



A Game of Getting Out and Going Home
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Introduction

It starts out young - you try not to be different just to survive - you try to be just like everyone else - anonymity becomes reflexive - and then one day you wake up and you've become all those other people - the others - the something you aren't. And you wonder if you can ever be what you really are. You wonder if it's too late to find out.

-- Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs*

This is the nightmare of modern office life: work that crushes the spirit, office cubicles as cells, and managers as wardens. The office is a dehumanizing environment for the employees – the kind of thing that makes you a cog in the machine – a number. Nothing.

Faced with that, driven to a breaking point, human beings generally do one of two things: create their own petty fiefdoms and delusions of importance... or Get Out.

Frogger is about Getting Out. You remember the artwork on the side of the old Frogger arcade console? (Here's a hint: look at the picture on the front cover of this game.) A frog, rushing somewhere, vest and tie awry, briefcase in hand. It's easy to think that he's imitating the White Rabbit, muttering "I'm late, I'm late...", except that you know from the game itself that he's trying to get *Home*. He's an office worker, trying to get away, get across all these obstacles, and get to the thing he wants – the thing he needs.

This game was written as part of the 1KM1KT 24-Hour RPG challenge, which called for designers to adapt a computer game into a tabletop RPG in 24 Hours. Any computer game would have been fine; I could have done *City of Heroes*... I could have done *X-Com* (heck, I actually *planned* to do that one), but my girlfriend suggested *Frogger* as a joke, and the damn idea wouldn't get out of my head.

Aside from the game itself, I've pulled a lot of inspiration from movies like *Office Space*, *Clockwatchers*, *Falling Down*, *Lost in Translation*, *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle*, and (to take it a bit further afield) *Shawn of the Dead*, *Grosse Pointe Blank*, and *Road to Perdition*.

And this is what I ended up with. Enjoy.

Who or what is a Frogger?

Let's start out with what a Frogger was; a drone in the hive, a cog in the machine. Your character is just someone who's been playing the part of a dutiful worker and getting by.

Then it changed.

Something happened to our worker bee that made her want to get away from the buzz; something hit that cog and made it slip off.

That's where this game starts; that's where the story begins – when you decide you've got to get away.

How do I play this thing?

"Can you keep a secret? I'm trying to organize a prison break. We have to first get out of this bar, then the hotel, then the city, and then the country. Are you in or you out?"

"I'm in."

-- Bob and Charlotte, Lost in Translation

When you get together with your friends to play *Frogger*, each player creates a fictional character in the story. One person is The Boss (referred to in many roleplaying games as the GM or Game Moderator), while everyone else makes up a *Frogger* character.

During play, each player takes turns working toward your character's goals (their "frog home", to steal a term from that Frogger entry quoted above), trying to cross metaphorical "Lanes of Traffic" that are in their way.

Sometimes you make it, and sometimes you get squished. Finding out what happens is why we play the game.

"Frogger was an early-80's arcade game regarded as a classic and very popular for its novel gameplay and theme.

"The object of the game is to guide a frog home. To do so, the player must get frogs to successfully dodge and navigate hazards.

"The player guides a frog which starts at the bottom of the screen. The very top of the screen contains "frog homes" - the goal for each frog.

"The only control the player has is navigating the direction for the frog to hop.

"On the bottom half of the screen, the player must successfully guide the frog between opposing lanes of traffic. The middle of the screen, after the road, contains a median where the player must prepare to navigate the river. The player can then guide his frog safely to one of the empty "homes". The player must avoid threats, but may catch bugs or escort a lady frog for bonuses."

-- Wikipedia,

Before You Play

Stuff You're Gonna Need

First, you need these rules. Luckily, you have these rules, so that's all right. You only really need one copy of the game for the whole group, as the rules are pretty simple. In addition to the book, you'll need copies of the player sheets (one for each character), and some kind of tokens to denote bad karma. You can use poker chips or coins if you like, but I'd suggest paperclips, just to capture the feel of the setting – one's 'borrowed' from a supply closet are even better.

You will also need either one standard deck of playing cards and one twelve-sided dice, or just two standard decks of playing cards; the option is yours. If you've played a few role-playing games, you probably already have the die you need, but if not, and you want some, I talk about where to acquire dice in the "Jargon" section, below.

