choice-Based

Point-buy systems give players a certain amount of points (or any other metacurrency) to spend during character creation. Each option costs a certain number of points, and when the player is out of points their character is finished.

- **Benefits:** Allows for extremely modular characters, allows for different balances of character elements, easy to fold this naturally into a progression system
- **Drawbacks:** Players need to read and digest a lot of options, players need to track the points they're spending, may end up with unbalanced characters, economy of character elements needs to be finely-tuned

Choice-based systems rely on the rules stating that a number of options have to be chosen, usually from distinct categories (two things from here, six from here etc). Characters may get a different amount of choices to make depending on the level of play, but all players go through the same kinds of choices.

- **Benefits:** Easy to organize a step-by-step process, no/minimal numbers to track, should result in balanced characters, may reduce the amount a player needs to read and choose from, players aren't at risk of 'running out of points' by overspending on early options
- **Drawbacks:** More restrictive in terms of how much of one thing a character can have, doesn't support varying power levels as well in terms of granularity, much harder to dovetail into a progression system.

The Power of Choice

Character creation is important. Players are going to spend at least a couple of hours, if not weeks, months, or years, with the characters they create. Whether you choose point-buy, choice-based, or a hybrid of the two, allowing players to create the kinds of character they want is the most important thing.

And hybrids *are* possible – maybe a player chooses two things from one section, and then has 6 points to spend in another. Or perhaps players are making more than just a single character, and you use one system for characters and another for whatever else they create.

The Wildsea is choice-based when it comes to characters, point-buy in terms of ship creation. When making a character, a player makes a certain number of choices based on the elements of the backgrounds they choose. When making a ship, which is a group activity, each player has a personal metacurrency (stakes) to spend, and the group also get some stakes to share. These stakes are spent on things for the ship as whole, and on things that make the ship better for each player's particular character.

Using Metacurrencies

Point-based character creation is one of the most common ways of bringing in a metacurrency (pg xx). Perhaps leftovers get converted into an in-game type of wealth or resource, or saved for future character progression.

ADVANCEMENT

Also known as character progression, advancement allows characters to 'level up' – they gain more skills, develop aspects, maybe even change their impulses.

Advancement might be...

- Tied to completing a certain number of sessions, with all players being able to advance their characters at the same time.
- Related to the earning and spending of a metacurrency, or even in-game wealth.
- Something that is represented in-game, with characters training to master new skills and aspects.

The Golden Rule of advancement for Wild Words is that it should be able to build on what already exists. Consider combining aspects, broadening the use of particular skills, and locking certain resources in to being a permanent part of a character's kit as ways a character might advance.

... And let them take new stuff too, of course.

Chop & Change - Creation Methods

When adding a creation method to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Have different characters start at different levels of power and experience.
- Allow 'undecided' choices, where a character can save part of character creation to use in-game as a reveal or the answer to a problem.
- Introduce an element of randomness to proceedings, with rolls for how many points might be spent in a point-buy system, or how many choices made in a choice-based one.
- Enforce uniqueness – a minor advancement as the end of the character creation process, so that all players come with a character that transcends the options in the book in some way.

TWISTS SUBSYSTEM

The Basics

- Twists are a subsystem, most often linked to dice rolls, that encourage players to take the reins of the narrative in small ways.
- The 'standard' twist comes in the form of a player (or their character) reshaping or altering an element of the world, or bringing something unexpected into the narrative that changes the progression of a game's plot.
- Twists do have some built-in limits, as there's an element of conversational agreement that comes into their planning and execution.
- Most importantly, Twists are player-focused, not GM-focused. The GM might get a say, maybe even the final say, but the generation of a twist comes from the players.

The Standard Twist

No matter how it appears in-universe, the most standard version of a twist allows a player to state that something unexpected happens as a result of one of their actions (usually as a result of rolling doubles, see page xx). There are a few conventions to follow here...

- **Twists Should Be Small:** The unexpected outcomes can be game-changers, but they shouldn't be game-killers. An unexpected outcome of falling off of a wall may well be crashing through the floor below into a previously undiscovered secret room, but it shouldn't be falling directly onto the head of a campaign's big bad and killing them outright. They add flavour and spice, not an entire side of beef.
- **Twists Should Be Player-First:** Twists might be decided by the player that rolls them (if you're linking twists to dice, which we recommend), but a better convention is to throw them open to the table - let other players offer their ideas for twists, and let the initial player and GM decide on which one they like best. Twists are literally there to facilitate collaborative storytelling.
- **Twists Should Be Narrative:** ... But they don't have to be. Sometimes there aren't any good ideas for a twist based on a particular action. In that case the GM might elect to offer a resource instead, or to up the impact of the action itself.

Unexpected Outcomes

The best way to keep a twist unexpected is to have it supplied by someone other than the initial player or GM. But why keep them unexpected in the first place?

Because Wild Words games are games for the GM as much as they are for the other players, and nothing's more thrilling than an unforeseen twist in a narrative that you're enjoying. Twists allows the average player a little taste of that GM storytelling magic, but they also allow the GM to react to unexpected narrative developments in the same way a player might.

Klash lets off a firework, rolling a twist as they attempt to impress the audience with their display. One of the players suggests that the burst of the firework reveals a danger in the night sky, and the group loves it. The GM had no plans for there to be danger there, so they could just say it doesn't quite work... But they roll with it, adapting to the change with glee.

Twists Don't Have To Be Positive

While it might seem sensible to colour twists in ways that they help everyone at the table, the core Wild Words rules don't specify that twists have to be *positive*, just unexpected. Make that clear in your rules - it often leads to some of the most exciting moments of play.

Hent's player rolls doubles as their character leaps onto a rising airship. The roll was a success, so Hent makes it on, but the twist is opened up to the table and one of the other players suggests that Hent's weight is just enough to overbalance the ship. Suddenly there's a crisis, a decision to be made - if Hent stays, maybe the entire ship goes down.

