EXEMPLAR

FIFTH ATTEMPT (c) 2006 Jeffrey S. Schecter

THE GAME

Exemplar is a role-playing game of martial arts fantasy set in the far future. Corrupt noble houses use an oppressive state religion, drugged diets, constant propaganda and the military might of the Marines Templar and Marines Justicar to keep the citizens of the Intersystem Government and Clergy (IGAC) under their control. Space travel is monopolized by the shadowy Navigator's Guild, for their prescient psychics are the only human beings capable of guiding Warships from one solar system's Jump Point to another -- the few independent worlds and planetary federations, and even the IGAC itself, have no choice but to submit to the Guild's will. Conflict exists everywhere: free planets struggle to gain control of resources, IGAC nobles jockey for power, and the Free Order attempts to shrug off the yoke of IGAC oppression.

Players portray the Exemplar: those who, through natural talent or iron will and rigorous training, have obtained a measure of psychic proficiency. Exemplar are trained by the Guild, by the twin Marine Orders of the IGAC, and by sundry other traditions -- the Exalted Knights of Sha, who use needles to manipulate the flow of life energy; the Brotherhood of Infiltrators, who mask their presences with psychic shields; and more.

CHARACTERS

Every player other than the GM must create a protagonist. A character sheet for protagonists can be found on the other page of this document. To create a protagonist, read over the character sheet in its entirety, then follow this procedure:

1) **Abilities** define a character's broad areas of competency. Roll 5d6 and discard the highest result. Reroll if the sum of the four remaining dice is 10 or less. Assign one die to each ability. Leave a number of triangles equal to the die's result blank; shade in the rest. Insight *must* receive the lowest die.

2) **Descriptors** are listed next to each ability, and describe narrower fields in which a character may have more or less talent. Highlight five descriptors. Cross out every non-highlighted Insight descriptor, plus 10 more Action, Thought, and Words descriptors (10 total, not 10 each).

3) **Traits** are salient quirks of a character's personality, appearance, history, and situation. There are two lists of traits on the character sheet: character traits and advantage traits. Highlight up to 10 traits total. Choose at least 5 character traits, and no more than 5 advantage traits.

4) **Techniques** are specific ways of putting a character's psychic talents to work. Many are martial arts moves. Highlight a number of techniques equal to your Insight score. If you chose any "techniques" advantage traits, gain an additional 3 (1 trait), 5 (2 traits), or 6 (all 3 traits) techniques.

5) **Modifications** are alterations to a character's physiology due to genetic engineering at birth, implanted technology later in life, or extensive physical and mental conditioning. If you have any "modifications" advantage traits, highlight 3 (1 trait), 5 (2 traits), or 6 (all 3 traits) modifications.

6) **Nemesis** measures a character's importance in the story. It is equal to 30 minus the sum of the character's abilities. **Willpower** measures a character's ability to push themselves above and beyond their normal limits. It is equal to 8 minus the number of advantage traits taken.

When the GM is creating NPC characters, they should simply assign abilities, descriptors, traits, techniques, modifications, and willpower as they see fit. NPCs do not have Nemesis, and only have Willpower if they play more than a bit role.

PLAY STRUCTURE

The game is divided into scenes. After a scene is *framed* (time, location, characters present, events already in motion, and other important features have been made clear), free play commences. When a conflict arises, the rules are invoked to determine the outcome. When the GM decides that a scene has served its purpose, the scene is declared over and a new one is begun.

The first scene of a game is entirely up to the GM. Thereafter, players have a right to *claim* scenes. A player may not claim a scene if they claimed the previous scene. Players who have protagonists with more Nemesis get first dibs on claiming a scene. (In case of ties, players who have more recently claimed scenes get lower priority.) When a player claims a scene, their protagonist loses a point of nemesis. However, the scene *must* feature their protagonist in a major way -- furthermore, they may frame the scene themselves.

The GM has veto power over any scene framing done by the other players. When they veto a scene element, they must give a reason why. For example -- Player: "I've just killed the baron, and am attempting to make my escape." GM: "Wait up! The baron's no pushover, and besides, you'd have to *get* to him first!" The player should then make the scene about addressing whatever is preventing the scene they wanted from taking place. For example -- Player: "All right, I'm making my way to Crystal Hall, where I'll challenge the baron to a duel."

If no player claims a scene, the GM may frame it in whatever manner they see fit.

TESTS

When two characters come into conflict, or when a character is attempting a difficult action when something is at stake, the GM may call for a *test*. (Players may request tests, but the GM has final say.) Involved parties then say what is at stake -- what happens if they win. The stakes may *never* be the immediate death or permanent disfigurement of any character. Negotiate until everyone agrees that the stakes are appropriate and exciting.

