



SPECTRUM ROLEPLAYING

A Genesys hack by
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Introduction

Spectrum is a table-top roleplaying game for a Game Master and 1-5 players. It uses the custom dice from the Genesys Roleplaying System (a.k.a. the Narrative Dice System, a.k.a. the Fantasy Flight Star Wars Roleplaying Game) to help you tell stories of adventure, resistance, and whatever else you can dream up together.

To play, you'll need

- a **group of friendly people** to play with
- a set of **Genesys dice**, or a **dice-rolling app**
- four two-sided **tokens**, with one dark side and one light side
- a **character sheet** and a writing implement for each player

Additionally, one of you (probably the GM) will need to have **read the rules** to be able to teach them, and the GM will probably want

to sketch a **situation** to put the players' characters in to kick off the game.

On Playing Fascists and Villains

Many Genesys games (and, by extension, Spectrum games) have villains that draw on real world fascists as inspiration: galactic empires, multinational hyper-corps, etc. This is fine, but if you're going to use these rules to do that, you **must**:

- Know something about real fascists and the harm they've caused.
- Remember that fascists are insecure bullies whose contributions to the human experience have mostly been pointless suffering and destruction.
- Be careful that you aren't normalizing fascist ideology or glorifying fascists' deeds.
- **Never** portray fascists as misunderstood victims.

The Dice

Spectrum uses Genesys dice to represent characters' skills and abilities, the advantages and disadvantages of their situation, and the magnitude of the challenges that they're up against. These dice are:

Name	Symbol	Role
Ability Dice		Characters' basic competence
Proficiency Dice		Characters' special skills
Boost dice		Advantageous circumstances
Difficulty Dice		The chance that things will go wrong
Challenge Dice		Especially dire opposition
Setback Dice		Disadvantageous circumstances

Making Rolls

Players roll the dice when their characters do something risky or dramatic. The GM doesn't roll dice. Instead, the antagonists act based on the outcome of the players' rolls.

Building the pool

To determine which dice to roll:

1. Start with

2. If the character's skills apply, upgrade one to a

3. If another character is helping add +

Any characters who help are also exposed to potential consequences.

4. If the character has favourable circumstances, add 1-3

This could include:

- high ground
- the element of surprise
- equipment (cool armour, a glowing sword, mystical powers, etc.)
- boosts from Advantages on previous rolls

5. The GM adds difficulty dice (1-3

This is influenced by:

- who or what the opposition is
- any special abilities the opposition has

Opposition with special abilities may upgrade the difficulty dice.

Characters' talents may downgrade the difficulty dice.

6. If there are unfavourable circumstances, add 1-3

This could include:

- difficult terrain, weather, smoke, etc.
- setbacks from disadvantages results on previous rolls

Reading the Results

Once you've rolled your dice count up Successes, Failures, Advantages, and Threats.

- Count **Successes and Failures**, and subtract Failures from Successes
 - If there are at least **2 net Successes**, the character gets what they wanted with no complications
 - If there are **0 or 1 net Successes**, the character gets what they want but Game Master makes a **Soft Move**
 - If there are any **net Failures** the Game Master makes a **Hard Move** (the more failures, the harder their move)
- Count **Advantages and Threats**, and subtract Threats from Advantages
 - If there are **net Advantages**, the player spends them on future Boost dice or inventing advantageous details
 - If there are **net Threats**, the Game Master spends them on future Setback dice or inventing complications
- Triumphs count as Successes; Despairs count as Failures. If a Triumph was rolled the player spends it for a Boost or to invent a significant detail; if a Despair was rolled the Game Master spends it for a Setback or to invent a significant detail (this happens even if the Triumph or Failure was cancelled)

Example

*Sam is rolling for their character Bortash to quietly scale the walls of a tower. They roll      and get two Successes, an Advantage, one Failure, and two Threats for a net roll of **one Success** and **one Threat**.*

Bortash makes it over the wall, but a sharp-eared guard hears something and starts to investigate; Bortash will have a  on their next roll if they're trying to be sneaky.