Twists Without the Randomness

Twists are tied to the dice in Core Wild Words, but they don't have to be earned this way exclusively - or at all! Having resources or aspects that can grant twists can add an element of control to the uncontrollable, and tying them to impulses can also make for some great collaborative storytelling experiences.

*In **The Wildsea**, Whispers are a resource that represent living words, and can be released into the world in a number of ways. One of these is to speak them aloud, essentially allowing the player that does so to change or bring in a narrative element to the scene related to the name of the whisper; a twist, essentially, but under their control. Whispers can also be shouted, creating a high-impact change that's entirely up to the GM.*

*In **Streets By Moonlight**, a bad roll made when confronting an impulse will damage the character. But how? This is up to other players at the table to determine, not the GM - investigators play an active part in the downfall of their colleagues, and themselves.*

The Limits of Twists

This is a tough one, and is very much up to you as a designer. What we will say is that it's easier to provide guidelines here than rules, as most tables will settle on a level of power for twists that feels right to them.

Chop & Change - Twists

When adding a twist system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Remove the GM from every part of the conversation where a twist is involved
- Specify that particular players handle the twists of specific other players, perhaps in relation to their character bonds
- Tie twists into another system, allowing them to be built up to or earned in some way
- Allow a player to 'save' twists when rolled, not using them immediately but saving them for a more dramatic moment
- Corrupt twists to always give negative outcomes, but to reward a player in other ways (**The Wildsea: Storm & Root** does this with an optional subsystem, Snaps)

DAMAGE (& RESISTANCE) SUBSYSTEM

The Basics

- If you're creating a game in which combat can take the main stage from time to time, a dedicated system of damage is not essential, but likely helpful.
- Damage in Wild Words is recorded by marking tracks, and in the Core version of the rules relates to Aspects (for player characters, pg XX) and Strategy Tracks (for in-universe hazards, pg XX). Damage may also have associated effects, more narrative outcomes of a hit in combat that might change a target's attitude or positioning.
- Damage also relates to Impact (pg XX), and contains (sub)subsystems for Weakness, Resistance, and Immunity.

Assigning Damage to Characters

One of the first questions to ask yourself about damage is who assigns it, and to where.

For characters, damage is usually taken by marking aspects. If they can't mark an aspect, a character will likely take an injury instead (a specific temporary aspect with a number of boxes equal to the damage dealt, that may have narrative or mechanical consequences until healed). You might have damage assigned by the GM (where they choose the aspect affected) or by the player, and large amounts of damage might be able to be split between different tracks or only taken in one chunk.

In The Wildsea, players assign damage to whichever of their aspects they feel best suits the moment. Damage must be taken in a single chunk (so if a character takes 4 marks of damage, it all has to be marked on a single aspect), and if damage runs over the end of the aspect this results in an injury.

Assigning Damage to Hazards

Depending on how hazards are organised, damage can be assigned in different ways. If a hazard has a strategy track, damage is simply marked on it box by box. If a hazard has multiple tracks arranged as specific aspects, players might be able to choose which part of a hazard they deal damage to.

In The Sword Spiral, hazards have several small tracks tied to their abilities, much like a character's aspects. A particularly successful attack allows players to determine which track their damage is assigned to.

Damage Amounts

As standard, characters deal one mark of damage at normal impact. A high-impact attack may deal two marks, and a low-impact attack might deal one mark or have a non-damaging but still-useful effect.

These numbers are easily changed. For a more granular system, characters might deal one mark of damage at low impact, two at normal impact, and three at high impact. For a less complex damage system, characters might deal one mark of damage no matter their impact, with impact changing additional effects instead.

Drift assumes that low-impact attacks deal one mark of damage, standard impact two marks, and high impact three marks.

Damage Types

Damage might be split into various types, each of them useful in different situations or when affecting different hazards. Damage types might also have additional effects that are unique to them.

In Butterfly Steel, damage is split into two types - kinetic and psychic. Kinetic damage is purely physical, and psychic purely mental. Both have different effects associated with them, from leaving bleeding wounds to knocking targets down, and from temporarily denying senses or certain actions to control over thoughts and nightmares.

The more damage types you have, the less important a weakness, resistance, or immunity is (as it will likely come into play less often). This might change the cost of aspects that grant such abilities.

Weakness, Resistance, Immunity

If you're using damage types, allowing characters (and hazards) to gain weakness, resistance, or immunity to certain types adds an additional dimension with few extra rules.

- When a character is weak to a damage type, they take more marks when hit by it and effects might be more dramatic.
- When a character is resistant to a damage type, they take fewer marks from it and effects might be weaker, or ignored altogether.
- When a character is immune to a damage type, they take no marks no matter how strong a hit dealing that damage type is, and completely ignore associated effects.

These three options aren't exclusive, merely useful. You might not want to use anything other than simple resistances, or maybe you want to make it more complex and add automatic counters or reflections for certain damage types, or the ability to absorb a type and heal.

Chop & Change - Damage Methods

When adding a damage method to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Split types by theme, or have certain types effective against certain keywords.
- Have damage types apply asymmetrically, so either only characters or only hazards have to take damage types into account.
- Create a two-tier system, with a small number of 'main' damage types and then additional subtypes within those.

IMPACT SUBSYSTEM

The Basics

- Impact represents the power, or level of effect, that something has on something else (most typically that a character's actions have on the world around them).
- Impact can be applied both to marks (how many boxes are marked on a track) and effects (the more narrative elements of an action). It doesn't have to apply to both, but players will likely expect it to.
- There are several different ways impact can be handled - the box on the right delves into a couple of pre-made presentations that have a solid grounding.
- The ability you give players to access different levels of impact, and how easily that access comes, can have a huge impact on the power level of a game.
- Low-impact events likely make a very small mechanical difference, if they make one at all, and high-impact occurrences can often do a lot more mechanically than one might expect. This holds true for narrative effects as well, but it's important to remember that even a low-impact action can change the direction of a story.

Three Common Tiers

However you set out an impact system, there are three tiers that players will *expect* once they know that the impact of their actions can vary - Low, Standard, and High. This is most easily explained with doors...