That's about it. You need some players – somewhere from three to six – but hopefully you've figured that out.

Jargon

Like a lot of role-playing games, **Frogger** uses some words in specific and not-entirely-conventional ways. The following list should explain "when I say *this*, what I *mean* is *that*."

Bad Karma. A measure of how currently screwed your character is. You pick up Bad Karma when a Conflict goes particularly badly for your character, and you get rid of it either by going back to the office, or inflicting your own bad fortune on other characters, during their Scenes.

The Boss. One person playing the game doesn't make up a character; they're The Boss. The Boss sets up Scenes, helps you figure out Conflicts in those scenes and what the Stakes are, moves the action from one character to the next, and plays most every other character in the story except for the ones under the control of the rest of the players – basically, they do what your computer has to do when you're playing a computer game. Don't confuse The Boss for the game with your character's manager, though; that's just mean.

Breaking Point. Determined during character creation, this is the moment near the beginning of the character's story (or the part of the story we're looking at during the game) where the character decides they aren't going to continue on as they have been – they are going to try to change. The Inciting Event. This could be as simple as your Manager telling you that you have to work through the weekend again, to an assassin killing your wife and youngest son.

Conflict. Where the rubber meets the road – a conflict is a point in the story where your character attempts to overcome a challenge that's been put in his or her way to prevent them from crossing the current Lane of Traffic. An attempt to win a conflict is referred to as Crossing Traffic.

D12. A twelve-sided dice. You may or may not be using a dice during Conflict resolution, but if you are, it will be a weird 12-sided dice, which we're calling a d12 from here on out, because it's faster to type, and we're lazy, lazy people. D12s, d4s, d20s and even plain old d6s like the ones you find in Yahtzee games are all available on the internet and local gaming and hobby

stores, if you need them.

Details. You are a special. You are a beautiful and unique snowflake. Details about your character express that.

Lanes of Traffic. Lanes of traffic are hurdles that must be got over in order to get Home. Your goal is to attempt to cross five Lanes successfully. If you fail to cross five lanes before that point, you're roadkill.

Home. The ultimate goal that your character wants to achieve by Getting Out, Home is determined during character creation, and can be anything from "Take the cute waitress out" to "survive the zombie uprising," depending on the setting.

Role. Your character's role essentially describes exactly what kind of cog in the corporate machine the character is – tech support, shift supervisor, graphic artist, software programmer, full-time college student, killer-for-hire, et cetera.

Scene. An interaction between the player's character whose turn it currently is, and any number of other characters (played either by other players or The Boss). Usually, the particulars of the Scene are set up and influence by the involved player, The Boss, a draw from a deck of cards, and any player who's inflicting Bad Karma on the Scene. Any input from the rest of the players that the involved player and The Boss decide to use is cool, too. Each player ends up playing through anywhere from five to a total of nine Scenes on the way Home, and each Scene involves a Conflict of some kind.

Traits

Qualities that your character possesses at some level that is notably above the norm. This can, for instance, be the fact that your character is a good liar, has a nice signing voice, is notably attractive, or figures out alien technology both easily and intuitively.

Figuring out the Setting

"Where are all the good men dead, in the heart or in the head?"

-- Debi, *Grosse Pointe Blank*

While the definition of a Frogger remains constant throughout these rules, there are any number of settings in which this kind of story can take place. Below, we'll take a look at the 'dials' that you can set to determine the kind of setting and story you and the rest of the folks in the game will be playing in.

The Reality Dial: Office Space vs. Shawn of the Dead

This is a pretty straightforward idea: how 'realistic' is the game going to be in tone? Is it going to be something as much like the real world as possible, or will there be elements that you can reasonably expect to only see in a movie or a roleplaying game, like Alien Overlords and skeletal hordes in the supermarket?

The group should decide on this Reality Dial together, and if you all have a strong idea about the kind of game you want to play, this dial should be self-setting.