Now, roll dice (d6) for each side in the conflict. For characters, the number of dice is equal to the unshaded triangles of the most relevant of Action, Thought, or Words. Add 1d if the relevant descriptor is highlighted, or divide by 2 and round down if it is crossed out. Then apply any other relevant modifiers, as outlined below. For unopposed tests, the GM will roll dice based on the difficulty of the task. 1-2d for everyday tasks, 3-4d for professional level tasks, 5-6d for extremely difficult tasks, or 7-8d for real legendary shit.

The result of a roll is equal to the highest die showing. Multiple dice that land on the same number are added together. The side that rolls higher gets a *victory*. If they won by 5 points or more, it is instead a *major victory*. When a character receives a major victory, they may accomplish *more* than what they set their stake as. In case of ties, give the victory to the character who did not initiate the action. If there is only one character involved, then they win ties.

TEST MODIFIERS

Assistance: +1d for 1 or 2, +2d for a handful, +3d for a crowd, +4d for an army. Perfect tool for the job / better tools than your opponent: +1d. Taking extra time or trying over and over: +1d. Clever, vivid, or cool action that takes advantage of the environment: +1d. Negative conditions: -1d for most distractions, -2d for worst possible circumstances. Currency: any test can give a ±1d (victory) or ±2d (major victory) modifier to a later, clearly related test.

Modifiers may never reduce a dice pool below 1d.

WILLPOWER

Characters may spend willpower to gain special advantages. Whenever a player claims a scene, their protagonist and one NPC of the GM's choice have their willpower pools refreshed to maximum. Willpower has the following uses:

Heroic Effort: Spend a point of willpower before you make a roll. Roll an extra die for each character trait that could somehow work to your advantage, and reroll every die that lands on 1. Continue rerolls until there are no more 1s.

Activate Insight Descriptor: Spend a point of willpower to activate an Insight descriptor that you have highlighted for the rest of the scene. 'Fiber and nerve' adds Insight to Action; 'third eye' adds Insight to Thought; 'fabric of consciousness' adds Insight to Words; 'telepathy' lets you hear the surface thoughts of characters you touch or make eye contact with; 'telekinesis' lets you act as if you were ten paces away; 'hypercomputation' lets you reroll a number of times equal to Insight.

Technique: Using some techniques may require the expenditure of a point or two of willpower.

Shrug it Off: When another character nets a victory against you, spend a point of willpower to force them to accomplish *less* than what they set their stake as. If they scored a major victory, you instead prevent them from accomplishing *more* than what they set their stake as.

FIGHT!

When many characters are all attempting to accomplish sundry goals at the same time, or when you want to zoom in on the action -- in a chase, combat, or dogfight, for example -- the GM may initiate a fight! Fights don't necessarily have to be physical battle.

In a fight, time is divided into rounds. Each round, every character can take one action (although exceptions exist). Actions are declared "in the free and clear" -- that is, in no set order, and people can change their mind until everyone is happy. Figure dice pools for all actions and roll them at the same time. Don't roll dice for defenses and reactions yet, thought.

Resolve actions in the order of highest result to lowest. Resolve ties at the same time. Don't be afraid to add modifiers to dice pools that have

already been rolled: just add extra dice for bonuses, and take away dice (highest first) for penalties.

Roll dice for defenses and reactions as they come up. If a character has not yet acted in the round, then they may only defend with 1 die, subject to no modifiers. At any time, a character may give up their action to defend with their full dice pool for the rest of the round. If a character uses their action to do nothing but defend, they gain +1d to do so.

EXEMPLAR character record

NAME:

HOMEWORLD:

NEMESIS/WILLPOWER:

ABILITIES

ACTION unarmed combat, HTH weapons, aim, acrobatics, stealth, piloting, toughness, survival, breaking things and heavy lifting, other athletics

THOUGHT bureaucracy, research, hacking, art, science, regional, strategy, gambling, repair, investigate, medical, academics, observation

WORDS argument, intimidation, persuasion, contacts, interrogation, deceit, socialize, leadership, bargaining, working with animals, teaching

INSIGHT fiber and nerve, third eye, fabric of consciousness, telepathy, telekinesis, hypercomputation

TRAITS

CHARACTER Accepting, Addict, Ambitious, Amorous, Ashamed, Athletic, Bastard, Beautiful, Bereaved, Blind, Body Mods, Boisterous, Charitable, Child, Clumsy, Cold, Coward, Cruel, Damned, Deaf, Debtor, Delusional, Destiny, Disturbed, Drowsy, Druggy, Drunkard, Dullard, Dumb, Entrepreneur, Family, Flake, Fop, Frail, Giant, Greedy, Grudge Keeper, Guilty Conscience, Hateful, Haughty, Histrionics, Honorable, Hubris, Hunted, Hypocrite, Illiterate, Immaculately Clean, Innocent, Inquisitive, Insomniac, Jaded, Jocular, Judgmental, Lame, Lazy, Liar, Long Winded, Loyal, Mad, Masquerade, Mean, Medicated, Miser, Misunderstood, Myopic, Narrow Minded, Nervous Tick, Nightmares, Nocturnal, Numb, Old, Outgoing, Overeducated, Owed Favors, Parables, Paranoid, Phobia, Polyglot, Poor, Popular, Pyromaniac, Religious, Scarred, Self-Righteous, Short Fuse, Shy, Sickly, States the Obvious, Submissive, Traitor, Trusting, Ugly, Unctuous, Veteran, Wizened, Young, Zealot.