- **Low Impact:** A character attempts to kick in a door, but the action has low impact. It might take several kicks to force the door open, or they might only be able to knock a few planks or panels out of the door.
- **Standard Impact:** A character attempts to kick in a door, and the action has standard impact. A solid kick is enough to break it open.
- **High Impact:** A character attempts to kick in a door, and they have high impact on the action. They might smash the door into splinters, kick it straight off of its hinges, or destroy the frame along with the door.

The examples above describe impact in a **narrative** form - the door is opened in all examples, but the feeling is very different.

Two Additional Tiers

optionally, you might want to specify that some options have No Impact (the door remains standing), or Massive Impact (the door, frame, and wall are destroyed). There's usually no point in a no-impact action.

Narrative vs Mechanical

The examples on the left deal with narrative impact, which can be tricky, but mechanical impact is much easier. An action or happening affects a track, and the level of impact determines how many boxes are marked (or cleared). See the sidebar on the right for more details.

What Determines Impact?

As a designer, whatever you want. It's a good idea to have character actions clock in at standard impact most of the time (it's in the name, after all), reserving high and low impact for moments it feels appropriate. You might make this a GM decision, which is fine, but there's nothing wrong with tying it to mechanical systems or character elements as well. Consider...

- Aspects that increase the impact of certain actions.
- A metacurrency that can be spent to change impact.
- Tying impact to a meter filling up.
- Adding impact based on certain die results, like odd numbers or doubles.

*In **The Wildsea**, actions have standard impact as... well, as standard. A character might be able to increase their impact by being in the right situation, with the blessing of the GM, but they can more reliably increase it by taking certain aspects or by choosing to Cut results on an action roll, making it less likely they'll succeed but more impactful if they do.*

IMPACT PRESENTATIONS

The examples below are pre-made systems based on impact, which can be adapted to your game if they fit.

Classic

Most actions have standard impact. Actions that are unsuited to a situation have low impact, and ones that match it perfectly have high impact. Impact affects narrative effects, and also changes the amount of boxes marked on a track (maybe 1 for low, definitely 1 for standard, 2 for high).

Technical

Most actions have standard impact. Impact can be increased through use of character elements, decreased by GM decree based on the resilience of what's being affected. Impact affects narrative effects, and also changes the amount of boxes marked (1 for low, 2 for standard, 3 for high).

Unbound

Impact is more track-based than narrative. Low impact doesn't exist. Standard impact marks 1 box, and every level of impact above this marks 1 box more. Characters are able to hyper-specialize, using impact to mark many boxes on a track at a time.

Story-Based

All actions and interactions with the world mark 1 box. Impact levels *can* vary, but they only relate to the narrative effects of actions and events.

Chop & Change - Impact

When adding an impact system to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Allow for Massive impact, marking all boxes on a track at once (The Wildsea handles impact this way)
- Have impact work differently for characters than it does for hazards and elements of the world
- Connect impact directly to a game's damage system, allowing for varying levels of damage
- Randomize impact with a die roll
- Restrict increasing impact to a function of consuming resources, limiting flexibility

SHARED ASSETS SUBSYSTEM

The Basics

- Most Wild Words games will likely have a character for each player, with information recorded on some kind of character sheet. A shared asset is something that all players have equal stake in, often represented on a separate sheet that's shared by everyone at the table.
- Shared assets are the best way to represent something like a home base or vehicle that exists for all characters.
- Shared assets might be available at all times, or restricted to certain scenes. The frequency of use and complexity of these assets will likely have a large impact on speed of play, especially if they're represented by a single sheet.

What is a Shared Asset?

Anything that multiple characters own and interact with might be a shared asset, but we recommend only giving such things a sheet of their own if they can be altered or improved during play. A shared asset works particularly well for representing...

- **A Vehicle:** Something that moves all players from place to place in the world, especially if there are rooms or fittings on that vehicle that they can interact with during a game.
- **A Base:** Such as a building or underground hideout that the characters retire to in between certain scenes.
- **A Faction:** Not all shared assets have to be physical – if all characters belong to a single group or faction, a sheet for this shared asset might record the opinions of NPCs or how the faction's connections or training benefits characters.

In Iron on Stone, all players share a hangar bay that their mechs return to after a mission. The hangar bay is where characters can unsuit and mingle, having roleplay-first interactions, but also where mechs are repaired and upgraded.

In Rise, the shared asset is the world that the nation-states share. The sheet for this shared asset tracks things like changes in era, barbarian activity, and the changing types of resources available to be claimed. Though the asset is shared it's not always a place for cooperation, and players might have their nation states claim certain elements of the shared asset for themselves from time to time.

Equal Opportunities

The most important element of a shared asset is that it can be used by everyone at the table in some form. Certain character choices or narrative roles might allow it to be used in different ways, but it's called a shared asset for a reason.

Ratings (page XX) are extremely useful when it comes to shared assets. They ensure that what an asset can do is at the same power level or usefulness for everyone, no matter which character or player is interacting with it. This isn't necessary – you might prefer certain characters have an easier or more rewarding time interacting with a shared asset – but it does help with table balance.

In The Wildsea, all characters can make a ratings roll using the ratings on their ship sheet. The edges and skills of the character rolling have no effect, as it's the capabilities of the vessel they're determining with their roll, but some particularly sea-focused characters might have their aspects come into play during these rolls.

Developing a Shared Asset

This might be done through the application of resources, the spending of metacurrency, or merely tied to in-game narrative or the duration of play. But developing a shared asset helps make it more unique, and increases the feeling of group ownership at the table.

In The Sword Spiral, the asset that everyone shares is a legend that tells of their heroic triumphs and grisly failures. This legend is updated at the end of every session, and narrative elements that have been added to the legend can be called upon for mechanical boosts in subsequent sessions.

Chop & Change - Shared Assets

When adding a shared asset to your Wild Words game, you might...

