Jack
OF ALL
Trades

"It's not fair, but neither is the universe."

I'm a roving jack of all trades –
Of every trade, of all trades –
And if you wish to know my name
They call me Jack of All Trades.

Oh, I am a roving sporting blade; they call me Jack of All Trades –

I always place my chief delight in courting pretty fair maids.

So when in Dublin I arrived to try for a situation,

I always heard them say it was the pride of all the nations.

On George's Quay I first began and there became a porter

Me and my master soon fell out which cut my acquaintance shorter

In Sackville Street, a pastry cook; In James' Street, a baker

In Cook Street I did coffins make; In Eustace Street, a preacher

In Baggot Street I drove a cab and there was well requited

In Francis Street had lodging beds, to entertain all strangers

For Dublin is of high renown, or I am much mistaken

In Kevin Street, I do declare, sold butter, eggs and bacon

In Golden Lane I sold old shoes: In Meath Street was a grinder

In Barrack Street I lost my wife. I'm glad I ne'er could find her

In Mary's Lane, I've dyed old clothes, of which I've often boasted

In that noted place Exchequer Street, sold mutton ready roasted

In Liffey Street had furniture with fleas and bugs I sold it

And at the Bank a big placard I often stood to hold it

In New Street I sold hay and straw, and in Spitalfields made bacon

In Fishamble Street was at the grand old trade of basketmaking

In Summerhill a coachmaker; in Denzille Street a gilder

In Cork Street was a tanner, in Brunswick Street, a builder

In High Street, I sold hosiery; In Patrick Street sold all blades

So if you wish to know my name, they call me Jack of all Trades

Jack of All Trades

What is *Jack of All Trades?*

Jack of All Trades is intended to be a broad universal system that can be applied to any setting that the game leader and the players wish to explore.

Also, part of the point of *Jack* is to create a role-playing game that – while retaining the complexity found in many RPG's – is quick enough to pick up that it can be learned by somebody with little experience.

What kind of dice do I need for *Jack of All Trades?*

None. *Jack* uses no dice. No D20's, no D6's, no D100's. Instead, players in *Jack of All Trades* build their characters and make their checks using regular playing cards.

Yes, that kind of playing card. I am very impressed by your Sandman Tarot set, but it has a few extra cards in it that we don't have rules for. So let's stick to a good ol' pack of Poker cards, shall we?

You'll also need a handful of poker chips. If you're feeling fancy, grab yourself some of the professional clay chips like you've seen used on TV in the No Limit Texas Hold-'Em tournaments. In fact, there are lots of places now where you can spend a small fortune to get such chips with custom labels. But you could much more easily get a pack or two of cheap plastic chips from your local dollar store which would be considerably cheaper and which you would be a lot less afraid of losing. Plus, you could use some circular printer labels to customize them yourself. But whatever gets your motor running is fine. What's important is that you have a full deck of cards and some poker chips.

What's the deal with "Green England's Shore?"

As I said, *Jack of All Trades* is supposed to be a broad, universal system. I've included "Green England's Shore" as a very basic setting for *Jack of All Trades* adventures as an example of what can be done with the game. No, no need to thank me. I live to serve.

It sounds like you're describing one of those "beer and pretzel" games. Can you tell me your favorite beer joke?

Actually, beer and pretzel games tend to involve a lot fewer numbers. But if you insist...

An American walks into a bar. He sits down, calls the bartender over, and says, "I want the taste of the Rockies. I want a beer that gives me that true, blue, American feeling. Get me a Coors."

The bartender pulls a Coors for the American and goes back to the rest of the bar.

A few minutes later, a German walks in and sits down next to the American. He calls the bartender over.

"I want a true German beer," he says. "I want a beer like the beer served in Munich. I want a beer that proves that German beer is the best in the world. Bring me an Einbecker Ur-Bock."

The bartender shrugs, gets the bottle and glass for the German, and puts a hefty fee on his bill.

An Irishman walks into the bar next and sits down next to the German and the American. He looks over at the two men drinking their beers and waves the bartender over.

"I'll have a lemonade," he says to the bartender.

The bartender goes to get his lemonade. The American and the German stare at the Irishman in disbelief.

"Why didn't you order a Guinness?" says the American.

The Irishman snorts and says, "Well, I figure if neither of you are going to be drinking beer, then I'm not going to drink alone."

I guess you kinda had to be there.

Yeah, I get that a lot. Maybe we should just move on to the rules.

But First: Some Terms

Chances are that if you've stumbled on *Jack of All Trades*, you're an experienced gamer. The author would like to recognize, however, that there might be a few people out there for whom *Jack* is their first RPG. Welcome! And may I invite you to stick around and see what's going on. But may I point out to you that you might be safer starting with something established like the D20 gaming system, or the D6 gaming system, or any of those systems that have a "D" in the name. Sure, you'll need fancy dice before you can play 'em, but those games have... um... watchamacallit. *"Writers."* And they've been "playtested." And they were written in more than "24 Hours." Even so, here are some handy terms for you to know before you head into the fray.

Fray: "Fray" is a disorderly fight or struggle. A term that is supremely applicable to the current form of *Jack of All Trades*.

Game Leader: Or, as I like to call him, "The sucker what owns the instruction book." This is the friendly person who has elected to let the players have all the fun while they pull their hair out trying to figure out a way to get back on track and finish the lovely adventure they carefully crafted the night before in a panic. They decide what stats you check, they tell you what happens as a result, and they basically run the game. Their role in *Jack* is vital. Especially because the first rule of *Jack* is that the Game Leader's word is final.

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Role Playing Game: Also called an "RPG." Do we have to cover this? Okay. An RPG is a game in which the players "roleplay." That is, they take on roles and play them in an imaginary situation. It's safe and fun for everyone.

Character: Your character is the person you portray in the course of the game. Your Character Sheet provides you with the information you need to play that character.

