

WITLESS MINION!



THE ROLE-PLAYING GAME OF
MOOKS, MINIONS AND DUPES.

BY

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24-HOUR RPG

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Witless Minion is a role-playing game covering the daily lives and travails of the low-level mooks, agents, numberless hordes, administrative staff, and minions of Mad Scientists, Criminal Masterminds, and Supervillains. In this role players try desperately to pull off capers, avoid the bad graces of their superiors, stock away cash, escape capture, and negotiate for a better dental plan.

Witless Minion is a low-detail, high-trust game system. The rules are fairly abstract and assume a group familiar with role-playing games. It is a more narrative-driven game but GMs with a desire for greater crunch can easily expand on the rules presented here. Each player assumes the role of a minion, selects an archetype and picks their own talents and flaws. Depending on the campaign frame, players may be trying to climb the hierarchy in a single organization or move between a number of masters.

Players will need a bunch of d10s, the usual pen and paper, plus a number of tokens or coins to represent drama points.

While the game uses a standard dice pool mechanic for resolution, it does provide a number of new systems tailored to the genre:

Flashbacks: This mechanic allows players to 'retcon' preparation for a caper or operation. This encourages creativity and allows the GM to move forward into heists and the like without having the players spend hours debating the details.

Limits: A system of drama point rewards for play based on a character's disadvantages.

The Hierarchy of Villainy: Minions operate at the bottom of the food chain-- with a number of ranks above them. This mechanic simulates the difficulty faced by minions when fighting named characters.

The Prisoner's Dilemma: An optional system which offers a tangible incentive for sticking together and at the same time for bugging out on teammates.

Witless Minion is intended to be darkly humorous. It isn't gritty or realistic but as the same time bad things happen to bad and good people. Depending on the group, a GM may want to have a more serious or over-the-top ludicrous game.

Witless Minion draws thematically from the following sources:

Comic Books: *Empowered* (from which the name is taken), *52*, *Astro City*, *Gotham Central*, Simone's run on *Birds of Prey*, and *Manhunter* (the more recent version).

TV Shows: *The Venture Brothers*, *Frisky Dingo*, *Batman*, *Batman the Animated Series*, *The Xtacles*, *G.I. Joe*, and *MASK*

Movies/Films: *Expendable* (a must-watch short feature you can find online), *Troopers*, *The Dark Knight* (for the opening sequence), *Austin Powers*, *The Italian Job*, *Dr. Horrible*, *James Bond*, *The Incredibles*, and *Mystery Men*.

On the Web: *Evil, Inc*; *Girl Genius*; somethingawful.com's "Henchmen Status Updates" <http://static.somethingawful.com/d/feature-articles/henchman-status-parade.php?page=1>.

PART TWO: CHARACTER CREATION

1. Choose an archetype. Ten are presented below.
2. Come up with a little backstory and reason for signing on as a minion-- is this the character's first job or have they fallen through the ranks of other similar criminal organizations.
3. Assign points to the character's stats
4. Choose the character's abilities.
5. Pick the character's limit(s).
6. Final Details.

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

Archetypes help to define a character's role within an organization. Especially at the bottom of the food chain, organizations of villainy tend to have a loose approach to formal job duties. That means that minions with particular training may find themselves doing things they're completely unqualified for.

Archetypes are loose descriptions rather than character classes. Each archetype includes some typical limits-- players should feel free to come up with different ones. Each also has a slightly different flavor to their "flashback"-- the technique by which players may retroactively do preparation for a caper or operation (see Drama Points).

Muscle

The muscle pushes people around: victims and co-workers. They're the ones sent to rough someone up and the sound of their own knuckles cracking is music to their ears. What they lack in finesse they claim to make up for in brute force.

Typical Limits: Oblivious, Gullible, Hard of Hearing, Glass Jaw, Excessive, Slow to Learn

Flashback: Friends: Well maybe not exactly friends, but the muscle know someone who owe him a favor. Maybe it is someone from the old neighborhood or a distant relative. They been given the high sign ahead of time and have provide info, laid something in place or are lying in wait.