Changing the Odds

Upgrading and Downgrading Dice

Some character or antagonist abilities will call for the ability or difficulty dice in a roll to be upgraded or downgraded. Dice that help a roll (♦ or ♡) and dice that hinder it (◆ or ♥) are upgraded or downgraded separately, and a roll can have both its ability dice and its difficulty dice upgraded.

To upgrade a roll's ability dice:

- If there's an ability die in the pool (♦) replace it with a proficiency die (♡).
- If there are no ability dice in the pool, add one.

To downgrade a roll's ability dice:

- If there's a proficiency die (♡) in the pool, replace it with an ability die (♦).
- If not, remove an ability die.
- If there are no ability dice, do nothing.

The procedure for difficulty dice is equivalent: replace a difficulty die (◆) with a challenge die (♥), or add a new difficulty die if the pool only has challenge dice.

When the rules say to apply upgrades and downgrades to a roll's ability or difficulty dice, an upgrade cancels a downgrade

Some examples:

Upgrades	Downgrades
♦ → ♡	♦ → (nothing)
♡ ♦ → ♡ ♡	♡ ♦ → ♦ ♦
♥ ♥ → ♥ ♥ ◆	♥ ♥ → ♥ ◆
♥ ♥ ◆ → ♥ ♥ ♥	♥ ♥ ◆ → ♥ ♥ ◆

Luck Tokens

In addition to the characters and antagonists, the players and GM have access to a pool of four **Luck tokens**: two sided tokens which can be either dark or light.

Players may flip a token from **light to dark** to:

- Upgrade their ability dice for a roll
- Invent an important detail for the story (*it may seem like we're trapped here, but we actually arranged for our friend Bix to pick us up and complete our escape*)
- Narrate a flashback as long as it doesn't contradict the established fiction (the game-master may ask you to flip more tokens for particularly incredible or outlandish flashbacks).

The GM may flip a token from **dark to light** to:

- Upgrade the difficulty dice of a roll
- Invent an important detail for the story (*the contact you're meeting is actually your old friend Bix, the one you left for dead on Marselay IV*)
- Make a **Soft Move**

The GM may flip **three tokens from dark to light** to make a **Hard Move** at any time.

Start with two tokens dark side up and two tokens light side up.

Running the Game

GM Moves

When the Game Master makes a **Soft Move**, they:

- Foreshadow a new problem

- *you hear guards coming*
- *the anomaly starts to destabilize*
- *the senator's disposition sours*

- Aggravate an existing problem

- *the guards arrive*
- *the anomaly breaks containment*
- *the senator becomes irritated*

- Follow through on a problem that you've foreshadowed

- *the guards shoot somebody*
- *the anomaly punctures the ship's hull*
- *the senator gets up and leaves*

- Ask the player how the situation gets worse

When the Game Master makes a **Hard Move**, they:

- Suddenly introduce a new problem

- *a dark figure jumps out and suddenly disarms you*
- *you start to feel the effects of the poison you just drank*
- *it's revealed that the adversary's agents have been here all along*

- Hurt somebody

- *in the midst of the firefight somebody gets shot and is badly injured*
- *the shield generator overheats and burns the mechanic and the soldier who was helping them*
- *as you try to break up a fight you knock somebody down and they hit their head; they don't get up*

- Damage or take away something important

- *the ship's damaged engines are ejected and explode*
- *the inquisitor you're duelling disarms you and smashes your weapon*
- *your starfighter sinks into the swamp*

- Cut off an opportunity

- *the agent you were pursuing gets lost in the crowd*
- *the blast doors close, cutting off your avenue of attack*

Consequences

Spectrum doesn't explicitly track injuries, hit points, or statuses, but when something bad happens to the characters it should be reflected in the fiction.

- a character with a broken leg can't run away
- a character whose cover is blown can't just Bluff Harder
- an antagonist who's been disarmed should be less perilous

Consequences should include things other than violence. Characters' resources, relationships, and reputations are all on the line.

Characters should also be able to address these consequences with appropriate fictional actions:

- an injured character could lay low for a few hours and apply a hyper-splint to their broken leg
- a character whose cover is blown could lure away the person who recognized them and silently eliminate them
- an antagonist without a weapon could retreat and find a new one

Injuries and past failures can absolutely be disadvantageous circumstances that incur ■.