Cards: Even if you're not familiar with RPG's, you should be familiar on some level with a standard deck of playing cards. The deck has four suits. Each suit has an Ace, the number 2-10, and three face cards (Jack, Queen, and King), and the deck should also have two Jokers who are without a suit. The Anglo-American deck uses Hearts, Clubs, Spades, and Diamonds as the suits, but suits don't matter in *Jack*. If your deck has a suit of swords instead of a suit of spades, then that's groovy. Rock on with your bad self.

Chips: On your table you might have tortilla, potato, apple, or (my personal favorite) sweet potato. But any time we refer to Chips in the rules we're specifically talking about the poker chips used to keep track of your character's ability to advance and develop. These are not edible. No. Really. Spit it out.

Class: This is the job your character does. Simple enough. There are three basic classes in *Jack* – Warrior, Wise One, and Rake. These will be discussed later.

Stats: Stats determine the ability of your character as well as several other traits. We'll get to

that when we talk character construction. For now, just know that there are two kinds of Stats defined below.

Base Stats: Base Stats are stats that are basic to all characters in *Jack of All Trades*, regardless of setting and campaign. Every character created in *Jack* will have a "Constitution" score. Every character in *Jack* will have an "Attraction" score. It doesn't matter if you're playing a space trucker, a superhero, or a gay vampire in New Orleans.

Option Stats: Option Stats are dependent on your Game Leader – or on your ability to make a good case for them. Option Stats may be the result of the setting or they may be the result of an individual character's Class. For instance, your Space Trucker has to do a lot of work that ordinary people might not ever encounter. So he might have the Stat "Pilot Large Spaceship," which would be largely a result of the game's setting. Meanwhile, your superhero may be FlyHigh Guy with the power of heat vision (Don't ask me why he's FlyHigh Guy, then – you're the one who's playing him). He would then have a "Heat Vision" Stat that would be unique to his character. And your gay vampire in New Orleans may have a sulky pout when he gives an interview in a dank, deserted, Old South mansion. Feel free to argue with the Game Leader that you deserve a "Pout" Stat. I'm sure they'll appreciate that.

Smackdown Rules: Oh, boy. You're in for it, now. You had to go and argue that "Pout" was a valid Stat, didn't you? There are a lot of terms for that kind of player. Some call them "Munchkins."

Others call them "Rule Lawyers." I prefer to call them "Cannon Fodder." These are the people who have memorized the entire rulebook – not because they're dedicated to the game, but because they want to find every possible loophole to get out of bad situations that they probably started, themselves. They want to exploit every tiny detail in order to squeeze the maximum value out of their character. Ever played a game of **insert popular fantasy game I don't want to be sued by** and been in a party with a half-elf Druid/Fighter/Thief/? That's probably a Rule Lawyer at work.

Jack of All Trades is, admittedly, not friendly to Rule Lawyers. We recognize their place in gaming, and realize that sometimes Rule Lawyers can be a good thing. However, we feel that when a Rule Lawyer becomes annoying, it's time to bring that fact to their attention. That's why we have Smackdown Rules.

Smackdown Rules are optional rules that can make things very hard, very fast. A prime example of this will appear later as the "Suicide King" rule. These rules are enforced at the Game Leader's discretion, and are a sign of one of three things.

1) *Somebody's being a Rule Lawyer and holding the game up.* Someone has seriously ticked the Game Leader off with their constant whining and loophole-exploiting. In this case, there's probably a good chance that they've managed to tick the other players off, as well.

2) *The game needs a shake-up.* Sometimes, nobody's done anything in particular to deserve the smackdown that's coming around. The Game Leader has just decided that benevolence and goodwill are making for an awfully boring game and it's time for something to stir up the situation a little. Those of us who were forced to sit through Sunday school at some point in our lives like to call this the "Job Complex."

3) *The Game Leader just had a love affair that ended very badly and they don't see why anybody else should have any fun.* Yeah. I really can't help you with this one.

Smackdown Rules are *not* fair. In fact, they are categorically unfair. That's part of why they'll all appear in nice grey boxes like the one you're looking at right now. This should point out to the Game Leader that the rule in question is *not* meant to be enforced 100% of the time, but only when somebody is being annoying. Or the game calls for it. Or it would just be a lot of fun.

And for Rule Lawyers who would care to argue that their Game Leader doesn't *have* to enforce a Smackdown Rule and therefore they really shouldn't, please bear in mind the first rule of *Jack of All Trades*: The Game Leader's word is final.

The First Rule of *Jack of All Trades:*

The Game Leader's Word is Final.

I never get tired of saying that. And neither should you.

Now that we've covered that, shall we move on to Character Creation?

Character Creation

Character creation is possibly one of the hardest parts of any particular RPG. It takes time to put down the stats, balance the figures, beat the Rule Lawyers for asking how many classes their characters can have, and then hide the bloodied and shattered corpses. All the while there is much wailing and gnashing of teeth as the Diet Coke runs out and the players become more involved in who's going to run to the store than they are in the game.

For this reason, Game Leaders might want to consider creating the characters in advance and handing them out to the players before the game begins. Not only does this save time, it also *really* ticks off the Rule Lawyers.

If you want more speed like you get from pre-creating the characters, but you would also like the players to be able to customize their characters, then meet them halfway. When the time comes around for background information on a character sheet, let the players handle it themselves. Otherwise, you have everything else on the character sheets nicely filled out.

An alternate time saver is to have the players prepare their character sheets themselves. This puts the whole dreary slog – I mean, acres of fun and adventure! – into the hands of the players. Who will surely name their firstborn child after you as a result of your kindness and generosity.[1]

Or, if you are truly a masochist, you can go the long route and have your players create their characters at the beginning of the campaign. In the end, it's all good – as long as the characters get made and the game can begin.

Prepare the Deck

During game play, the deck will be a full 54 cards (all cards and both Jokers). For the purpose of character creation, however, you'll need to remove some cards from the deck.