Arm Candy

Some Villains like to have beautiful things around them-- including people. The arm candy is part of the nameless harem such masterminds keep on hand. Arm Candy hopes to graduate up to the ranks of Boy Toy, Floozy, Stud or Moll. Perhaps some day they might even be asked to be Mr. Or Mrs. Number Two.

Typical Limits: Vain, Self-Absorbed, Low Pain Threshold, Spendthrift, Compulsive Lair

Flashback: Dupe: The Arm Candy has managed to 'persuade' someone to help them out- usually against their own best interests. They might leave a door unlocked, slip something into someone's drink or provide the blueprints needed.

Technician

Someone has to stand at the control panel and push those buttons. Mad Scientists especially have to have a legion of Technicians dressed in the appropriate lab coats. Technicians usually have a field of specialty, but have managed to either keep quiet about that or have pissed off a lead scientist somewhere. They usually have a knowledge of villain gadgetry but perhaps not the skill to actually apply that knowledge.

Typical Limits: Gunshy, Nervous Tic, Poor Eyesight, Weak Physique, Jealous Collegues

Flashback: Special Equipment: The Tehcnician technically wasn't supposed to have this device but he managed to sneak it out...which will come in handy right now...

IT Guy

Perhaps in his mind, the IT guy might actually be a L337 hacker-- but right now he's the guy who keeps the mainframe running, build the internal website and spends most of his hours trying to clear viruses off of the Leader's personal computer.

Typical Limits: Superiority Complex, Compulsive Critic, Asthma, Obsessive-Compulsive, Poor Hygiene

Flashback: Reprogramming: It was child's play to get into their system and plant that Trojan Horse to temporarily blank out their security cameras. Planting false information is just as easy.

Driver

He's played lots of Grand Theft Auto and Need for Speed, practicing running the streets and alleys with controller based precision. Someday he hopes to graduate from driving the surveillance and cargo vans around to being an actual Wheelman on a heist.

Typical Limits: Twitchy, Adrenaline Junkie, Loud, Braggart, Overly Protective of Possession

Flashback: Shortcut: Useful for chases and pursuits of all kinds, the driver knows the quickest or quietest way around something. He's memorized the directions, layout or patterns. Perhaps he's even managed to set a special surprise up ahead of time.

Martial Artist

The martial artist may have washed out from a legitimate dojo, perhaps they went overboard in a title bout. On the other hand they may have served under a real villainous cult and didn't quite make the cut. Or they may have an overly grand idea of their own skills after watching one too many movies.

Typical Limits: Delusional, Fanatical, Obsessive Exerciser, Teetotaler, Show Off

Flashback: Ancient Technique: The Martial Artist has learned special trick which may be used in just this instant-- a unique weapon or powder, the means to briefly cloud men's (but not women's) minds or some other obscure and extremely rare

Guard

The guard's been given simple instructions-- stand here and make sure no one comes through. The job seems easy, but the fact that the uniform came pre-bloodied makes him nervous. And now those alarms are going off-- where's he supposed to go-- why isn't anyone answering on the walkie-talkie?

Typical Limits: Lazy, Bullet Magnet, Unimaginative, Clueless, Badly Trained

Flashback: Boobytrap: The guard has prepared some kind of tripped defense (or offense) and put it into play. It could be as simple as a smoke bomb or as sophisticated as an advanced Rube Goldberg contraption to give them time to escape.

Soldier

Soldiers make up the mainline offensive troops for villains-- thrown away casually in assaults and cunning stratagems. Soldiers run the gauntlet from the wide-eyed greenie lured in by the promise of high pay to the grizzled veteran of a thousand Pyrrhic wars.

Typical Limits: Hard of Hearing, Jaded, Naïve, Trigger Happy, Shell Shocked, Paranoid

Flashback: Secret Weapon: The soldier always keeps one extra weapon up his sleeve or hidden in place on any mission. It might be a little extra firepower at the right moment or maybe just a last-ditch hurrah.