ADVANTAGE **Ace** (mark one descriptor w/ an asterisk; it now gives +2d instead of +1d), **Conditioned** (modifications), **Cybered Up** (modifications), **Destiny** (+2 starting Nemesis), **Eidetic Recall** (have a photographic memory), **Genetically Engineered** (modifications), **Influential** (have control over great wealth or political power), **Jack of All Trades** (only have to cross out two Action, Thought, and Words descriptors), **Manual** (techniques), **Multitalented** (may highlight two extra descriptors), **Psychic Gift** (techniques), **Teacher** (techniques)

TECHNIQUES

There are three types of techniques: **Form** techniques, which grant a permanent benefit; **Move** techniques, which may each be used for free once per scene and thereafter cost 1 willpower per use; and **Special** techniques, which cost 1 willpower for their first use in a scene and thereafter cost 2 willpower per use. Move and Special techniques typically enhance a single action or roll. Only one Move or Special technique may be used at a time.

FORM **Geometer's Mercury** (mathematically perfect martial art; +1d to Action when you activated hypercomputation), **Iron Feather** (enhanced senses of perception and mobility; +1d for movement, positioning, defense, and attacks with thrown and missile weapons when 'third eye' is active), **Jen Da** (martial art for the tasseled, one handed straight sword; +1d swordplay), **Lightfoot Style** (flying leaps, running on walls, balancing on bamboo; +1d for running and +1d to defend against those who don't also have Lightfoot), **Shadow Step** (the Infiltrators' stealth meditation; enemies lose dice on attempts to find you equal to your Insight), **Wise Touch** (the acupuncture based martial art of Sha; may paralyze limbs and bodies with needles, and +1d first aid when you have your needles), **Wushu** (the martial art of the Marines Templar and Marines Justicar -- kicks that send people flying, punching through brick walls; enemies without Wushu are at -1d to defend against you)

MOVE **Blade Shattering Reflex** (break enemy's weapon when you successfully block their attack), **Dim Mak** (doubles willpower cost of shrugging off attack), **Drunken Step** (enemy at -2d to attack you), **Flow as Water** (take two actions in a round), **Gently Falling Feather** (land safely from a fall of any distance), **Ghost Reflexes** (+2d to avoid any attack), **Iron Hand Attack** (+2d to a close combat attack), **Shadow Strike** (enemy at -2d to avoid your attack, even firearms), **Star in the Void Strike** (take an action and ignore all penalties for obscured vision, distance to target, concealment, etc.), **Thousand Steps** (+2d for chases or positioning), **Viper Coil** (+3d to a close combat attack the round after you do nothing but defend)

SPECIAL **Angered Soul Attack** (+4d to a close combat attack), **Five Point Prana Sealing Touch** (triples willpower cost of shrugging off attack), **Invisible Warrior Method** (+4d to avoid any attack), **Striking Cobra Method** (+6d to a close combat attack the round after you do nothing but defend), **Ten Thousand Steps** (+4d for chases or positioning), **Tree on the Riverbank** (take three actions in a round), **Warp Navigation** (allows a Navigator to guide a Warship from one Jump Point to another, as long as they have hypercomputation active)

MODIFICATIONS

Amphibious (you can breather underwater, and +2d to swim), **Aural Enhancer** (+2d to detect and identify sounds), **Bioprocessor** (internal computer you control with your thoughts, but not networkable unless you have Comm), **Comm** (communications gear implanted in you somewhere, allows remote linking if you also have a bioprocessor), **Chemspec** (may analyze a substance's chemical makeup by sniffing it), **Claws** (retractable claws built in to hands), **Detox** (immune to poisons), **Ocular** (ignore penalties for obscured sight or darkness, can record images and video with your eyes), **Pattern Buffer** (stores your brain patterns and allows your mind to be preserved if you die), **Regeneration** (wounds seal themselves, and heal in a tenth the normal time), **Regulator** (allows you to go without sleep, or put yourself into a stasis where you can survive indefinitely without food or oxygen), **Signal Dampener** (ignore 1d of penalties from injuries), **Tail** (you have a prehensile tail! Fuckin' A!), **Venom** (you secrete a venom that paralyzes or digests people or causes them to hallucinate or whatever; probably in your salivary glands, but maybe under your fingernails or in artificial claws if you have them), **Winged** (You can fly! Fuckin' A!)

NOTES (WRITE SMALL)