1) Remove the Jokers. Jokers are usually the first cards removed in any regular card game. They have a purpose in *Jack*, just not during character creation. Bench 'em.

2) Remove Face Cards. If you're not certain what face cards are, you can pretty much remember that they're the ones with faces on them instead of numbers. Those would be Jacks, Queens, and Kings. Again, they'll be back in the deck when we're ready to play, but they don't have any purpose in character creation. Let 'em warm the bench with the Jokers. But make sure you leave the Aces in the deck – they don't count as face cards.

3) Remove the Tens. It might seem a bit odd, but go ahead and remove the ten for each suit in the deck.

Now you should have a deck composed of four suits with each

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[1] Either that, or name them "Grognar the Barrbarian.

suit represented by number cards from one (ace) to nine. This is a character creation deck.

Basic Information:

It's time to lay down some basics about the character. First – what's the character's name? Everybody's got to have one. Generally speaking, the name is whatever the character's creator wants it to be.

That is, it's whatever the creator wants it to be *within reason*. Joe the Wizard is acceptable. Elowynn the Elfin Thief is acceptable. Grognar the Barbarian is acceptable.

If you get a character submitted to the game bearing a name like "Elcowiznixch the Unstoppable, Slayer of Orcs, Feared of Men, Loved of Women, Destroyer of Worlds Who Laughs Even as He Cuckolds Death Himself," feel free to secretly assign the character a Stats decrease of –1 for each syllable after the first six.

Gender and Age are also up to the whim of the Game Leader and the Player. There are no gender-based bonuses, and we assume that if a character is ancient with really high Stats, then they're Yoda. Let's move on.

Character Class:

Character Class is listed directly below the character's name on the Character Sheet, but it has significantly more importance to game play than the name, age, or gender. The Class determines the character's specialty.

There are three basic Classes in *Jack of All Trades*. These Classes are the Warrior, the Wise One,

and the Rake. Each class has its own set of bonuses to the Character's stats. When we draw up the Stats in the next major step, we will add those bonuses accordingly.

1) The Warrior: Warriors are those who specialize in physical battle. This term is kept in the generic to allow for variations to fit the intended setting of the campaign. In a swords-and-sorcery setting, a Warrior would likely take the shape of a knight or a barbarian. In a modern setting, a Warrior might be a Navy Seal or a highly skilled mercenary. Generically, Warriors should be thought of as people whose specialty is to take anything that moves and make it not move any more.

Warriors get +1 bonuses on their Constitution and Strength.

2) The Wise One: Wise Ones are those who specialize in the life of the mind. They have gone to great lengths to educate themselves in subjects that the average person knows little about, if they know anything at all.

In a swords-and-sorcery setting, a Wise One could easily be a magician, a witch, a cleric, or any number of similar figures. In a modern setting, they might be a scientist, a scholar, an archaeologist, or other such person.

Wise Ones get +1 bonuses on Knowledge and Wit.

3) The Rake: Rakes are those who do what it takes to get by. Smugglers, thieves, and con artists are all valid figures to be played as Rakes. Generally speaking the Rake is not necessarily the most intelligent member of the group,

nor the strongest, but in spite of this they manage all right for themselves.

In a swords-and-sorcery setting a Rake would be your typical thief character. In a modern setting, they could be a con artist or a professional gambler.

Rakes get +1 bonuses to Wit and Coordination.

Class	Bonus
Warrior	+1 Constitution +1 Strength
Wise One	+1 Knowledge +1 Wit
Rake	+1 Wit +1 Coordination

Alternate Classes: The Game Leader has the supreme authority to create new Classes for a given campaign. This allows the Game Leader flexibility in creating the setting.

If, for example, the Game Leader decides to create the Enchanter Class and define it as a magic-user whose work involves as much seduction as it does magic, then they might adjust the bonuses accordingly. The Enchanter, then, might be a class that gets a +1 bonus on Knowledge and Attraction.

The rules to follow when making new Classes are that their bonuses must make sense for their profession, and no class ever receives more than two bonuses.

If the Game Leader chooses to allow it, Players can also suggest alternate Classes. These Classes must follow the same two rules – they must make sense and they can't have more than two Stats bonuses – and the Game Leader must approve of them.

Combining Classes: To combine classes, the player must make a successful argument to the Game Leader. On its face, it may seem just as easy to propose a new Class – but there is one difference between a combined Class and a new Class that makes it worth the extra effort.

The difference is in the number of bonuses granted to a combined Class versus those of a regular Class. A regular class can only have two bonuses. When a player successfully makes the argument for combining a class, however, they get to take the four bonuses of both classes and choose one bonus to drop – giving the character a total of three bonuses instead of the regular two.

Let's say that Joe – a Player who is already showing disturbing signs of becoming a Rule Lawyer – decides that he wishes to roleplay a ninja. The Game Leader has not introduced a Ninja Class, but instead is using just the three basic Classes.

Joe could just propose a Ninja class. However, a new Class can only have two bonuses.

Instead, Joe proposes that a Ninja would be a combination of the Rake and Wise One classes. The Ninja is not necessarily a Warrior, Joe argues, because while they work as killers, they depend more on stealth and secrecy than on brute strength. To

truly exercise their full potential, then, the Ninja must be limber, have superior knowledge on a vast array of subjects, and have the wit to use both in the proper way. These are combinations of the Wise One and Rake Class' bonuses.

The Game Leader is intrigued, and asks Joe to select a bonus to drop.

Joe studies the sheet for a second, and then announces that he will choose to drop the Wise One's Knowledge bonus.

The Game Leader immediately denies Joe's request and directs him to choose one Class or the other to roleplay as his Ninja character. Joe made a critical Rule Lawyer error at the last moment – having built a case for a Ninja requiring bonuses in Knowledge, Coordination, and Wit, he then dropped the Knowledge bonus, hoping to get a +2 bonus in Wit. By eliminating one of the bonuses he had argued to use, he undermined his entire argument.

