

FIRESTARTER

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INTRODUCTION

"Firestarter" is a role-playing game set within the shadows of the Soviet Union's paranormal research. Psychokinesis (PK) and demons ("dragons") are real and amuck. You might play a scientist, a psychic, a skeptic outsider, a Russian mobster, a KGB agent, an American agent, a corporate mercenary, half-demon prince, or some surprising combination! You might not even know yourself. Think KGB X-Files meets Hellraiser noir.

A Firestarter game session requires a Game Master (GM), players, and a dice pool (of your favorite sidedness). Firestarter sprung to life as a last-minute entry for the November 2005 Ronnies competition. This is my first attempt to design a role-playing game and it is admittedly incomplete. I chose to include the keywords DRAGON and SOVIET and exclude GUN and MUD.

ORGANIZATIONS

The world of Firestarter is filled with many competing, overlapping organizations. The GM is encouraged to create new organizations and new triple-double-crossing ties between the organizations. Some common organizations include:

- * The CIA spies on the KGB and the Russian Academy of Sciences and sells drugs and weapons to the *Organizatsiya*.
- * Demons, euphemistically called "dragons", from a dark supernatural place. The dragons were unleashed by the KGB's misuse of the Academy paranormal research. Dragons are intelligent and self-serving, but not necessarily evil. They are sheltered and tended by cults of humans and half-demons who move freely through Russian society.
- * The FBI polices the CIA and the *Organizatsiya*, but lacks much political or budget leverage.
- * The KGB funds the Russian Academy of Science's research, but has its own plans for PK and demons.
- *The *Organizatsiya*, the Russian Mafia, buys and sells drugs and weapons. They seek demonic and PK power to control their turf.
- * The Russian Academy of Science conducts research, The Academy relies on the KGB's political and financial connections, but distrusts them.

* PSI-CORP, a multinational corporation and its tangled subsidiaries

CHARACTERS

Characters live under the watchful eye of many shadowy organizations. Characters' to these organizations and the other players may shift during the game.

Every character and creature has five attributes, measured in *dice*:

- * Mind (your intelligence)
- * Body (your physical strength)
- * Soul (your will power)
- * Hit Points (your life force, abbreviated HP)
- * Psi (your PK feedback bonus)

To create a new character, players are given 15 points to "buy" attribute dice. Each Mind die costs 1 point. Each Body die costs 2 points. Each Soul die costs 4 points. Each HP die costs 1 point. The initial value of a character's HP is Body + Soul + any points allocated to HP. Each attribute must have at least 1 die. A character's attribute dice are rolled for conflict resolution. Psi is a meta-attribute bonus earned by successfully invoking PK. Psi dice cannot be bought during character generation.

TODO: MOTIVATION/NEEDS/FLAWS?

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflicts are either opposed or unopposed. An Opposed Contest is rolled against another player or NPC's dice. An Unopposed Contest is rolled against a difficulty score set by the GM.

The player or GM will choose the appropriate attribute (Mind, Body, or Soul) to determine the maximum number of dice each side can choose to roll. The player and GM must each roll at least 1 die.

Unlike most other role-playing games, a contest can have multiple successes, failures, winners, and losers. The more dice rolled, the higher chance of a success... and a greater number of possible failures! After the dice are rolled, the player and GM each order their dice from highest to lowest, pairing their dice with their opponents. For each dice pair, the die with the higher number wins. Tied dice are a draw: no success, no failure. If one side rolled more dice than the other, any remaining dice are ignored.

Here's an example contest:

GM rolls: 6,6,3,1,1
Player rolls: 5,4,3,2

GM's 6 vs Player's 5 = 1 GM success
GM's 6 vs Player's 4 = 1 GM success
GM's 3 vs Player's 3 = draw
GM's 1 vs Player's 2 = 1 Player success
GM's 1 vs nothing = ignored

The GM won two successes and the player won one.

SUCCESESSES

What does a player or GM do with a success? The player or GM is allowed invent, or *narrate*, one new fact per success about the current situation or their organizational contacts. The player also receives one bonus die per success that may be applied to the player's next action. The GM receives one bonus die per success to use to the losing player's disadvantage. For a draw (tied dice), the GM narrates a fact about the player's failure, but he does not get a bonus die.

PSYCHOKINESIS

Characters may have psychokinetic abilities, which function like magic does in other role-playing games. Any character can attempt to use PK, but it is difficult for those not gifted with many Soul and Psi dice. During character generation, a player also selects some initial Psi Domains, or traits, such as:

- * telepathy (remote communication)
- * clairvoyance (remote sight)
- * clairsaudience (remote hearing)
- * clairsentience (remote touch)
- * precognition
- * postcognition

To invoke PK, a player must spend one or more turns gathering Psi energy and then one turn to release the Psi energy. When a character successfully invokes PK, they earn bonus Psi dice, creating a positive feedback loop.

TODO: PHYSICAL COMBAT

TODO: DEMONS