Accountant

Some Masterminds understand that villainy is a business-- for that they need accountants to handle and track things, from payroll to hiring to purchasing. Someone has to figure out how to amortize those equipment losses. The Accounts department of any villainous organization keeps the operation running-- if not smoothly then at least running.

Typical Limits: Overly Precise, Combat Adverse, Greedy, Low Self Esteem, Career Path Remorse

Flashback: Advance Research: The Accountant tries to keep everything in order and one can only do that by doing the legwork. They've figured out something ahead of time that they can now bring into play-- a special fact or detail overlooked by everyone else.

Specialist

Sometimes a villain needs personnel with talents outside the norm-- perhaps not entirely necessary for villainy, but important to day to day operations: the Vet who tends to the Man-Eating Lions, the Master Chef who prepares the exquisite last meals for prisoners, or the Tailor who preapres those fabulous uniforms.

Typical Limits: Obsessed with Profession, any others above.

Flashback: Trade Secret: The specialists skills may not seem useful at first glance, but they've managed to put together a few unexpected tricks based on their profession-- or they've managed to exchange secrets with the other behind-the-scenes staff.

ASSIGN CHARACTER STATS

Each character has six stats with a number that represents the number of dice used when rolling for an action related to that stat.

Physique: Relates to strength, endurance, stamina and health.

Agility: Deals with anything about coordination, speed, and dexterity.

Combat: Used for attacks, shooting, parries, spotting in the heat of battle, and the like.

Social: Covers any kind of social interaction or awareness.

Willpower: Handles staying cool, resisting fear, withstanding torture and pain.

Smarts: Applies to any test of intelligence, wisdom or technical expertise.

Stats run from 1 (weak, basic) to 5 (peak of human skill)...and beyond for some NPCs. A rank of 2 means decent potential and ability, 3 means your character's quite good at that, 4 means you stand out and are noted for your talent in that area. Players begin with 13 points to divide among those stats. At least one point must be put in each stat, and a maximum of one stat at the start may have four points.

PICK ABILITIES

Anything the character knows how to do well is represented by an ability. Abilities can be broad, standard or narrow. The narrower the ability, the more dice it gives when attempting the applicable action. In play, the GM determines if an ability applies and how many dice it gives.

Broad abilities cover a wide range situations but give fewer dice. Examples include Hand to Hand Combat, Ranged Combat, Athletics, Strong, Driving, Charming, Fast, Resilient and so on.

Standard Abilities cover a group of situations, but still have some general use. Examples include Pistols, Sense Motive, Electronics, Computer Programming, Wrestling, Drive Car, Lift Heavy Things, Mechanical Repair, Labwork, Security Systems, Diplomacy, Seduction, Electronic Surveillance.

Narrow Abilities cover very specific situations or maneuvers. These give the most dice in play. Players ought to come up with colorful and interesting names. Examples include Moving Vehicle, Conversing with Redheads, Honky-Tonk Stage Performance, Assessing Convenience Store Security, Bellycrawling, and Tournament Arm Wrestling.

The Perception Question

Perception, Spot Hidden, Search, Notice...however you call these they're always a problem in games. The GM should decide how they want to handle these checks. In general if a failed perception (or investigation) check would bring the action to a halt and keep the story from moving forward, then no roll should be necessary. Instead reserve these kinds of check for spotting ambushes, gaining insight or picking up additional details about the situation.

That being said, players can't buy a broad perception skill. They may buy things like keen sense of smell, sharp hears, hawkeyes (for seeing things far away)-- but these will

always be considered broad or standard abilities. Instead the GM should fall back to skills relevant to the situation for checks-- if in the middle of a party the GM wants to see if the player notices tension between a couple of guests, abilities like Diplomacy, Savior Faire, Sense Motive should be applied rather than a perception-type skill.