If a Game Leader allows Players to combine Classes, it is important to note that Players can *only* combine *two* Classes. There can be a Warrior/Rake or a Rake/Wise One, but under no circumstances should a Warrior/Rake/Wise One be permitted. Two is the absolute maximum number of Classes that can be combined by a single Player, no exceptions.

HP:

Hit Points represent how much damage your character can take before dying. They go up with the basic information and the class, but we need to draw up our Stats before we can fill this in. So let's move on to the Stats, shall we?

Stats:

Here's where all of your hard work preparing the deck finally pays off. It's time to deal out the Base Stats.

Stats in *Jack of All Trades* are numbers from 1 – 9, and are dealt randomly from the deck. In terms of game play, a 1 in a stat suggests a dangerous level of ineptness, while a 9 in a stat suggests superhuman levels of ability. Let's take a quick look at those stats and what they mean to the player.

1) Constitution: Constitution will determine the character's hit points. This Stat has to do with the character's toughness. How much punishment can the character take before giving in? This can also be used to see how resistant the character is to poison or other types of physical attack. A character with a Constitution Stat of 1 will find that they are barely able to make it up a small flight of stairs without stopping to catch their breath. A character with a Constitution Stat of 5 can jog several miles. A character with a Constitution Stat of 9 can run a marathon even after having one leg lopped off.

2) Attraction: Simply put, this is how physically attractive the character is. Physical attractiveness can be very valuable to a character such as a Rake, as it can provide a very handy distraction. It can also make it easier to get townspeople or other characters to talk to you, and if the Stat is high enough it may even open some doors that

would otherwise be closed. A character with an Attraction Stat of 1 has been known to curdle milk just by looking at it. A character with an Attraction Stat of 5 is nice enough looking to be pleasant, but not outstanding enough that they can be easily found in a crowd. A character with an Attraction Stat of 9 can cause heart attacks by winking.

3) Strength: Strength has to do with how much physical work your character can perform. The greater the Strength stat, the more the character can lift, the more the character can throw, and the more the character can break. A character with a Strength Stat of 1 can't break much more than a sweat. A character with a Strength Stat of 5 is capable of helping to carry a couch up a flight of stairs. A character with a Strength Stat of 9 can pulverize bricks into dust with their bare hands while carrying another person on their shoulders.

4) Coordination: Coordination determines how well a character can move and how well they can do delicate work. A character with a Coordination Stat of 1 trips over their own feet constantly and can somehow manage to screw up heart surgery while in the next room. A character with a Coordination stat of 5 can make it through the average day without fumbling anything too badly. A character with a Coordination stat of 9 can fix a precision watch while turning back flips from roof to roof.

5) Knowledge: Knowledge reflects how much the character knows. A character with a Knowledge Stat of 1 can barely memorize the steps involved in the complex process of breathing. A character with a Knowledge Stat of 5 could get the correct questions for most of the answers given in an average episode of "Jeopardy!" A character with a Knowledge Stat of 9 would not only know all of the questions in that episode, but would also be able to give those questions in Mandarin Chinese, Latin, or even Ancient Aramaic if they so choose.

6) Wit: Wit reflects how well the character can think. This involves making connections and coming up with plans, as well as figuring out ways to sweet-talk one's way out of a particularly tight situation. A character with a Wit Stat of 1 cannot make the connection between walking and the fact that they keep moving forward. A character with a Wit Stat of 5 has a good deal of common sense and can make decent connections. A character with a Wit Stat of 9 could convince a nun that she could end world hunger by dancing naked on the table.

By now you've probably noticed that it's possible to have truly superhuman skill in this game. It's a feature of how the stats system works. The examples above have been exaggerated, but the point remains – someone with a Stat of 9 is capable of doing things no ordinary human can do.

There's a balancing smackdown rule coming up soon, but for now I would just like to point out that in any given draw, the maximum number of 9's a character could have in their Stats would be 4 – and the chances of that happening are very, very slim.

Now that we know what each of those stats means, it's time to fill them out on the Character Sheet.

Take your specially prepared character creation deck and make sure that it's shuffled. If the Game Leader is participating in the character creation (that is, if the Game Leader hasn't told the Player to develop their character on their own), then the Game Leader should handle the shuffling of the cards. If the Player is participating in the character creation (that is, if the Game Leader has not taken the responsibility for generating the character on themselves), then the Player should be allowed the opportunity to cut the cards before the deal.

Once the deck is shuffled and cut, the Game Leader deals out six cards – one for each Base Stat. The cards dealt are in order of the Stats on the sheet. The first card is Constitution, the second card is Attraction, and so on. When recording the Stats' values, remember that any given Stat can have a maximum value of 9. If a 9 is drawn for a Stat that gets a bonus, the Stat remains at 9. A stat can never advance to 10 or beyond, not even with Class bonuses.

Once all six cards have been dealt, the Player has the option of asking for a re-draw on any card they choose. The Player can only take one re-draw for each stat, however, and they are required to take the new number, even if it is lower than the original.

Unless the Players get overly creative with their character names, this may be the earliest possible point for a smackdown.

This rule, however, can also be used to help a Player. The smackdown is purely in the way the rule is applied.

Players get their bonus for their class and they get one opportunity to redraw each statistic if they don't like their original draw – but they have to take the new draw, no matter what it is. So Players get the opportunity to make a switch, provided that they're willing to take the chance that the switch won't be exactly what they were hoping for. It's a gamble appropriate for a cards-and-chips based game.

The optional rule for Game Leaders is that if they choose to, they can make one swap of statistics on a Player's sheet. There are conditions to this rule.

1) The Game Leader can make only one swap *per Character Sheet*, not per Stat.

