

Peter Nordstrand's Game of

Guilt and Frustration

Who Will You Hurt?

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The Game at A Glance

Guilt and Frustration deals with the conflict between a person's subconscious, or repressed, desires and the perceived expectations of the outside world. It is a game about not quite being a man. The game asks the question: When you are ripped apart by guilt and frustration, when your zest for life is gone, when your past choices have made you resentful and hateful, and you just want to harm somebody, who will you hurt?

What kind of sick fuck wrote this shit anyway?



Hang on! The last minute addition of the *sublimation* rules (page 7), changes the premise of the game. It introduces the option of turning all that bottled up Guilt into something constructive. Perhaps you don't have to hurt someone? You figure it out.

Guilt and Frustration is written as a 24 hour RPG, and is a submission to the September 2005 Ronnies.

Character Creation

It is strongly advised that you create characters that you, on some level, can sympathize with. The all out evil pet-torturing, painted-all-in-black villain does not make for a good protagonist. Player characters in ***Guilt and Frustration*** have to make some tough choices, don't invalidate play by making them bad-guys from the outset.

Player characters in ***Guilt and Frustration*** are assumed to be men. One design goal was to create a game suitable for dealing with the subject of dysfunctional masculinity. The sample character Josh McIntyre, for example, is created with this in mind. However, players should feel free to go beyond this, and explore kindred premises.

Actually, the game designer is a neurotic freak who knows nothing about women.

Use the *Sample Characters* as a reference when looking through the character creation process.

Relationships

Your character has four core relationships: to his mother, his father, his girlfriend, and his boss. Each relationship has certain **Expectations** on your character *that conflict* with a specific subconscious, repressed, or secret **Desire** that your character has. You may give your character additional relationships, if you wish.

Note: The Expectations are what your character *perceives* them to be, which may or may not coincide with what really is going on; i.e. a relationship in ***Guilt and Frustration*** is an inner quality of your character rather than actual interaction with other people.

- ▶ For each relationship, choose an Expectation and a conflicting Desire. Keep it short and to the point; not longer than a sentence.
- ▶ Distribute 20 points among all the Expectation scores. No Expectation may have a rating lower than 1.
- ▶ Distribute 20 points among all the Desire scores. No Desire may have a rating lower than 1.

Expectations and Desires give bonuses to die rolls relating to appropriate actions, but they do *not* in any way tell a player how to role-play. No matter what a character's ratings are, the player is always

free to have his character act in any way he wishes. Some actions will give bonuses, other actions will not. You decide if this should influence your role-playing or not.

Characteristics

Your character gets three distinguishing **characteristics**; his areas of expertise. Characteristics are broad descriptors, that define what makes your character noteworthy. Usually, characteristics give bonuses to appropriate actions. For example, a *high school math teacher* gets a bonus when solving equations, when speaking to an audience, when trying to bypass the bureaucracy of the education system, etc. Sometimes a characteristic gives a penalty rather than a bonus. However, unless specifically designed by the player as a flaw, this should be a rare consequence of a characteristic.

- Distribute 30 points among your characteristics. No rating may be lower than 5 .

Here are some ideas, to get you started if you have trouble coming up with good characteristics.

An **occupation** is what one does for a living: High School Math Teacher, Police Officer, Janitor, Lawyer, Traveling Handkerchief Salesman, Poker Player.

A **hobby** is an activity done on one's leisure time for pleasure: Trekkie, Jogger, Play Poker, Design Indie Role-playing Games, Loves Art Museums, Wine Connoisseur.

A **physical characteristic**: Strong Like an Ox, Handsome.

A **social ability**: Flirtatious, Eloquent, Street Cred.

Sometimes you may want a **flaw**: Strong B.O., Talks Endlessly About his Characters in Role-playing Games, Ugly, Dirt Poor.

Or it could be something **completely different**: Wealthy, Photographic Memory, Owns a BMW 645ci Convertible, Alien Abductee.