The Tone Dial: Harold & Kumar vs. Falling Down

Again, this is pretty simple: are you going for zany comedy or dark, harrowing drama? You don't have to nail this down entirely, because nothing is harder than when a group decides "Okay, it's time to BE FUNNY... so... BE FUNNY! Now!", but you should talk about this so that you don't run into a problem where some of the people playing expect wacky hijinx and some of the others want their Breaking Point to be "and then the security guards killed my family in front of me."

The Group Veto

Everyone has a lot of freedom to introduce elements into either their scenes or into other people's scenes (using Bad Karma) – while it's true that you can do that, if someone introduces something that two or more people at the table thing is out of line with the setting, inappropriate in tone, or just kind of stupid, that player needs to reset that contribution and try again.

Weird Settings

"Then they rip out your ego and they put you in a box until you rot. You'll never know if you're dead or simply envying the dead."

- Wally, at "Careers Day" (*Dilbert*)

Frogger is about someone who gets sick of the life they're living and decides to break out of the rut – that kind of story works in a LOT of strange place – consider that I'm listing *Shawn of the Dead*, *Road to Perdition*, and *Grosse Pointe Blank* as inspirational films for this game, and see what you can come up with.

Now what?

So you've figured out where you're going to be and what you're going to be doing? Awesome. Get hopping.

Character Creation

"You see Bob, it's not that I'm lazy, it's that I just don't care."
-- Peter, *Office Space*

Okay, you've got your setting nailed down, time to work on your **Frogger** character. Grab a copy of the Character Sheet and start down the list...

1. **Name** your character.
2. Define the **role** that you character fills in the corporate world.
3. Your character starts out with three or more **Traits**, each Trait assigned a value ranging from 1 (eh) to 6 (hell yeah). You have 12 points to distribute between the traits you select, and the traits can be anything, from expertise in a particular area, to a natural ability, to a noteworthy attribute.
4. **Add details** about the character. For instance:
 - Clothing and general appearance.
 - Unusual physical features.
 - A few items, not unusually valuable but with personal importance of some kind.
5. **Equip the character** with whatever stuff you'd like or that makes sense for the character and the setting.
6. Decide on your **Breaking Point** – that specific moment in which your character decides that he has to Get Out and Go Home.
7. Write down your character's **Home** – the goal they are pursuing.

Role

"I don't like my job, and, uh, I don't think I'm gonna go anymore."
"So you're gonna quit?"
"Nuh-uh. Not really. Uh... I'm just gonna stop going."
"When did you decide all that?"
"About an hour ago."
-- Peter and Joanna, *Office Space*

In broad terms, your Role doesn't do much in a mechanical sense – that's what your Traits are for, but it helps define your character and give him some depth. The nice thing about the fact that there's no game-mechanics "weight" to the Role, is that you can make it as detailed and in-depth as you like; get into this! Go to town!

Traits

"I can sit there and do nothing as good as anyone."
-- Margaret, *Clockwatchers*

With traits, you want to avoid two extremes: making a trait that's too broad, and making a Trait that's too narrow. "Really Smart and Funny" is too broad. "Expert Salad Tosser" is too narrow. Some good traits might be things like, "Good at first-person shooter videogames", "Excellent Driver", "Good at non-corporate social situations", "Athletic", or "Sarcastic Wit".

Details

"You pretend to be more eccentric than you actually are because you fear you are an interchangeable cog"

-- Douglas Coupland

Like Role, Details are a good place to give your character some depth and humanity. Have fun with these details – use them to explain how you are not like everyone else in your staid work environment.

Breaking Point

"So I was sitting in my cubicle today, and I realized, ever since I started working, every single day of my life has been worse than the day before it. So that means that every single day that you see me, that's on the worst day of my life."

-- Peter, *Office Space*

A Breaking Point can be summed up best in this way – is the moment in the character's story where they simply cannot go back to the way things have been. This might be due to an external physical fact ("My apartment just blew up and blasted all my Ikea furniture onto the street."), or it might be an internal unwillingness to stay in the rut you're in ("That's it... I'm not coming into work on the weekends anymore!"). No one can tell you what your character's Breaking Point will be – you know them best, after all – but always been willing to ask people for advice if you're stuck for inspiration.

Home

"I am just trying to get home to my little girl's birthday party and if everyone will just stay out of my way, nobody will get hurt."