2) The Stats being swapped must be finalized. If the player has not decided whether or not to re-draw a Stat, then the Game Leader cannot make the swap.

3) The swap must occur during the character creation process before game play has begun. Once the campaign is underway, the Game Leader can no longer make a swap.

There is also one condition for the Player. A swapped stat cannot be re-drawn. If you chose to let a Stat stand and then it got swapped by the Game Leader, you do not have the option of re-drawing that Stat.

Example 1) Dave has decided to play a Warrior. The initial deal comes out as 6-5-A-9-6-A. This gives his Warrior Constitution of

6 (+1 Bonus), Attraction of 5, Strength of 1 (+1 Bonus), Coordination of 9, Knowledge of 6, and Wit of 1. Figuring he can't do any worse than 1, he re-draws Strength and Wit. The new draw is 4 and 7. He now has a Strength Stat of 4 (+1 Bonus) and a Wit of 7. Not wanting to see any of his other numbers drop below their respectable levels, he calls his deal done.

Because Dave is a good gamer and can contribute a lot to the game, the Game Leader now offers to exercise his option to swap stats. 4+1 is fairly low strength for a Warrior, while 7 Wit is fairly high. It would make more sense for the numbers to be reversed. Dave accepts, and the Game Leader makes the swap. Dave's final numbers with bonuses added are Constitution 7, Attraction 5, Strength 8, Coordination 9, Knowledge 6, Wit 4, giving him a powerful Warrior with much better than expected coordination.

Example 2) Joe has successfully argued for a Warrior/Rake and has opted to drop his Wit bonus from his Rake Class. He deals out the cards and gets 6-5-2-A-9-6. This gives him Constitution 6 (+1), Attraction 5, Strength 2 (+1), Coordination 1 (+1), Knowledge 9, and Wit 6. Joe calls for a re-draw on Attraction, Strength, and Coordination. He draws 6-4-A, giving him new numbers of Attraction 6, Strength 4 (+1), and Coordination still of 1 (+1). He is dissatisfied with his Coordination – especially after arguing his extra bonus point for it – but he has no options, having used up his re-draw for it. He calls the deal complete.

By now, the Game Leader has noticed the pattern in Joe's playing. Joe is steadily rule-lawyering himself up and is stalling the game in doing so. The Game Leader therefore decides that it's time to lay the smackdown on Joe and teach him a lesson early on. Knowing that Joe loves nothing more than power playing, the Game Leader exercises his swap option. He immediately swaps the Ace in Joe's Coordination for the 6 in Joe's Constitution. Joe is delighted with his new Coordination at first, until he realizes that he now has a Constitution (with bonus) of 2. With his Hit Points based on his Constitution, Joe has just watched his character gain better-than-average Coordination at the expense of an ability to survive. From this point on, if he wants to advance in the game Joe will have to play his Warrior cautiously.

Make certain when you create more than one character that the character creation deck is re-shuffled between each character.

Once everybody's Base Stats are settled, it's time to calculate the HP.

Calculate the Hit Points for a Character by multiplying their Constitution Stat by 5. The resulting number represents the amount of physical damage the character can take.

Option Stats

If Option Stats are being used in the campaign, now is the time to figure those out. Option Stats are dealt in the same manner as Base Stats, but with one major exception. They are dealt

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separately to allow more opportunity for advancement. The same basic guidelines apply – a 1 in any Stat is dangerously incompetent, while a 9 in any Stat is godlike.

The major exception between dealing Option Stats and Base Stats is that with Option Stats, the original draw stands. There is no re-draw and there is no Game Leader swap.

That said, the Game Leader does have the option before character creation begins of setting a minimum level of competency that a Class has for an Option Stat. For example, if the setting is in outer space and one of the Players is drawing a character to act as the ship's pilot, the Game Leader can have determined earlier that the pilot had to have exhibited some skill in order to get the job they currently have.

In this instance, the Game Leader may decide that the ship's pilot has to have a Pilot Large Spaceship Stat. In order to become pilot, there had to be a certain level of skill there – but the Game Leader Determines that it could have been average skill, so he sets the minimum Stat at 5.

Situation One, then, is that the player draws a number lower than 5 for that Stat. In this instance, the number drawn is discarded and the minimum Stat is recorded.

In Situation Two, the player draws a number higher than the minimum Stat. In this case, the minimum Stat is discarded and the drawn number is used. The minimum stat is either used or discarded – it is never added to a drawn number.

Background Information

The only remaining spaces on the Character Sheet are spaces for Physical Description, Character Description, and Objects Carried.

Physical Description is obvious enough. Here is where we get a description of what the character looks like – tall, short, fat, or thin. This is an area where the Player (or the overworked Game Leader) can get creative. Just make sure they take their Attraction Stat into consideration. If they describe a ravishing beauty with an Attraction Stat of 1, then there had better be a good role playing reason for it.

Character Description is where we get an idea of who the character really is. A brief history of the character along with hobbies, foibles, and tendencies will help to flesh out the character and give us a better sense of whom we're dealing with.

Finally, the Objects Carried space should be kept simple to begin with. There should be plenty of swag to pick up on the adventure, so encourage your players not to try to start off with everything. Some basic equipment would be a good idea – or the Player might decide that their Warrior wants to go it bare-handed for a while. Whatever the option, leave room in the inventory for growth.

Character Sheet

Character Name: _____

Character Class: _____

Gender: ____   Age: ____   HP: ____

Base Stats:

Constitution: _____   Attraction: _____

Strength: _____   Coordination: _____

Knowledge: _____   Wit: _____

Option Stats:

Physical Description:

Character Description:

Objects Carried:

Character Sheets and Conflict Resolution

Now we have Character Sheets. But what do we do with all of those numbers?

The first thing we do is put all of the face cards, the 10's, and the jokers back into our deck of cards. With character creation behind us, we're ready to play. And for that we'll need a full deck. 54 cards in all.