Compare to keywords in *HeroQuest*, traits in *Over the Edge*, and scores in *Sorcerer*.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution in ***Guilt and Frustration*** is handled by rolling a d20, modified by appropriate relationships and characteristics, and comparing the result to an opponent's similarly modified roll. Whoever rolls highest wins.

Example: Josh (see *Sample Characters*, below) is desperately trying to please everybody. His boss wants him to work overtime at the law-firm again. Josh therefore tries to convince his mother to reschedule their weekly "family" dinner.

Josh's player rolls a 4, +5 for trying to please his boss, +9 for trying to live up to his father's expectations, and +10 for actually being a lawyer, for a total of 28.

The GM rolls a 10, +10 for the mother's Control Josh's Life characteristic, for a total of 20.

Josh's mother agrees to reschedule; no hard feelings involved.

That's pretty much it.

Except that every roll also has an effect in game terms.



The Pool is another game where character traits simply adds a bonus to dice rolls. Not that this game is anything like *The Pool*.

Effect

The **effect** of a roll is a modifier that affects appropriate future rolls.

- ▶ The effect equals the winners modified roll, divided by 10.

Example: In the previous example, the effect was 3 (Josh's modified roll of $28 \div 10 \approx 3$). Later, when Josh's mother visits him at work, distracting him with hollow chatter about her new lover, Josh will get a +3 bonus to convince her to leave, since she has already agreed to meet him some other time.

Effect and Relationships

Whenever acting in accordance with, or contrary to, an Expectation or Desire a character gains points in either Guilt or of Frustration (see *Cracking Up*, below).

Example: Josh fulfilled his boss' wishes, and records 3 Frustration (the effect of the roll above) next to his relationship to his boss. He also acted in accordance with his father's expectations, which adds 3 Frustration points to that relationship as well. Since Josh successfully convinced his mother to reschedule, he isn't letting her down, and does not gain any Guilt in his relationship to her.

Josh is getting pretty frustrated with his work ...

It's a freaky game about freaky people going to WORK?!?

Duration

A penalty or bonus lasts as long as common sense dictates.

Severity

Some things are more severe than others. Being hit by a shotgun blast is worse than being punched. In certain circumstances, the GM may assign a multiplier to the effect, based on its severity.

Cracking Up

Characters in ***Guilt and Frustration*** always run the risk of having a breakdown. Before you get too depressed by this rather dour mechanic, be aware that there is a way out. Rules for *sublimation* can be found at the very end of this chapter.

Guilt and Frustration

Each relationship comes with separate **Frustration** and **Guilt** scores. Frustration is associated with Expectations, and Guilt with Desires. Thus, there is one Frustration/Father score, one Frustration/Girlfriend score et cetera. All Guilt and Frustration ratings start out at 0.

Frustration

- ▶ Whenever a character acts in line with an Expectation, he gains Frustration equal to the action's effect.
- ▶ Whenever a character acts contrary to an Desire he gains Frustration equal to the action's effect.
- ▶ Once a relationship's Frustration rating exceeds its Expectation rating, it is transferred into Hatred (see below) in its entirety.

Example: At one point Josh's Frustration/Mother goes up from to a total of 6. This exceeds the relationship's Expectation score of 5. Therefore Josh's player adds 6 to his Hatred, and subsequently reduces his Frustration/Mother to zero.

Guilt

- ▶ Whenever a character acts in line with an Desire, he gains Guilt equal to the action's effect.
- ▶ Whenever a character acts contrary to an Expectation he gains Guilt equal to the action's effect.
- ▶ Once a relationship's Guilt rating exceeds its Desire rating, it is transferred into Hatred (see below) in its entirety.



Compare to how Paradox is handles in *Mage: The Ascension*.

Hatred

Hatred impairs a character both physically and emotionally, giving him a penalty to all rolls. That's right, everything the character does is affected; it takes a lot of energy bottling it up like that. The penalty is equal to his Hatred rating. Thus, a character with Hatred 5 gets -5 on each and every die roll.