- Have it used as a storage space for certain types of resources that aren't owned by an individual character (**The Wildsea** does this with Cargo)
- Have it out of reach for the majority of a game, accessible only in a limited way for powerful bonuses
- Use the shared asset as a reward or goal that can only be accessed after a smaller story or arc is completed
- Treat the shared asset as an NPC that characters must manage their relationship with
- Have several shared assets that are under the control of pairs of characters, unique from each other

HAZARDS SUBSYSTEM

The Basics

- Hazards are dangerous elements of the world that a GM might introduce to challenge players.
- Hazards might come in the form of monsters, illnesses, environmental features, or dangerous NPCs.
- Players can deal with hazards in a number of ways, but they usually involve filling either aspect or strategy tracks to represent the hazard being bypassed or bested in some way.
- The nature and presentation of hazards depends very much on the kind of setting or world you're using, as does their potential lethality.
- Hazards might be pre-made for GMs to use, or designed to be pieced together quickly at the table.

Designing Hazards

Even if you intend for the GM to create hazards themselves, having a few examples (along with a step-by-step guide of how to design them) is extremely useful.

But that assumes you know how to make hazards yourself, and that's going to be hard to do unless you know the components they're made from.

At their base, hazards have two essential components.

- **Appearance:** How does this hazard look, and what kind of thing is it?
- **Effect:** What makes this hazard *hazardous*? What kind of danger does it represent?

All hazards should start out with these two questions in mind, and they relate heavily onto the kind of world and game you're crafting. For a traditional hack-and-slash fantasy romp, hazards might be dire wolves and mythical beasts that pose a direct danger to life and limb. For a slow-burning investigative tale, hazards might be criminal masterminds, street toughs, or even the investigation itself, and the effects they have might come in the form of prison time, spoiled clues, back-alley brawls, or stolen resources.

In Streets By Moonlight, each arc concerns the investigation of a single hazard, usually an eldritch force or creature, that is present in the background throughout the arc and has multiple effects on the narrative and characters. Smaller hazards may also make an appearance, posing a more immediate physical or mental threat.

Hazard Components

Once you know the rough form a hazard will take, and the effect you want it to have, you need to fill out the narrative and mechanical sides of it so that it can actually be used in a game. Hazards don't need *all* of the components listed below, so choose the ones that make sense for your setting and work with the rest of your rules and GM advice.

- **Name:** It's rather rude to kill characters before introducing yourself.
- **Type:** Does the hazard fall into a class or category of thing? This might cover size, genus, or qualities.
- **Description:** Helps GMs introduce and run a hazard, and gives extra meat for players that enjoy reading whole books.
- **Drives:** What does the hazard want? Why is it likely to be in the path of the characters?
- **Presence:** A focus on sight, smell, taste, sound... Anything the GM might use to make an encounter more vivid.
- **Rewards:** What do the characters get for besting the hazard, if anything?
- **Aspects:** Just like a character aspect, these describe the special things a hazard can do. These aspects may have tracks of their own, or the hazard might run on a strategy track (see the box on the right).
- **Quirks:** Optional aspects that a GM could use to spice up an encounter with a hazard for more experienced players.
- **Example Encounters:** Brief overviews of how an encounter with the hazard may begin or run.

ASPECT Vs STRATEGY TRACKS

If you're using tracks to measure the health or staying power of a hazard, there are two main ways you can do it. The first is with aspect tracks, the second strategy tracks. Both have their pros and cons.

Aspect Tracks

With aspect tracks, each unique thing the hazard can do (special abilities described by a hazard's aspects) has a track of its own, just like a character's aspects. When an aspect's track is fully marked the hazard loses access to that special rule, and when they're all fully marked the hazard is dead, beaten back, or rendered harmless.

Pros: Granular and easy to understand. Allows for a subsystem of characters targeting specific aspects with their attacks or other actions. Easy to represent visually. Tracks can be pre-made for GMs, keeping mental load and on-the-spot-design requirements low.

Cons: Hazard has a set difficulty based on the established tracks. Targeting certain tracks may be difficult, especially for characters unsuited to this type of hazard (for example, non-combat characters engaging a physical threat may feel overwhelmed or useless).

Strategy Tracks

With a strategy track, the GM can set a track with a number of boxes and break points that they feel works for the situation and the power level of the characters. Boxes on a strategy track can be filled by many different kinds of action, anything that would affect the hazard in some way. Reaching break points may represent the hazard using unique moves or changing behaviour. When the strategy track is full, the hazard is overcome.

Pros: Extremely flexible, set by the GM to suit the exact situations and the condition of characters and players. Helps involve all characters in a hazardous encounter (for example, helpful actions taken by non-combat characters in a fight should still mark the strategy track). Measures more the overall status of a hazard than one specific thing, such as damage or stress.

Cons: GM must set the track. Leads to more complex encounters and more on-the-fly rulings. Targeting specific aspects potentially more difficult.

The Danger of Hazards

So what can a hazard do that makes it hazardous?

There's a bit of advice on the previous page, but you should consider...

- **Direct Damage:** The hazard can attack characters, damaging their aspects (or other tracks). *A rampaging orc might swing axes around, inflicting grievous harm on fleshy characters.*
- **Resource Damage:** Either through destruction or the addition of negative tags. *A potent storm might soak all paper-based resources to the point of illegibility.*
- **Narrative Effect:** This could change the position of a character or give them an additional problem to worry about, perhaps inflicting cut (page xx). *Being pursued by police might force characters to use the rooftops rather than the streets to get around, and add cut on rolls with them interacting with law-abiding citizens.*
- **Denial:** This could render some edges, skills, aspects, or resources impossible to use, or shut off narrative options usually present for a character. *A computer virus might rip through commonly-accessed systems on a starship, making computer-based skills impossible to use and shutting down warp travel for a time.*

Tackling Hazards

Whether a hazard is monstrous, environmental, or just deeply strange, the aspects and skills of a character should be effective against it in some way. Consider the effects of damage from character weapons (and how that might tie into an impact or type system, pg XX), how the environment might be of use (or become a hindrance), and if certain hazards are unique or omnipresent enough that they might be called out in aspects or skill descriptions.