The basic form of conflict resolution in *Jack of All Trades* is simple. Each Stat is represented by a number between 1 and 9. In the deck there are cards for four suits numbered 1 – 10.

When testing a Stat to complete a task, the Game Leader determines what Stat to use. Heavy lifting may require a check against the Strength Stat, while talking your way out of a dinner bill that you don't have the money for might require a check against either the Wit or the Attraction stat, depending on the tactic selected.

There are two types of tasks in *Jack of All Trades* – contested and uncontested. For simplicity's sake, we will begin with the uncontested.

Uncontested Tasks

Dave's Warrior and Joe's Warrior/Rake find themselves in an inn in a small village. Dave's Warrior wants to lift a table up over his head to show off his strength. We define this as an "Uncontested Task," in that there is nothing actively working against Joe's Warrior as he performs the task. With no active resistance, the task is purely an issue of the Warrior's strength against the weight of the table.

To test a Stat for an uncontested task, you draw a card against the Stat. To succeed, the card dealt must be of equal or lesser value to the Stat tested.

Dave's Warrior has a Strength Stat with bonus point of 8. The Game Leader determines that the table is a large table made of solid oak, and decides that the weight of the table is far enough above an average task that it calls for a one point deduction in the Warrior's Strength Stat. This adjustment is done at the Game Leader's discretion, which may not seem logical, but it's awfully convenient.

The Warrior is now lifting the table with an effective strength of 7. He shuffles up the cards and deals out one card to test his Stat.

The card he deals out is an Ace, which always has a value of 1 in *Jack of All Trades*.

The Warrior succeeds in his attempt to lift the table with a draw of 1 on a Strength Stat of 7.

Next, Joe's Warrior/Rake decides that he will prove his prowess by smashing through the top of the bar. Nothing is actively working against him, so again the task qualifies as an Uncontested Task. With his bonus, the Warrior/Rake has a Strength Stat of 5. Because every fixture in this bar is Oak, however, the Game Leader is also adjusting the Warrior/Rake's Strength down one point – again, because the Game Leader has made a judgment call regarding the difficulty of the task.

Now the Warrior/Rake is attempting to smash through the top of the bar with an effective strength of 4. He shuffles up the cards and deals out one card to check his strength against the top of the bar. Unfortunately for him, the card he deals is a 6. Even if there hadn't been any adjustment made to his Strength Stat, the card would still be higher. As a result, all the Warrior/Rake manages to accomplish is bruising his knuckles against the solid oak bar.

Because turnabout is fair play – or so I have been led to believe – it's time for the rule lawyers to get a little bit of smackdown, themselves. In both examples above, the Game Leader elected to adjust the Strength Stat down one point to reflect the difficulty of the task. This is the Game Leader's prerogative.

This does not, however, give the Game Leader blanket permission to abuse the players with random adjustments to their stats. In an example like the ones seen above, the adjustment is only valid if the Game Leader announces it before the check is made. If the Game Leader fails to announce it, then the budding rule lawyer is well within their rights to challenge that decision.

Let's take another look at the Warrior/Rake failing to break through the bar. If he draws a 6 – as he did in the example – then it doesn't matter either way. The decision stands because even unadjusted, his Stat is lower than the card he drew.

Let's suppose, however, that the Game Leader fails to announce the adjustment and that the Warrior/Rake draws a 5 against his Stat. With his Stat unadjusted, the card is equal to his Stat, meaning that he succeeds at his task.

Remember that the Game Leader's word is final? Well, this is still true. But in this case, the Game Leader's word is final when they declare an adjustment to a check *before* the card is drawn. If the card is drawn with no adjustment announced, then the Game Leader's word on that draw was "No adjustment," even if the Game Leader intended to make an adjustment and forgot to announce it.

Not all hope is lost, however. As long as the Game Leader announces adjustments before the draw, those adjustments are final. There is only as much room for negotiation as the Game Leader chooses to allow – and if they choose to pronounce an adjustment and not to hear

discussion, then their adjustment is final – even if they decide to adjust a character's Stat of 9 by five points. After all, there should be some tasks that even a superhuman would have difficulty with.

Notice that the maximum of any stat – even with Class bonuses – is 9. This means that a draw of 10 is almost always a failure.

A Game Leader may choose to define a task as a "gimme," and adjust a stat of 9 up 1 for a given task, effectively giving the player a skill of 10. This would make any number card drawn an instant success, and the only reason for actually drawing a card at all would be to see if one of the face cards pops up.

Face Cards: What do they mean?

The number cards discussed above are used to determine success or failure. In a check determined by a number card, the issue at hand is whether or not their skill is up to the task at that moment.

Face cards suggest a success or failure that may reflect more than just whether the skill level was up to it or not. These are not simply "successes" or "failures," but are defined as **Instant Failures**, **Instant Successes**, and **Strong Successes**.

An **Instant Failure** occurs whenever the card drawn is a King. In these moments, something goes wrong to cause the character to fail at their task. It can be an outside force – somebody jumps on top of the table just as the character is lifting – or it can be a problem with the

character that effects their ability to perform the task properly, such as the Warrior pulling a muscle in his back as he tries to lift the table. There might be a temporary adjustment made to the Constitution Stat in a case such as that. But the point is that the King's appearance out of the deck means that something has prevented that task from succeeding – it is an instant failure. If you're a rule lawyer, note that an Instant Failure from a King is absolute. The best way to argue against an Instant Failure is: don't. If you decide to try anyway, then hope to whatever deity you choose that the Game Leader isn't using a deck with a **Suicide King** – but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Queens count in Stat checks as Instant Successes. This may simply be a case of their Stat being enough to cover the task – as long as that's believable. However, if a character with a Strength Stat of 1 draws a Queen while trying to smash the top of an oak bar, then the Queen means that something was seriously in their favor. They may have chosen the exact spot of the bar where the screws were loose, or it might turn out that the bar has been poorly maintained and that sections of it are not nearly as solid as they should be. Like an Instant Failure, however, an Instant Success is absolute. A Queen means that the character succeeds at their task, whatever the reason for their success might be.