Tricks: An Ability Variant

Players may choose abilities which don't grant bonus dice to action resolution, but instead have other effects. These are called "Tricks". Usually these represent equipment which the character has constant access to. For example Nightvision Goggles, Grappling Gun, Flash Powder, Mini-Oxygen Tank, and so on. Alternately, these could be souped-up weapons like a special pistol that does an extra die of damage. The GM should evaluate Tricks on a case-by-case basis. In some cases they can simply act as a standard ability, like a GPS Navigation system which grants bonus dice for actions involving chases or evasion. Generally a Trick should be used to represent a power or ability which a normal person doesn't have access to usually. Note that players don't have to buy Tricks for every piece of equipment-- instead they represent something something unique for that character.

Players begin the game with eight abilities of their choice.

PICK LIMITS

Players begin the game with two limits. Limits represent a character's weak points. In other games these might be called flaws, disadvantages, or drawbacks. Each archetype has a list of example limits-- these serve a dramatic rather than game mechanic purpose, so no specific description is given for them. Instead the player will decide when one of his limits comes into play.

At the beginning of a session, the GM will put out a stack of drama point chips. During the game, the players may take one of those chips by invoking one of their limits. There are two basic ways to do this: the player can take an automatic failure before even rolling. They have to explain how their limit caused them to screw up. The check failed must have some consequence, stakes or else provide an interesting dramatic moment. Just failing a drive down to the store check isn't enough.

Alternately, if the player fails a significant action test roll in play they can take a drama point. They must narrate how their limit plays into the failure and accept an additional consequence from the GM for failing. If they do so they can take a drama point chip.

A word on choosing limits: limits should be flaws which affect the player themselves and not cause immediate consequences for the rest of the party. Limits like Loner, Sullen and Flies Off the Handle are bad for group play. The GM should be alert for players who use their limits as a weapon to disrupt the game or spoil other player's fun (and afterwards say "I was just playing my character..."). The GM should feel free to withhold points from these players.

FINAL DETAILS

Pick a name. Each character starts with ten wounds. That's it.

PART THREE: RESOLVING ACTIONS

When a player attempts to do perform an action, the GM decides how to resolve it. Generally actions have two components: what the player wants to have happen and how they're making that occur.

Automatic: If the action is trivial, easy and uncontested, or generally doesn't create a dramatic opportunity, the GM should allow the action to happen without any roll or argument. So if the character's decide to drive down the street to the 7-11, then there's no need for a check. If the consequences for failure aren't dramatic-- i.e. would we spend any time on it in a movie or a comic book panel, then the GM should let those things happen. Actual rolled checks should be for cool, interesting and important things-- three factors which sometimes overlap but not always in play.

Tested: If an action is directly contested, difficult, has some dramatic stakes to it or takes place under pressure, then the GM can call for a test. Combat's where most rolling will happen since most actions like attacks and defenses are contested.

ROLLING TESTS

For any action, the GM declares the relevant stat the player will use. This is the base number of d10s the player will roll.

Physique: Relates to strength, endurance, stamina and health.

Agility: Deals with anything about coordination, speed, and dexterity.

Combat: Used for attacks, shooting, parries, spotting in the heat of battle, and the like.

Social: Covers any kind of social interaction of awareness.

Willpower: Handles staying cool, resisting fear, withstanding torture and pain.

Smarts: Applies to any test of intelligence, wisdom or technical expertise.

The player can then ask to apply any abilities they have to the action. Players can gain up to an additional three dice to their pool based on their abilities. Only one ability may be applied to any attempt.

Broad Abilities like Hand to Hand, Athletics, Strong, Driving, Charming and so on can grant +1 die.

Standard Abilities like Pistols, Wrestling, Drive Car, Lift Heavy Things, Electronic Surveillance, and so on can grant +2 dice.

Narrow Abilities like Shooting from a Moving Vehicle, Conversing with Redheads, Bellycrawling, Tournament Arm Wrestling, and so on can grant +3 dice. In addition, GMs may-- at their discretion-- allow an additional effect for having such a skill or allow it to offset any penalties for a difficult environment or situation.