-- Bill, *Falling Down*

Ahh, Home. This is what your character wants; the thing that, right or wrong, they believe will make everything all right. Maybe you just want a chili cheese dog from the street vendor on 84th and 3rd in Manhattan... and you're in L.A. Maybe you need to make sure you're only surviving child doesn't become a slave to the Alien Overlords...

It really just depends on you, your character, and the kind of game your group is going to play.

Character Creation Examples

Margie makes up a Frogger character for a pretty 'standard' game. She names her character Theresa Vines, and defines Theresa's role in the corporate world as 'Tech-guru and onsite I.T. support'. She then gives Theresa the Traits 'Repair Electronics: 5', 'Voracious Reader: 3' and 'Twitch Gamer: 4'. Margie notes on the character sheet that Theresa's hair is usually a bit frizzy, though clean, usually held out of her face with a varying number of hair ties, and that Theresa usually wears worn-out 'slacker' t-shirts peaking from underneath her official corporate shirt, some of which are actually quite non-PC. Margie notes that Theresa doesn't go anywhere without her cell phone, Blackberry, pager, and very eclectic charm bracelet that rings softly as she walks. Theresa's Breaking Point comes when her mom leaves voicemail on her phone to tell her that Brad McDaniels, her high school boyfriend, just got engaged, and Theresa's "Home" is just exactly that: she wants to go home to her folks' house, see the old home town, and offer congratulations to dear old Brad.

Sure she does.

Jason is making up a Frogger character for an Alien Invasion game that his friends have cooked up. His character's name is Marcus Lamont – he's a nighttime security guard at U-Store-Here, a national chain. Jason lists Mark's Traits as "Ex-jock: 4", "Good with Puzzles: 5" (all those nights on the job with nothing to do), and "Doesn't get worked up: 3". Jason mentions details like "Big ex-football player in decent shape, a chipped-tooth smile, and big hands. One the job, Mark carries a night stick, a radio, a cell phone, and his gun (which he's never fired, except on the range a couple times. Mark's Breaking Point comes when his shift partner is vaporized by the Alien Invaders two days before retirement, and his "Home" is his brother Carl's house; they don't talk much, but Mark is single, and he wants to get his brother, sister-in-law, and twin niece and nephew out of town.

Playing the Game

The System: Watching the Clock

"You look around - all those characters trying to kill time. Going around in circles. Even if a person wanted to break free, they could find out they've got nowhere else to go."

-- Iris Chapman, *Clockwatchers*

As mentioned before, every character has at least three Traits – possibly more -- each Trait ranging from 1 to 6.

Every Scene in the game involves successfully winning a Conflict, or “crossing traffic”. Crossing Traffic usually involves at least one scene; the player for that Conflict picks a number between 1 and 12 (as on the face of a clock), then rolls one twelve-sided dice (or draws a card from a deck of cards) – essentially, the player is trying to guess the number that is about to come up on the die or on the card. (Jacks, Queens, and Kings count as 11s, 12s, and 13s, respectively, so using cards makes conflict a bit more of a challenge, with the upside being, you don’t need a weird dice to play.)



Theresa is trying to get her manager’s computer to print so she can get out of the office. Margie guesses 5, then rolls her d12, getting a 7.

If you have a Trait that applies to the Conflict, you don’t have to guess the number exactly – you just have to get close; you can move forward or back on the clock face from the number you guessed, trying to reach the random number you rolled or drew. If the distance between the two numbers is less than or equal to your Trait’s score, you succeed. If you don’t have an appropriate Trait, you have to guess the randomized number exactly.

Margie’s character has Repair Electronics at 5. Because she is 5 or less away from the target of 7, she is successful.

Earning Experience: Getting Paid Time Off

"As you gain experience, you'll realize that all logical questions are considered insubordination."
- Dilbert

If you are close enough to the target number that you didn’t have to use the full range of moment allowed by your Trait to reach it, the number of “unused” points are added to your experience total.

Margie’s guess was 2 “points” away from the target number of 7, but her Trait would have allowed her to move up to 5, which means Margie has 3 points “unused” – her character Theresa gains 3 experience points.