Drawing a Jack in a Stat check means a Strong Success. Like an Instant Success, a Strong Success is absolute. It means that a character accomplishes the task and accomplishes it well. Possibly

even *too* well. The Warrior draws a Strong Success while lifting the table and actually

winds up throwing the table across the room. The Warrior/Rake draws a Strong Success while smashing the bar and winds up causing serious structural damage to the entire inn (or, in the case of the Strength Stat 1 character, manages to hit just the right spot to make the dilapidated building finally come apart).

Strong Successes do not necessarily have to have bad consequences, but the issue here is that a Strong Success is a success that exceeds the character's expectations. A Strong Success on a Wise One attempting to read a forgotten language might mean, for example, that they not only can read the text but can also identify who wrote it and when it was written.

Jokers

In the deck of 54 cards there are two Jokers. When a Joker appears during a stat check, the Player has two choices regarding what to do with it.

The first option is to let it stand as the character's Stat check. This can be of great value to the Player, because when it comes up in a check the Joker acts as though it were a Queen. This means that the Player's first option is to leave the Joker where it is and declare the check an Instant Success.

The second option is that a Player can pick the Joker up. This means that the Player has to draw another card for their check and they run the risk of failing their check as a result. The Player may find a benefit in that risk, however.

Once you've

Because people like charts...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
2	F	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
3	F	F	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
4	F	F	F	S	S	S	S	S	S
5	F	F	F	F	S	S	S	S	S
6	F	F	F	F	F	S	S	S	S
7	F	F	F	F	F	F	S	S	S
8	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	S	S
9	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	S
10	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
J	SS	SS	SS	SS	SS	SS	SS	SS	SS
Q	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS
K	IF	IF	IF	IF	IF	IF	IF	IF	IF

Chart Legend

S - Success
F - Failure
SS - Strong Success
IS - Instant Success
IF - Instant Failure

picked up the Joker, it stays with your Character whether or not your character fails or succeeds at that particular check. For that check, the Joker may not be used. For any check after that, however, the Joker that was picked up can be exchanged for an immediate re-draw.

Example: Joe's Warrior/Rake has a Strength Stat of 5 (with bonus). He performs a check to see if he can bend the bars of a cell that he has been thrown into. The card dealt is a Joker.

Joe has the option of leaving the Joker where it lies – in which case he manages to open the bars up whether he has the strength or not – or he can pick it up. Joe decides that he would rather have a re-draw later, figuring that between his Warrior/Rake's Wit of 6 and Dave's Warrior's Wit of 7, they should be able to figure out a way out of the cell even if he can't force the bars apart. He picks up the Joker and puts it with his Character Sheet. A new card is dealt for the current check and he draws a 10. He has failed his check, but he has gained a Joker that he can use later.

Later in the game, Joe's Warrior/Rake is trying to close a heavy stone door at the mouth of a cave to block a crowd of angry villagers that is chasing him over a con gone awry. He needs to check his strength to see if he can close the door or not. The Game Leader announces an adjustment down of one point, meaning that the Warrior/Rake is trying to close the door with an effective strength of 4. Joe draws a card and draws a King – an Instant Failure. Realizing that the door may be his last chance for survival, Joe grits

his teeth and plays his saved Joker on the King, forcing an immediate re-draw. The King and the Joker are discarded and a new card is dealt for the check. Joe gets lucky and draws a Jack, meaning that his Joker has converted an Instant Failure to a Strong Success. The door slams shut and the Warrior/Rake is now safe from the villagers. Unfortunately, the Strong Success sent shockwaves through the cave system and caused the main route out of the caverns to cave in. He will now have to look for another way out.

The Suicide King Rule

There is a smackdown rule so terrible that it is the only such rule to get its own name. It is a name that is enough to strike fear into the hearts of even the strongest of rule lawyers. This is **The Suicide King Rule**.

Many standard decks of cards have a "Suicide King." Usually, the card looks something like this:

As you can see, this very cheerful card is called a Suicide King because it depicts a King who appears to be shoving a knife into his own brain. If a Game Leader feels that they might ever have the desire to use The Suicide

King Rule, then they would do well to make sure that their deck has one. If players fear that The Suicide King Rule might be used against them, they would do well to finagle a deck of cards into the game that *doesn't* have one. Or they could tread very carefully around the Game Leader and make certain they don't step on his toes.

Kings in *Jack of All Trades* signify an Instant Failure – but under The Suicide King Rule, this particular King takes on a different meaning. Under this rule, a Suicide King signifies not just an Instant Failure, but also a **Catastrophic Failure.**

A Catastrophic Failure means that the player not only fails, but their failure has significant negative implications. The Warrior draws a Suicide King while trying to lift the solid oak table. As a result of his Catastrophic Failure, he not only fails to lift the table, but also wrenches his back so badly that he suffers a significant long-term reduction to his Strength and Constitution Stats.

A Wise One draws the Suicide King while performing a Knowledge check to read a forgotten language, and winds up reading it in such a way that the message is at best garbled and at worst completely misleading.

A Rake fails his Wit check by drawing a Suicide King. As a result, not only does he fail to convince the villagers that his snake oil cures rheumatism, but he actually causes the villagers to accuse him and his entire party of poisoning the local well.

That last example brings us to another significant element of Catastrophic Failure. The Failure can frequently affect more than just the player it occurred to – it could also have negative implications for the entire party.

If none of the Jokers have been picked up, there is a 1-in-54 chance of drawing a Suicide King. The Game Leader's discretion determines whether that card acts as an Instant Failure or a Catastrophic Failure.

It's not fair. But neither is the universe.