In Rise, barbarians are a specific type of hazard that all nation-states will have to contend with at some point. Many aspects change how a player will be able to affect these barbarians. Floods and other natural disasters, on the other hand, are rare - there are few skills or aspects that aid in combating them, and the effects are more narrative.

Weakness and Resistance

If you're using damage types, consider having aspects that describe the weaknesses and resistances of hazards. Also consider how they work - are they the same as character weaknesses and resistances, or is this element asymmetrical?

In The Wildsea, hazards deal larger chunks of damage than wildsailors usually do. When a character has a resistance against damage, they reduce the amount of marks they'd make by two. When a hazard has a resistance, they only reduce it by one - this addresses the imbalance in damage potential without losing granularity when it comes to tracks.

Nebulous and Eternal Hazards

Not all hazards can be dealt with up close and personal. Some might require elements of a story to be completed in order to be rendered ineffective, or even completely lack aspect or strategy tracks of their own to represent an omnipresent threat in certain areas of the world.

In The Wildsea, travelling through the canopy of the world-forest without a ship is inherently dangerous. In some ways, the entire sea is a hazard - it can deal damage, have effects, impose cut - but it has no tracks. It's just there to be dealt with by characters that don't have the safety of a vessel (and is so important to the world that several skills and many aspects directly describe how they interact or affect it).

Chop & Change - Hazards

When adding hazards to your game, you might...

- Have hazards that directly relate to the characters themselves, built by the GM after character creation
- Have hazards evolve and change over time if not beaten back or destroyed
- Use hazards to represent a mystery or puzzle that the characters need to solve, with tracks as a time limit rather than something they want to fill
- Give ownership of hazards out to particular players to control alongside their character rather than the GM, especially if they're elements of the weather or environment
- Have single-paragraph simple hazards for a GM to use as inspiration (The Wildsea does this for each type of hazard)

Example Hazard Entry

This is a lot of information, so a visual example of a hazard entry might help here. Below is a cut-down version of one of the classic Wildsea hazards, the pinwolf.

Pinwolves

[Medium] Swift Staccato Predators

Vicious pack hunters with stiletto limbs, pinwolves are a seemingly omnipresent threat across the various reaches and territories of the wildsea. Their habits and cunning, combined with their natural speed and vicious natures, make them a serious threat to even experienced sailors.

Drives

Hunt Incautious Sailors: Of all the beasts of the rustling waves, pinwolves are perhaps the most adept at understanding and exploiting the habits of wildsailors.

Presence

Sight: Bursts of uncanny movement. Long twitching tongues.

Sound: The sharp impacts of their pin-like limbs. Scraping and skittering. Ominous hissing.

Smell: Musky - a mixture of sweat and blood.

Resources

Specimens: Pin-Limb, Flexible Tongue, Beast Bones

Whispers: Unsettling Movement, Approaching Pack

Aspects

Pin-Limbs: Pinwolves can climb any surface their limbs can punch into, with the strongest able to puncture even metal. These limbs deal light to medium CQ Spike damage, and charges can deal medium Blunt damage.

Staccato Movement: Pinwolves move in swift, unpredictable bursts, making them difficult to evade. Add cut to actions taken to dodge or otherwise escape a pinwolf while it has full freedom of movement.

Quirks

Armoured Hide: The pinwolf's fur is matted and spiked, giving it resistance to Keen and Blunt damage.

Mottled: The pinwolf's hide shifts and flickers, giving it efficient camouflage against the rustling waves.

PART THREE SKELETAL EXAMPLE - THE WILDSEA

General Overview

The following pages are a technical breakdown of the very first Wild Words game, **The Wildsea**.

Setting, Genre, and Tone

Setting: A world of endless forests, a treetop sea sailed by chainsaw ships.

Genre: Vibrant Post-Apoc (the world has ended, but the new world is actually better for a lot of people in terms of opportunity and freedom), New Weird (unusual ways of living and uncanny creatures are the norm, traditional magic is sidelined in favour of weirdness)

Tone: Bright Horror (terrible things happen, but there's always hope)

The Conversation

The player roles for the Wildsea follow the traditional TTRPG split of 'GM' and 'Players with Characters'.

GM: The Firefly, the Wildsea's GM figure, provides story seeds and hooks, controls hazards and NPCs, and helps direct the shared story of the world. The Firefly helps to direct focus from player to player during the game, and may track specific actions and reactions that are taken during high-tension scenes such as combat or chases.

Players: Each player has a character of their own, but they can also take a smaller share of the GM role from time to time based on doubles in dice results. Player actions are fiction-first, with the rules coming into play in response to their wants. Player characters have no mechanical death-state - death is a narrative event, though serious injury is entirely possible via mechanical means.

Scenes

Split into three distinct types, Scenes, Montages, and Journeys. Scenes cover normal actions and exploration, Montages allow characters to complete a single task, and Journeys have the crew interact with their shared asset (the ship) in order to move from place to place across the leafy sea using stricter, ritualized rules.

Tracks

Used to measure damage to characters and hazards, and set by the Firefly in order to track changes and developments within the world of the game. Tracks are flexible by nature, and multiple boxes can be marked thanks to impact and the interaction of damage and weaknesses/resistances.

Dice, Pools, and Rolls

Most dice pools are made from between 1 and 6 d6s, and are rolled to find a result that sits within one of three bands - Disaster (1-3), Conflict (4-5), and Triumph (6). There's an additional band, Twist (accessed by rolling doubles) that allows players to take the narrative reins for a moment and add an unexpected benefit to an action (though twists favour uninvolved players above the ones that are rolling). Difficulty (and other problems) are addressed by cutting results, rather than cutting dice, starting with the highest result. If all results would be cut, instead roll 1d6 and treat triumphs as conflicts.

Actions

These are freeform, and a single action has no specified length - it should allow a character to do something of note, as a guideline. When an action is Difficult, Dangerous, or Dramatic, the dice are rolled.

Tasks are longer actions, reserved for montage-type scenes.