Critical Success: Punching the Clock

Guessing the exact number is required when you don’t have a relevant Trait for the Conflict, but when you have an appropriate Trait and guess the target number exactly, you have get a critical

success – the Scene works out in the best way that it possibly can – probably better than you might have hoped. In addition to that, a Critical Success gives you a 1-point bonus to your next Conflict roll (but not to any do overs involved).

Achieving a Critical Success also doubles the number of experience points you receive.

If Margie guesses the target number exactly, she earns 10 experience points (5 x 2).

Using Experience: Learning Behavior

"You know what you need?"

"What?"

"Shakabuku."

"You wanna tell me what that means?"

"It's a swift, spiritual kick to the head that alters your reality forever."

Oh, that'd be good. I think."

-- Debi and Marty, Grosse Pointe Blank

It costs 12 experience points to gain a brand new Trait at 1, 24 points to increase a 1-point Trait to 2, 36 to increase a 2-point to 3, et cetera.

Crossing Traffic: An Overview of Play

All conflicts in *Frogger* are conducted using the sequence of play and steps below, some of which have been modified or expanded from the original rules and detailed below.

1. The player or The Boss establishes a Scene by building off of either the Breaking Point or whatever the last scene was, establishing the desires of the character, and drawing one card from the Complication Deck.
2. The players establish the opening of the Scene and play through it to a point of Conflict. Other players can add complications to the scene/conflict by spending Bad Karma.
3. Either a player or the Boss initiates Conflict, discussing and deciding on what the Stakes and Consequences will be for winning and losing, and determining what character Traits, if any, apply.
4. “Fair and Clear” stage: determine actions, context, and events; the Boss sets Modifiers as appropriate.
5. Resolve the Conflict by conducting a Series for all player characters; provide narration and outcomes as dictated by success or failure. Players can get “do overs” on their checks by picking up Bad Karma, if they like, but eventually, one way or the other, a Conflict ends.
6. Someone narrates the results of the Conflict, and you move on to the next player. Lather, rinse, repeat.

The Boss usually narrates wins for the character and the players usually narrate losses, including what happens with regards to the Stakes and Consequences.

(Character vs. Character conflicts use slightly altered rules; see below.)

Establishing Scenes and Complications

A **Scene** happens when something is going on somewhere in the story that involves events and/or people that the players actually care about, and almost always include a Conflict. (Why? Because Conflicts means something is happening, and if nothing is happening, why do we care what’s going on?) The exception to this might be some ‘color’ backstory or foreshadowing, but that’s rare.

The mechanics in *Frogger* resolve **whole conflicts** – don’t do a Trait check to see if you success at one little task, check to see if you got what you wanted out of the Scene or not – when you use the system, you find out if you get what you want out of a whole conflict – there might be some people-charming and door-breaking going down, but only as one part of all that activity.

Building a Scene: the Complication Deck

In general, it’s pretty simply to figure out what’s going to happen in the character’s next scene, and if The Boss can’t think of a fun scene to do, the players should by all means give some suggestions, IF the Boss asks.

Now with that said, there’s something that can help out with this process, and that’s the Complication Deck.

Before any scene is laid out and detailed, the primary player involved draws one card from the Complication Deck (if you’re using a deck of cards for Conflict Resolution, make that a separate deck – you should use the same deck for both things). The card that’s drawn tells you (and the

rest of the group) what kind of complication the Scene should involve (depending on the suit), and how severe it is (depending on how big the card is).

Spades: We're experiencing technical difficulties

"Did Doogie Houser just steal my fucking car?"

-- Harold, *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle*

When a conflict card comes up spades, the Scene should involve some kind problem with technology, gear, belongings, or the like. Someone stole your clothes, your phone dies in mid-conversation while you're getting directions, your manager wants you to 'fix my computer, it's acting stupid,' and so forth.

Clubs: That's gonna leave a mark

"Now we're in Newark, of all places. You know we're gonna get shot."

-- Kumar, *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle*

Clubs mean violence, and depending on the Tone of the game, this could be fairly serious. Aside from the normal fist fights, knife fights, gun fights, and food fights, don't forget about things like car chases, angry wait staff, and rampaging stag caribou.

Diamonds: Paying the Devil

"I will not tolerate this business from you any longer. You have one more interview tomorrow morning, and if I hear from Dr. Wein that you are anything short of spectacular, I'll completely cut you off."