Severe consequences like death, permanent injury, public disgrace, etc. should only be on the table if it's dramatically appropriate and all players consent.

Antagonists

Antagonists in **Spectrum** come in three varieties:

Minions are pushovers, there to make the players look cool and add a little friction, not to pose an actual threat. The default difficulty of roles targeting them is ♦♦, and they might have one or two pieces of equipment that give players setback dice (■) in the wrong situation. A single successful roll against them is enough to take them out.

Rivals are more dangerous than Minions. Their default difficulty is ♦♦♦, and they often incur at least one ■ with fine equipment, clever tactics, and the like. It should take two to four successes to bring down a Rival.

Nemesis antagonists should feel scary, and should be nearly impossible to take down. Their default difficulty is ♦♦♦. Nemeses should always have some special assets that incur ■ dice and special rules to make them extra intimidating.

Example special abilities for antagonists:

- *Delegator*: Minions acting on behalf of this villain incur an extra ■; Rivals get a ■ and upgraded difficulty.
- *Active*: When players roll 2+ successes, this GM can still make a **Soft Move** with this antagonist.
- *Deadly*: When players roll 0-1 successes the GM can make a **Hard Move** instead of a **Soft Move**.
- *Invincible*: this villain can't be stopped, only slowed down, tricked, or outrun.

Of course, antagonists can be vivid and colourful characters, but they can also be natural forces, technical challenges, or other, more abstract obstacles—whatever works best for your story.

Characters

To create a character in **Spectrum**:

- Give them **Pronouns** and one or more **Names**.

- *full name*
- *nickname*
- *call sign*
- *pet name*
- *legal name*
- *moniker*
- *etc.*

- Give them a **Description**:

- *what do they look like?*
- *what do they wear?*
- *how do they move? carry themselves?*
- *how do they talk?*
- *what species are they?*
- *what's their gender presentation?*

- List three kinds of **Skills** they have.
Characters upgrade an ability die (◆ -> ♀) when making a roll where their skills are helpful. Skills should be broad and evocative, but not so broad that they can apply to every situation.

“Broad” will also depend on your genre: *Fighting* might be a good skill in a detective game, but in a space pirates game you might distinguish between *Plasma Cutlasses*, *Laser Cannons*, and *Ion Pistols*.

- List three **Assets**. Assets gives characters +■ when they're making a roll where it's useful. “Asset” can be as literal or as abstract as you want.

Example Assets:

- *invincible ancestral armour*
- *thieves tools*
- *knowledge of imperial protocols*
- *saints' blessings*

- *a squad of fearless cat-person bodyguards*

- List three **Talents**: situations the character is particularly adept in; when making a roll in that situation the character downgrades the difficulty before rolling.

Example Talents:

- *dealing with automatons*
- *seeing through deception*
- *striking from hiding*
- *sweet talking someone into bending the rules*

- Give them a **Weakness**: a situation where they increase difficulty.

Example Weaknesses:

- *applying brute force*
- *lying to someone's face*
- *dealing with computers*
- *standing by while injustice is done*

Your GM might give you a list of skills, assets, and talents to pick from, or you can work with them to make sure your picks are suitable.

Credits and Thanks

A huge thank you to Alex Roberts and Marc Seguin for playtesting this game with me.

Thanks also to everyone who worked on the software that made this document possible:

- The Typst typesetting system
- Dicier by Speak the Sky (used under CC BY 4.0)

And thank you for reading!

Colophon

Titles are set in Jost^{*}. Body is set in Helvetica Neue.

Author's Note

This game exists because of two podcasts.

The first is Campaign, starring Kat Kuhl, James D'Amato, John Patrick Cohen, and Johnny O'Mara. It was the first actual play podcast that I connected with, and it kept me connected to the hobby during a time in my life when I couldn't get to the table very much. It's where I first encountered Genesys dice and it's why I'm fond of them.

The second is RTFM by Aaron King and Maxwell Lander. Besides being a delightful pair of nerds (complementary), they introduced me to the idea of "Sledgehammering" a game: writing an small, simple ruleset based on a big, baroque game.

Genesys is definitely big and baroque—too much so for it to fit in my gaming life these days. But I do like these dice and some of the material that goes with them...

License

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