Backgrounds

Players choose three for their character, but may take elements from within any background - the chosen three are merely a guide.

Edges

There are seven edges, themed after the setting in terms of name. Using an edge as part of an action roll gives 1d6.

Skills

Skills are broken down into two categories, skills and languages. Each skill directly affects certain kind of actions, but can also be interpreted loosely to give benefits in related situations (rewards clever thinking). Each language records fluency in a spoken tongue and information about the culture behind that language. Skills and languages have three potential ranks, and give 1d6 for each rank when used to add to a roll.

Aspects

Combine tracks (for absorbing damage and using special rules), types (which affect how tracks are cleared), narrative elements (with name and description allowing thematic uses), and special rules (which override the usual rules of the wildsea) into packets of information contained within backgrounds. Characters choose multiple aspects at creation, and they can be developed and added to throughout play. Aspects add a d6 if they're relevant to an action, even in name or description only.

Meters

Not used by the Wildsea core game.

Impulses

Split into Drives (which are positive) and Mires (which are negative).

Drives describe what a character strives for and satisfying or working towards drives can clear mire and add milestones (used for character progression).

Mires represent the negative effects of a character losing faith in themselves or giving in to terror and cruelty. They each have a two-box track, which imposes narrative suggestions when one box is marked and cut-based mechanical requirements when both boxes are marked.

Resources

Split into four categories, Salvage, Specimens, Whispers, and Charts. Salvage is mostly used to build temporary gear, specimens to make food, drinks, and alchemical concoctions, whispers to change the world in small ways (the same way a twist can), and charts to aid with navigation and discovering new places during a journey.

Resources can be used to add 1d6 to dice rolls for actions, but doing so risks the resource – if the roll goes well the resource remains, if it goes badly the resource is destroyed.

Resources are also used for healing, and traded for other (more useful resources). They can have positive or negative tags that can make both of these activities easier or more difficult.

Wealth

Not used by the Wildsea core game – smaller non-resource interactions (such as buying drinks or food) is covered by the concept of Scratch, weird stuff kept in pockets that is always enough for basic, boring purposes.

Metacurrency

Milestones are earned during each session and after the conclusion of large story arcs, named after the events that inspired them. Milestones are used to extend tracks, purchase new skills and languages, and combine, develop, or gain new aspects. Stakes, a metacurrency that you can trade cargo for, are used to create ships.

Creation Methods

Characters are made by making a number of choices at the beginning of a game, depending on the level of experience a Firefly and players want the characters to have.

Ships are made by spending stakes, a resource shared by all players.

Twists

Accessed by rolling doubles on dice or by using whispers during a scene. Decided by players uninvolved in the roll, confirmed by players that rolled and the Firefly.

Damage (and Resistance)

Multiple damage types are available, combined with ranges (CQ or LR) to make weapons for characters. Characters and hazards can have resistances, immunities, and weaknesses, but these are more impactful in terms of adding and removing marks when used by characters.

Impact

Marks made on tracks (and narrative effects) are governed by impact, either Low, Standard, High, or Massive.

Shared Assets

Characters are assumed to be part of a crew, and own a ship together. The ship is a shared asset, with track-based ratings, rooms, and weapons of its own, constructed by using stakes by all of the players at the table.

Hazards

Monsters, pirates, and elements of the environment. Hazards have names and descriptions, types, drives of their own, a presence entry (showing how they look, taste, smell etc), potential resources a character might get from besting them, aspects describing their special rules, and quirks that add optional aspects. Hazards are under the control of the Firefly by default, and act without rolling (prompting responses from targeted characters). Hazards don't have innate tracks, but Fireflies can either give them tracks for each of their aspects or use strategy tracks to measure the progress of a fight or encounter.

WILDSEA RULES BREAKDOWN

CHARACTER ELEMENTS

Edges

Grace: Elegance, precision, agility

Iron: Force, determination, willpower

Instinct: Sense, intuition, reaction

Sharps: Logic, wit, planning

Teeth: Savagery, passion, destruction

Tides: Exploration, learning, lore

Veils: Shadows, ciphers, secrecy

Skills

Brace: Defend, determination, immobility

Break: Break, smash, demolish

Concoct: Chemical reactions, essence/crezzer extraction

Cook: Spices, sustenance, meats, fruits, heat

Delve: Explore ruins, bypass locks/traps, identify the past

Flourish: Showmanship, performance, art

Hack: Chop, identify unknown plant hazards, spin tales

Harvest: Forage, identify plants, nurture plants/insects

Hunt: Observe, track, shoot, render specimens

Outwit: Sneak, infiltrate, deceive

Rattle: Mend, maintain, invent

Scavenge: Locate, collect, identify properties and value

Sense: Detect, intuit, react

Study: Discover, record, interpret, decipher

Sway: Convince, argue, threaten

Tend: Heal, calm, communicate with beasts

Vault: Climb, leap, dodge, tumble

Wavewalk: Brachiate, swing, navigate the wilds

Aspects

Consist of a name, a type, a track and a special rule. Mark aspect tracks with a / as they get damaged or X if they are subjected to a permanent Burn (other tracks work the same way when marking progress). A character can have seven in total, not counting temporary aspects.

Languages

Language Ranks: 1 (Smattering), 2 (Knowledge), 3 (Fluency). *Languages can be used to make friends, impress others, gain extra information.*

Low Sour: A mongrel 'common tongue'.

Chthonic: Ancient human tongue.

Saprekk: Thick, rolling ektus tongue.

Gaudimm: Gau language of soft clicks, subtle twitches, and pheromone bursts.

Knock: Hissing, chittering tzelicrae language.

Brasstongue: Clipped and precise trader tongue.

Raka Spit: Rapid patter of hunters and leviathanneers.

Lyre-Bite: Liltongue of poets and songwriters.

Old Hand: Sign language.

Signalling: Code language delivered with flags, flares, signal lamps.

Highvin: Primarily written language often found on pre-verdant ruins.