-- Dr. Patel, *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle*

Someone stole your wallet. Your wallet is empty. Your mom is going to cut you off, your girlfriend wants a prenup, and/or you need to post bail for your grandma – wrap the story's fist around a roll of quarters and sock em in the mouth.

Hearts: Love hurts

"Why have we got to go to Liz's?"

"Because we do."

"But she dumped you!"

"I have to know if she's all right!"

-- Ed and Shaun, *Shaun of the Dead*

Your coworker wants you to go out for drinks and bond... right now. You're late for your 'last chance' date with your boyfriend... that you forgot about. Your Mom and Dad are getting a divorce. Your sister's a vampire.

All's fair in Love... so grab that Love and shoot 'em in the face.

The Joker: Getting Ganged Up On

"No matter what you might think, okay, I do not find it difficult to keep my work and my social life separate."

-- Shaun, *Shaun of the Dead*

Jokers are one of those situations where the hits just keep on coming: have the player draw two more complication cards and sock em with both of em at the same time. Set the Severity

wherever you like. When you get the character cursing out loud and shaking their head in dismay, you're getting warm.

Severity

Setting the Severity of the complication is easy: the bigger the card that you drew, the worse things are. For example, pulling a 4 of Hearts is going to be much less of a pain than drawing the Queen of Hearts. (I would say that's something like "Your coworker wants to go out for drinks" versus "Your boyfriend wants to see other people.") For determining severity only, aces count as the biggest card in each suit, because I like aces.

Conflicts: 'Fair and Clear'

There are a few rules about how this step goes – nothing "counts" until the players involved guess their number and either draw a card or roll that die. Until then, everyone gets to say what they're going to do, listen to what OTHER people say they're going to do, and if they want, change what their plans... which lets the other people change THEIR plans, and so forth, until it all gets sorted out.

You must let it get sorted out. Everyone has to agree exactly on who is doing what to and with whom before anyone tries out Conflict Resolution. Seriously.

Conflicts: Modifiers

Frogger only use a single unmodified Trait for any conflict, however, the Boss may add a Penalty or Bonus to a given roll (which reduces or increases the chance of success); also, the player may have earned Bad Karma (which also reduces the chance of success, see below).

If a penalty reduces your effective Trait below 0, you automatically fail. If a bonus increases a Trait to the point where you can "reach" every single number around the face of the Clock, treat it as an automatic success.

To clarify, Boss-applied modifiers and Bad Karma penalties apply to **all** rolls, including Do Overs.

Success and Failure Narration

Conflicts are resolved using a single Trait check using the "Time clock" system described earlier. Each check, however, allows for "Do Overs". The initial roll plus its do over is considered on extended Trait check (even if the Traits used change). Usually, the Boss describes successful Conflicts, and the player describes failed Conflicts. Any other players may suggest embellishments to the narrator, but the narrator has the final say.

The Do Over

"Looks like you've been missing a lot of work lately."
*"Well, I wouldn't exactly say I've been *missing* it, Bob."*
-- Bob and Peter, *Office Space*

When you fail a Trait check, you may "Do over" by accepting a Bad Karma token. (I suggest paperclips.) The effect of Bad Karma is that your Traits are reduced in effectiveness by one for each Bad Karma token currently in your possession – this effect even penalizes your do over attempts, and since you cannot attempt a do over if your chance of success has been reduced

to less than zero, there is a hard but variable limit (depending on your Trait level) on the number of attempts possible. A *Series* of do overs does not have to be based on the same Trait from beginning to end, however, so be aware that this limit can change.

Theresa is trying to talk a cop out of giving her a speeding ticket, but she's got nothing in the way of a fast-talk Trait and she blows her check – the cop isn't interested in hearing about her sick... umm... aunt... yeah. Margie opts to go for a Do Over; she takes a Bad Karma token and in the follow-up check announces that she's going to be using her Voracious Reader Trait. How? I have no idea – that's for the player to explain...

As shown in the example above, failing the first check means the character failed in a non-critical way. Again, the player describes how. The player can choose to Give or Do Over at this point.