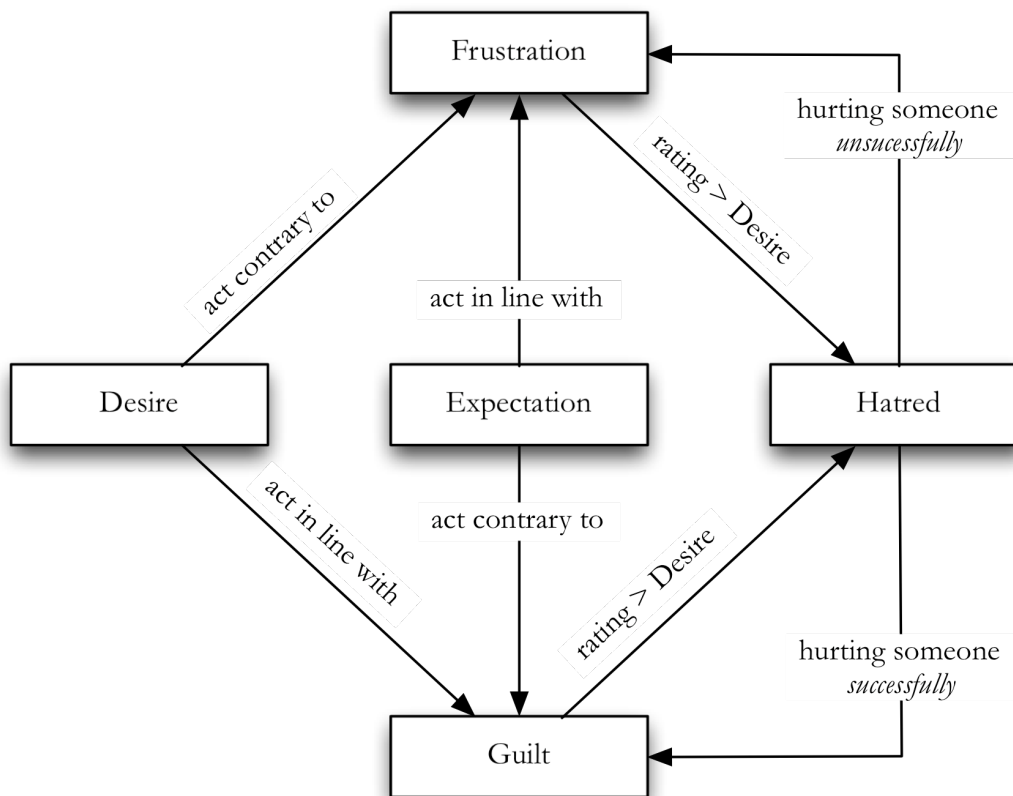
Sadly, there is only one way to reduce your Hatred rating: Hurting someone.

Seriously, what is wrong with this guy?

- ▶ A character hurting someone to reduce his Hatred gains a bonus equal to his Hatred rating.

Example: Josh desperately needs to get rid of all this intense bottled up ill will. He decides to take it out on his boss, by sending an anonymous letter to his boss' wife, claiming that her husband has a love affair with his secretary. With a Hatred of 6, Josh gets +6 to this despicable act.

- Once a character has hurt someone, his Hatred is reduced by the effect of the roll. In addition, if it was a *successful* roll, add +1 to all the character's Guilt scores. That's right, all of them. If the roll was *unsuccessful*, add +1 to all the character's Frustration scores.



Sublimation

Sublimation is the act of diverting or modifying inappropriate or undesirable drives and impulses into socially acceptable activity. A determined player can deliberately turn his character's Desire into a **Passion**. This is a long and arduous process, but it can be done. A Passion is an altered, *sublimed*, version of a Desire; something that *doesn't* clash with an Expectation. A Passion can be used in play just like a Characteristic.