Mires & Drives

Mire: Marked in response to an event you're caught in, something you're forced to do against your judgement or as a consequence of discovering or witnessing something truly disturbing.

If you act contrary to a mire, automatically cut a number of dice equal to the marks on its track.

Drive: Advancing or satisfying a drive lets you choose one of...

- Gain a whisper
- Clear a mark of mire
- Gain a minor milestone (once per session only)
- Gain a major milestone, remove and replace it (once per session only)

SCENE RULES

Action Rolls

Edge (1d6)

+ **Skill or Language (up to 3d6)**

+ **Advantage (up to 2d6)**

Advantage includes pieces of the environment, resources, aspects, favourable situations, and helpful assistance – usually 1d6 (2d6 for multiple advantages).

Helping Hands: Two crewmembers working together on the same task choose which provides the edges, advantages, or skill ranks. Both are affected by any negatives that result.

Reading the Dice

Use the highest single die and note if you have doubles. Triples or above only count as doubles.

Action Roll Results

6 – Triumph: Complete success, no drawbacks. Mark/clear a box on a track.

5, 4 – Conflict: Success with a drawback. Usually marks/clears a box.

3, 2, 1 – Disaster: Failure and narrative complication or drawback. Usually doesn't mark/clear a box.

Doubles – Twist: Adds a small, potentially useful twist, suggested by any player. Firefly has final say.

Cut

Removes results after the roll, starting with the highest.

Cut for Difficulty: Firefly lets you know if a roll is particularly difficult.

Cut for Precision: Cut 1 result to aim at a location/part. Declare before roll.

Cut for Impact: Cut for extra Impact. Declare intent before rolling.

Impact

Low: Action is weaker/has less effect, marks less boxes, downgrades power.

Normal: Most actions. Marks one box.

High: More effect/power. Marks an extra box.

Massive: Hugely potent, e.g. ship-scale armament. Marks all boxes in a track.

IN-SCENE COMBAT RULES

Tracking Focus

Narrative dictates the order.

Hijacking Focus: If you hijack a Player's focus, they have to agree first. Focus always returns to whatever it was hijacked from when action is done.

Attacking and Damage

Players usually choose if they inflict damage (and on which track) or an effect. Sometimes it's both. Attacks normally mark 1 track box. Increased Impact or a more effective Damage Type marks an extra box.

Damage Types

Blunt: Crushing - stun and break

Keen: Cutting - slice and bleed

Spike: Piercing - penetrate and impale

Hewing: Chopping - split and break

Serrated: Sawing - rip and tear

Toxin: Poison - sicken and confuse

Acid: Corrosive - melt and sear

Blast: Explosive - stun and shatter

Volt: Electrical - shock and paralyze

Frost: Cold - slow and freeze

Salt: Crystalline - dry and banish

Flame: Burning - melt and inspire fear

Range

Close Quarters (CQ) or Long Range (LR)

Using LR in CQ combat (or vice versa) inflicts a Cut.

Attack Roll Results

6 - Triumph

Powerful blow. Deal damage and might inflict an effect.

5, 4 - Conflict

Attack deals damage and maybe associated effect, but you might take some damage, suffer an effect, lose a resource or be put in a less favourable position.

3, 2, 1 - Disaster

Attack misses or does no damage. You definitely take some damage or an effect, and might lose a resource or be put in a less favourable position too.

Doubles - Twist... or Critical

Unexpected narrative effect/critical with increased impact.

Defending

Players roll to defend, opponents do not roll to attack.

Defence Roll Results

6 - Triumph

Completely avoid the threat (though some powerful opponents may have aspects that make even a triumph dangerous).

5, 4 - Conflict

Avoid the worst but take damage, an effect, a negative change in position, or destruction (or temporary denial) of a resource.

3, 2, 1 - Disaster

Take damage, and likely associated effect and loss of resource or position as well.

Doubles - Twist... or Counter

Unexpected narrative effect, or counter with a mark of damage against them (if in range).

Resistance, Immunity, & Weakness

- Resistance reduces damage to a hazard by one mark, damage to a character by two marks. Can reduce or eliminate injury.
- Immunity is full protection.
- Weakness increases damage to a hazard by one mark, damage to a character by two marks. Injuries may be more detrimental or last longer.

Stacking: If you have two resistances to a certain type of damage, count that as an immunity. If you have an immunity and a weakness, treat it as a resistance. If you have a weakness and a resistance, they cancel each other out.

Injuries

Caused by hazards (such as monsters), disease, large amounts of damage, etc. They might:

- Force a Cut on some actions.
- Take away a Skill or sense.
- Add negative effects to actions.

Injuries are represented by temporary tracks.

MONTAGE RULES

Narrative is condensed into **Tasks**.

Required Resources still count as Advantages, including teamwork.

Task Types

Exploration

Tracking down individuals/services, chasing down leads, indulging curiosity, gaining local knowledge, discovering routes and options. Uses various Skills.

Acquisition

Acquires Resources in appropriate areas with three approaches. Use Acquisition Results table.

Scavenging: Salvage.

Hunting: Specimens.

Gathering: Specimens.

Acquisition Results

6 - Triumph

Gain a solid untainted resource.

5, 4 - Conflict

Gain a resource with a negative tag.

3, 2, 1 - Disaster

Resource not found or ruined during collection.

Doubles - Twist

Gain a resource with a unique or positive tag suggested by you or another player.

Sample Resource Tags

(Salvage) **Sturdy:** Repairs extra damage mark.

(Salvage) **Ornate:** Has far more worth.

(Salvage) **Broken:** Almost useless.

(Specimen) **Pure/Medicinal:** Heals extra mark.

(Specimen) **Heirloom:** Has far more worth.

(Specimen) **Rotten:** Makes you sick if you eat it.

(Whisper) **Echoing:** Use twice before fading.

(Whisper) **Hungry:** Removes an element of the world, rather than adding one.

(Chart) **Faded:** Almost impossible to read.

(Any) **Pre-Verdant:** Ancient.