Alternately, the player may take a point of Bad Karma to activate a do over, introducing new elements and tactics into the conflict.

Failing the second or subsequent check means that the character failed again in progressively more serious ways. The player describes how. At any point, the Conflict can stop, either due to player victory, the player conceding the Conflict, or Bad Karma rising to the point where the character's relevant Traits are effectively less than zero.

Paying Off Karmic Debt

"Sometimes I pretend to choke in the cafeteria. Then when someone performs the Heimlich Maneuver, I spin around suddenly... just to get a hug."

-- Wally (Dilbert)

Bad Karma can haunt you, and you're going to want to get rid of it. The first way is simple: take the Karmic Hit. On their next turn, the player announces they are going to pay off their karmic debt. The player then erases one of the *Successful* Conflicts that they've noted on their character sheet and narrates an appropriate setback on their progress toward Home (which should probably in some way relate to the loss of that Conflict Success). Once this is done, the player hands all their Bad Karma back to The Boss, and play resumes normally.

Spreading the Wealth: Karmic Hand-off

Paying off Karmic Debt is very effective, but it's also all about owning your own failures – misery loves company, so if you're having a bad day, why not drag others down with you.

On another player's turn, you can spend a point of Bad Karma against the player in question, either to significantly increase the severity of the Complications involved in the scene ("The Coworker you're having drinks with hits on you, aggressively."), or to give them a -1 penalty on **ONLY** the first Trait check in that Scene's Conflict.

You can only spend on Bad Karma per scene in this manner.

Multiple Character Conflicts

"He murdered Annie and Peter!"

"There are only murderers in this room, Michael! Open your eyes! This is the life we chose, the life we lead. And there is only one guarantee: none of us will see heaven."

"Michael could."

"Then do everything that you can to see that that happens."

-- Michael Sullivan and John Rooney, *The Road to Perdition*

There's two ways that Froggers can be involved in a Conflict together – either on the same side, or against each other.

Working Together

So you've decided to team up with another *Frogger* and conquer the corporate world together? Awesome. The rules for this are simple: in a conflict, both of you make Trait checks, and if either of you succeed, it counts as a success, but **only for the character to whom this scene belongs**. If the character who 'owns' the scene calls for a Do Over, *both* characters take a point of Bad Karma.

Working Against Each Other

Assuming the desires of the two characters are actually working directly against one another, the group needs to make very sure that everyone knows what is going to happen as a result of Winning and Losing, during the free and clear step.

Once that's done, both players roll and calculate the amount that they made their check by (failing the check entirely counts as a -1, regardless of how much the roll was missed by). The character whose total amount of success rolls is higher is considered the winner. Neither side gets experience.

In the event of one side calling for a do over during a "Vs." conflict, BOTH participants must do over their Trait check, but only the player calling for the do over earns Bad Karma.

The Boss narrates the results of all all Frogger-vs.-Frogger conflicts.

The Boss

Stakes & Consequences

"So what do you wanna do?"

"First I'm gonna take you out to dinner, and then I'm gonna go back to my apartment and watch Kung Fu. Do you ever watch Kung Fu?"

"I love Kung Fu."

-- Peter and Joanna, *Office Space*

So, you're The Boss, and you're working on a Scene, and the first conflict comes up, and it's time to set the Stakes and Consequences.

You'll do fine. I trust you. That said, I have this bit of advice: don't just set the Consequences as the opposite of the whatever-the-character-wants; frequently, that's boring, and it brings the story to screeching halt. Use the consequences to add another complication to the character's story as a whole.

Say the character wants to woo some pretty boy in a bar. It's easy to say "and if you fail, he turns you down." Eh. That's no fun. Try this out: "If you fail, his girlfriend sees what's going on and 'interrupts' the whole thing before you get anywhere." Ohhhh, see, that sounds interesting.

Lanes of Traffic

I meant to write more about this, but I ran out of time, so here it is in brief. Lay out the character's stories like a *Frogger* game; first, the Highway, then the Median, then the River.

The Highway: Discreet Threats

"Hello, Peter. What's happening? We need to talk about your TPS reports."