Contested Tasks

Now that we've covered Uncontested Tasks, it should be easier to discuss Contested Tasks. Simply put, a Contested Task is when there is a force that is actively and willfully working against a Character as the Character attempts a task. For instance – let's say that Joe's Warrior/Rake decides to engage in a not-so-friendly game of tug-of-war with Dave's Warrior.

Both are using their strength against each other. The Warrior has a Strength Stat of 8, while the Warrior/Rake has a Strength Stat of 5. Both Players will then be performing checks against their Character's Strength.

The check ends when one player succeeds and another fails. If on the first deal the Warrior draws a 7 (lower than his Strength) while the Warrior/Rake draws a 9 (higher than his Strength), the Warrior succeeds and the Warrior/Rake fails.

It is possible that the two forces will tie, and it is not necessary that

they draw the same value card to do so. If the Warrior draws a 7 – a success – and the Warrior/Rake draws a 3 – also a success – then they are said to be tied. A success matches up against a success and the two are evenly matched – the task continues for another round. The cards dealt for this round are *not* shuffled back into the deck for the next round.

In the next round, the Warrior draws a 10 – a failure – and the Warrior/Rake draws a King – an Instant Failure. In a Contested Task, there is no difference between the types of failures with regard to the outcome of the task. A failure is a failure – although the Warrior fails this round because his strength isn't up to the task, and the Warrior/Rake fails this round because he lost his footing for a moment in the mud. Both fail, neither gains ground, and the task continues for another round with the Characters still Tied. Again, the cards for this and the previous round are *not* shuffled back into the deck for the next round.

In the third round, the Warrior draws a Jack – a Strong Success – while the Warrior/Rake draws an Ace – a success. As with the failures in the previous round, there is no difference in the outcome between the two successes. The Warrior may have managed to pull the Warrior/Rake off-balance for a second, but the Warrior/Rake's success means that he holds his ground. Neither one is a clear winner, and the task moves into a fourth round.

This rule isn't so much a smackdown on the players as it is a smackdown on a potentially long gaming session. Given two

even-matched forces, it is possible that a Contested Task could continue for a very long time. The Game Leader has the option, then, of ending the Contested Task anytime after it has gone through at least the third round.

Instead, the outcome of the task will then be decided by a cut of the deck. One of the forces cuts the deck to a card, and then the other one cuts the deck to a card. The values of the cards are compared and the highest card wins. For the purpose of this rule, the values of the cards are face value for the number cards with Aces counting as 1, and the values for the face cards are 11 – 12 – 13 for the J – Q – K. Jokers do not count in this rule.

Let's talk about experience

Role playing Games by and large assume that a Character's stats are not the final word on a Character's capabilities. They recognize the capacity of a person to grow, learn, and change. In most games, this is done through experience and levels. In *Jack of All Trades*, we use chips.

There should be three values of chips represented by whatever colors the Game Leader has provided. Chips should be in values of 10, 100, and 500. If there is a fourth color, the Game Leader may choose to have a 1,000 value chip.

These chips represent the experience gained by the Character through performing tasks and coming through combat. At any time that the Character has accumulated enough chips, they may cash in the chips for

Stat Value	# Chips (Bonus)	# Chips (No Bonus)
1	N/a	N/a
2	4000	8000
3	6000	12000
4	8000	16000
5	10000	20000
6	12000	24000
7	14000	28000
8	16000	32000
9	18000	36000

additional points on any given stat.

Each additional point must be purchased individually, and the cost of an additional point gets progressively higher as the Stat itself gets higher.

Stats on which the Character gets a bonus are considered to be vital to that Character's work and are therefore easier for the Character to learn. To find the value needed for them to advance, take the Stat value they are trying to achieve and multiply it by 2000. Bear in mind that each Base Stat should have a level of at least 1, so there is no need for a Character to ever spend 2000 to get their first point in a Stat.

As an example, let's take Joe's Warrior/Rake. He is obviously not happy with his character's Constitution, especially after the Game Leader pulled that Stat swap and left him with a Constitution Stat of 1 (+1 Bonus). Luckily for him, Constitution is one of his Bonus Stats. When figuring his current level, figure the number *without* the bonus – so while in Stat checks he has an effective Constitution of 2, in advancing his Character he has a Constitution of 1. When he has accumulated 4000 chips he can raise his Constitution to the next level and get a Constitution Stat of 2 (+1 Bonus), giving him an effective Constitution of 3. This will increase his Hit Points accordingly.

Players are only allowed to upgrade their Characters' Stats one point at a time. Joe might be able to accumulate 18,000 chips, but he cannot turn those chips in to move directly from a Stat of 1 to a Stat of 9. He must pay 4000 to advance from 1 to 2, 6000 to advance from 2 to 3, and so on. If you do the math, you'll find that this means that the total value in chips needed to move from a Stat of 1 to a Stat of 9 is 88,000 chips, which is a fair chunk of experience.

At the same time, Dave has determined that his Warrior could stand to be more attractive. At an Attraction Stat of 5, the Warrior is not ugly by any standards, but is also not particularly attractive. He feels that increased attractiveness might be able to open doors for the Character and his party.

Warriors do *not* get a bonus on Attraction. To calculate how many chips value he needs, then, take the Stat level he is trying to achieve and multiply it 4,000. To move from an Attraction of 5 to an Attraction of 6, he will need 24,000 chips value. Again, the Player can only upgrade the Character's stats one point at a time, meaning that if the Warrior moves from 5 to 6, he will need 28,000 *more* chips value to move

from 6 to 7. Again, the math will show that to move from 1 to 9 in a non-bonus stat, a player will need to invest 176,000 in chips – an even bigger chunk of change.

This same process is used to advance both Base and Option Stats. Note that a player can choose to add an Option Stat after the character has been created, but this will require a minimum investment of 7,000 chips value – 2,000 for the first point of the Stat and an additional 5,000 in a penalty for adding the Stat after Character creation is finished.