Creation

Combines Resources to create temporary Aspects for self or others. Each temporary Aspect will have a name, track, useful ability, and is used up forever when the track is filled. Uses the Creation Roll Results table.

Concocting: Requires 2 Resources (any type). Makes a related potion.

Cooking: Requires 2 Specimens. Makes a full meal with related property.

Crafting: Requires 2 Salvage. Makes a piece of useful temporary Gear.

Creation Roll Results

6 - Triumph

Recipient gains temporary benefit related to resources used.

5, 4 - Conflict

Recipient gains temporary 2-track aspect with downsides, or no downside, but it doesn't quite do what was intended.

3, 2, 1 - Disaster

Creation might be a bizarre ornament/culinary curiosity, but gives no benefits.

Doubles - Twist

Creation has small, unexpected benefit in addition to the usual result.

Recovery

Each option requires a Resource or safe, appropriate environment (allowing the Resource to be spent and automatically take the Conflict result if desired). Uses the Recovery table:

Healing: Requires an appropriate Specimen. Clears marks from Traits or animals.

Repairing: Requires appropriate Salvage. Clears marks from Gear or mechanicals.

Relaxing: Requires an appropriate Whisper. Clears marks from Mires.

Recovery Roll Results

6 - Triumph

Heal two marks of damage to an aspect, ship rating, injury track or mire.

5, 4 - Conflict

Heal one mark of damage to an aspect, ship rating, injury track or mire.

3, 2, 1 - Disaster

Add an extra mark of damage to an aspect, ship rating, injury track or mire.

Doubles - Twist

You don't consume the resource used to carry out your recovery.

Projects

Fall outside the timescale of Actions or Tasks and take several or more of the latter. To mark them:

- **Time:** Mark a box for each appropriate span of effort or study.
- **Rolls:** Roll as per normal Actions.
- **Resources:** Might be required and might help the process.
- **Aid:** Others may offer help or expertise.

JOURNEY RULES

Sequence

Departure: Set destination, run a Montage, Scene, or Checklist of preparations.

Progress & Encounters: Crewmembers can choose to take turns At the Helm and On Watch. Boxes are marked on the Firefly's secret Progress, Risk, Pathfinding (if someone is Cartographizing) and Riot (if poor leadership, crew treatment, or excessive danger might bring mutiny) tracks. Filling a Progress track ends the journey. Filling a Risk track means a powerful foe or threat has found you. Filling a Pathfinding track provides the cartographer with a relevant Chart. Filling a Riot track results in potential mutiny.

Arrival: Arrival at the final destination when the Progress track is complete.

At the Helm [Essential]

Choose an option:

- **Cut a Path:** Travel at decent speed, as safely as possible. Mark a single Progress box. When the Watch Roll is made, you can choose to Encounter or steer clear easily.
- **Forge Ahead:** Swift but rough passage. Mark 2 Progress boxes. When the Watch Roll is made, the ship usually blunders into an encounter or avoids it with some damage.
- **Drop Anchor:** Stop to rest, no Progress, minimum fear of interruption. Undercrew take watch and the crew can take a Montage.
- **Challenging Terrain:** This can force a Ratings Roll to progress.

Ratings Rolls

Used to avoid obstacles, in tricky maneuvers, to progress in a chase, etc.

Ratings Roll Results

6 - Triumph

Bypass the obstacle safely.

5, 4 - Conflict

Bypass the obstacle but mark 1 Rating damage.

3, 2, 1 - Disaster

Fail to bypass the obstacle and mark 1 Rating damage.

Doubles - Twist

An unexpected event in addition to the result.

On Watch [Essential]

Choose an option:

- **Make a Discovery:** Choose a Chart, add a Whisper, interpret. Both are then lost.
- **Watch the Waves:** Make a random roll on Watch Roll Results.

Threat

The Firefly secretly rolls 1d6 (2d6, take the highest result if the crew has a Chart of the area) to determine the Threat level of any Encounters: 6 is a danger-free opportunity; 5 or 4 is a hazardous encounter with a useful pay-off; a 3, 2 or 1 indicates that there's an immediate danger with little pay-off. The Firefly usually gives clues to the level of any threat.

Watch Roll Results

6 - Peace

Montage, Meeting, Tall Tale (gain a Whisper), Tree Shanty, Undercrew Issue, Reflection (heal Mire)

5, 4 - Order

Nearby Ship, Outpost, Survivor Needing Rescue, Wreck or Ruin, Cache of Cargo/Supplies, Conspiracy

3, 2, 1 - Nature

Weather, Natural Feature, Wonder (heal Mire), Horror, Unsettled Landfall, True Wilds

Tending the Engine [Optional]

Choose an option:

- **Tend to the Engine:** Immediately hijack focus if there are any problems relating to the engine to attempt an instant fix/bypass.
- **Overload the Engine:** Uses a resource suitable for fuel. Increase impact on a roll to take advantage of the ship's temporary power/speed, or mark an additional box on the journey track.
- **Muffle the Engine:** Uses a soft, muffling resource. Increase impact on a roll made to take advantage of the ship's quieter profile or stealthily leave an area without making a roll (if you haven't been spotted).

Cartographising [Optional]

Slowly create a chart of the area you're travelling through - every time you find a particularly important landmark the Pathfinding track created by the Firefly gets marked. When the track is fully marked you gain a chart - add it to your resources and name it.

Watching the Weather [Optional]

Roll 1d6 on Weather-Watching Results.

Weather-Watching Results

6 - Clear Skies

Weather clears.

5, 4 - Continuation

Weather continues as it is.

3, 2, 1 - A Change for the Worse

Driving rain/hail (lowers visibility), blazing sunshine (potential heatstroke), living storm or bizarre weather phenomenon.

Encounters

Avoiding an Encounter: May or may not require a Ratings Roll.

Engaging an Encounter

The options are:

- **Choice:** The crew chooses from options provided by the Firefly.
- **Challenge:** A threat to the ship. Player At the Helm may need to make Ratings Rolls.
- **Scene Encounter:** Usually when the players leave the ship.