1. Make up a Passion.
2. Roll a d20 versus d20+[Desire]. The Passion's rating is equal to the effect of the roll. This is the only instance where it is possible to start out with a negative rating.
3. Whenever the character acts in accordance with his Passion, the player may roll [Passion] versus [Desire]. Any *success* increases his Passion by one (1). If the Passion rating is positive

—and *only* if it is positive—the player may also choose to reduce the corresponding Desire by one (1).

Example: Josh's Desire/Father is to become a full time musician. This is incompatible with his father's wish for him to be a successful lawyer. Therefore, Josh decides to establish a new Passion for copyright law, especially as pertaining to musical works.

Josh's player rolls 11 versus the GM's 16 (a roll of 10 + Josh's Desire to become a musician of 6). Josh gains a Passion for copyright law at -2.

What about reducing Frustration?

Apparently, the designer has no idea how to deal with OTHER people's wishes.

A Note on NPCs

The relationship mechanic, with its expectations, desires, guilt, frustration, and hatred is there to facilitate certain player priorities. Non-player characters don't wrestle with the same problems that player characters do. If you need to assign stats to them, give them characteristics, as many or as few as you like, and be done with it. And if, for some reason, you want an NPC to crack up and begin to take out their guilt on frustration on other people, then let them. Your NPCs can be as sick or as sane as you want them.

Influences

Brucato, Phil, et al. *Mage: The Ascension*. 2nd ed. 1995.

Edwards, Ron. *Sorcerer: An Intense Role-Playing Game*. Chicago, 2001.

Laws, Robin D. & Greg Stafford. *HeroQuest: Roleplaying in Glorantha*. Concord, 2003.

Tweet, Jonathan. *Over the Edge: The Role-Playing Game of Surreal Danger*. 2nd ed. Roseville, 1997.

West, James V. *The Pool*. Get it for free at <http://www.randomordercreations.com/thepool.htm> (scroll down to see the game).

Conversations with Chris Chinn, Mike Holmes, and Ron Edwards have been a major influence on my approach to role-playing. Naturally, these exchanges took place at The Forge.

If I've forgotten to mention your game, an obvious influence, I beg your forgiveness. Contact me, and I will correct this embarrassing mistake if I ever update the game.

Sample Characters

Josh McIntyre

Mother: Georgia Jollimore

After her husband's death, Georgia took back her maiden name.

Expectations (5): Georgia expects Josh to be her closest friend and confidante.

Desire (3): Josh desires a nurturing mother figure.

Father: Dirk McIntyre

Dirk died in a car accident ten years ago, but his shadow still weighs heavily on his son.

Expectations (9): Dirk expected Josh to be a successful lawyer like himself.

Desire (6): Josh dreams of becoming a full time musician.

Girlfriend: Graziella

Expectations (1): Graziella expects Josh to be a supportive father figure.

Desire (6): Josh wants Graziella to be the nurturing mother figure he has never had.

Boss: Ralph Nease

Expectations (5): Ralph expects Josh to do a lot of overtime.

Desire (5): Josh wants to spend more time with his girlfriend.

Characteristics

Lawyer (10)

Guitarist (5)

Prevaricate (15)

Gene Waylon Uchtman

Mother: Dominica Marlin Uchtman

Expectations (5): Dominica wants her son to kill his father.

Desire (5): Gene wants his mother

Father: Mark Kelton Uchtman

Expectations (5): Mark wants his son to sell government secrets to his North Korean business partners.

Desire (5): Gene wants his father in a federal prison.

Girlfriend: Marion Camelon

Marion is a secret agent working for the Consortium, a high-tech crime syndicate based in Eastern Europe. The Consortium is an enemy of the United States.

Expectations (5): Marion expects Gene to leave the CIA and join the Consortium.

Desire (5): Gene wants Marion to marry him and move with him to France (see below).

Boss: Jamil Ayala

Expectations (5): Jamil expects Gene to [insert latest mission].

Desire (5): Gene wants to leave the CIA, and open a restaurant in La Rochelle, France.

Characteristics

CIA field agent (20)

Ladies' Man (5)

Chef de Cuisine (5)