-- Dom Portwood, *Office Space*

For the first half of a story, keep the Conflict simple and discreet –you're using the situations to establish the various main threats that the characters going to face, and you want them to be spelled out, nice and clear... you're going to use that later when things get crazy.

The Median: Taking Stock

"What if we're still doin' this when we're 50?"

"It would be nice to have that kind of job security."

-- Peter and Samir, *Office Space*

About halfway through the story, give the player a deceptively easy scene – a moment to reflect and look at how far they've come, and how far they've got to go...

... oh how very very far they've got to go, and what little distance they've really come. This is where the character gets a chance to wonder "am I just wasting my time? What's the point?"

The River: In Over Your Head

"I've passed the point of no return. Do you know what that is, Beth? That's the point in a journey where it's longer to go back to the beginning."

-- Bill Foster, *Falling Down*

The character dives in for the last big push for Home, and you want that water swirling into their mouth and ears. You want to hit them with their wife's infidelity and you drew a Diamond? It's a receipt for a very expensive luxury hotel weekend. Use the cards for color, but kept the pressure up and push the scenes and Stakes in a way that makes the players want to succeed even if it means lots of Bad Karma – interesting Consequences that make the player's *wince*, that's what I'm talking about.

Winning

"Some people say forgive and forget. Nah, I don't know. I say forget about forgiving and just accept. And... get the hell out of town."

-- Debi, *Grosse Pointe Blank*

The character wraps up a conflict and checks of the fifth “win” box on their sheet. They get one more scene, where you narrate them getting Home – getting exactly what they want, and riding off into the sunset.

Losing

"You know what two things are very similar? Unpaid overtime and death."

- Dilbert

Here's a dirty little secret about this game; not everyone's going to win. Winning is going to be hard, and Losing is going to hurt.

Your job, as the Boss, is simple: you have to make that final, wrap up, “your guy lost” scene be as awesome as possible.

You can do it.

Acknowledgements

All the contributors to The Forge (<http://www.indie-rpgs.com>), Story-Games for Everybody (<http://www.story-games.com>) and RandomWiki (<http://random.average-bear.com/HomePage/>) influence and inspire me with their thoughts and insight on the dozens of outstanding games coming from that crew, year after year – they are, by my lights, the finest that gaming as a community has to offer.

This game was influenced by many sources:

Video Games

Umm... I'm gonna say Frogger. Also, the inspiration for this game came almost entirely from the art piece entitled "Frogger," by Dan Abdo, and hosted on Life Meter Comics.

(http://lifemetercomics.com/art/frogger_dan.html) Everything else flowed from that.

RPGs

- The original *ClockWorx* conflict resolution system is by Jared A. Sorensen, and is used in *Frogger* with his kind permission.
- *The Agency*, by Matt Machell: Matt's 'karma' system was the inspiration for the way you get rid of Bad Karma in *Frogger* – I just turned some of the fun outward at the other players.
- *Galactic!*, by Matt Wilson: contributed an integral part of how the group constructs a new scene – specifically, Matt's ideas for gathering player contributions about what's waiting.
- *Nicotine Girls*, by Paul Czege: a Nicotine Girl's "Dream" is a direct antecedent to a *Frogger*'s "Home".
- *The Shadow of Yesterday*, by Clinton Nixon, and Mike Holmes in general: TsoY put Stakes in terms I could understand, and Mike's essays on the subject showed me how stakes can be cool when they're won, and even cooler when they're lost.
- *Trollbabe*, by Ron Edwards: Trollbabe basically convinced me of the desirability of a "reroll" mechanic in a single-check system, and the mechanic that *Frogger* uses is basically a stump-foot version of the Trollbabe elegance. Also, I didn't want to think of another name for discussing the step in Conflict management where you work out what exactly might or might not happen, so I ripped off Ron's "Free and Clear" name.

Media and authors

There's a bunch of media out there either depicting the soul-crushing nature of the modern work environment, or telling tales of an average Joe, trying to escape it or gain something despite it.

- *Clockwatchers*
- *Dilbert*, by Scott Adams
- Everything written by Douglas Coupland
- *Falling Down*
- *Grosse Pointe Blank*
- *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle*
- *Lost in Translation*
- *Office Space*
- *Road to Perdition*
- *Shawn of the Dead*