The GM is final judge of whether a particular ability is related to the action. If the GM feel the player is reaching with their use of the ability they should say no or have the ability give one die less bonus.

If an action isn't contested and the player has a number of abilities related to the action, the GM should feel free to allow the player an automatic success. This should especially be true if the player takes the time to describe their action: reward that effort.

Roll the dice and count each result of 7 or better as a success. Each 10 rolled counts as 2 successes. If the player rolls no successes and they rolled a 1 on at least one die, then there's a fumble-- a really bad result the GM should feel free to adjudicate.

Measuring Success

The actual difficulty of the task at hand depends on if the action contested or uncontested. For uncontested actions, the GM sets the number of successes necessary. The more difficult, complex or involved, the more successes necessary.

Extended Actions

Witless Minion uses a dramatic time scale, essentially outside of combat, each action takes as long as it needs to. However, in some cases, like long term projects the GM may ask that the player accumulate a number of success over several rolls (perhaps using different abilities) or take several players make rolls. If there's a time pressure, the GM may require X successes within Y rolls.

In combat, actions become a little more crunchy, but remain abstract. For involved actions, the GM may require rolls over several turns towards a cumulative goal. Any turn or action takes a few seconds, but the GM's the final arbiter of this. Consider that even in combat, time is still a dramatic factor. Actions which in real life would much longer always manage to get done within the span of a scene in comics, TV shows and movies.



Winning and Difficulties

If two (or more) characters are competing, then the results of the rolls are compared. The character with the higher number of successes wins. If the GM requires a tiebreaker, the character using the narrower abilities trumps a character using a broader one.

Where there's no active opponent, the GM assigns a static difficulty to the task. For example: picking a lock, climbing a mountain, editing video footage, building a house and so on.

For any basic task, the player needs just one success. Things like climbing a fence with wire at the top might be a basic task. Climbing a fence while avoiding security cameras might be a two. Climbing an electrified fence while avoiding security cameras could be a three. A task requiring five successes might be incredibly difficult, and more than that might be legendary.

Rule of Rolling

It is worth restating that the GM should only make the players roll if it matters, is interesting or dramatic.

Failure

If a character fails a check, then generally they've exhausted their skill and talents in the attempt. They may not try again. They may not try again unless they can apply a different ability to the attempt. This represents having to find another approach to the problem. Depending on the situation, the GM may allow other players to spend actions assisting and therefore providing another means of attempting the action.

In time dependent or extended action situations the GM may opt to handle this differently. In these cases failure represents the action taking longer. Players may continue to test, but each try uses up more time. For example, someone trying to break the security on a door while pursuit draws closer. Failure represents them fumbling around trying to get the right combination in the system.

Environmental Factors/Distractions

If the character is performing an action in a difficult setting: on a rocking ship, in a room filled with smoke, in sub-zero temperatures, then the GM may raise the number required for success up to 8+ or in horribly dire situations, 9+. Players who possess a number of abilities related to an action may ask to apply those to offset this penalty. The GM should allow this, especially if a player has bought deeply in a particular area.

Can I Do This?

Witless Minion assumes that characters can roll for most standard actions: characters have a good basic knowledge of the world. If an action covers a technical or specialized area of knowledge, the GM may require the player to have a related ability to even make an attempt. In these cases, broad abilities may not help. For example, characters can be assumed to know how to use a computer, but not to be able to hack a program or run a trace program.



accidents will happen

If a character lacks a relevant ability, the GM may allow them to roll a reduced number of dice in a fit of dumb luck. They bash on the keyboard blindly and something happens. Alternately, a player may spend a drama point to suddenly explain how they actually have an ability relevant to the situation. If the player spins a good or funny enough story, the GM should allow it-- such a skill must be narrow and specific to the need at hand. The player writes the new ability on their sheet and must spend their next experience to pay for the ability (or if they have experience on hand, they may spend it immediately along with the drama point).

Teamwork

Teamwork can be handled in a couple of ways. If the action is an extended one, then the GM may allow each player to roll to add towards a target number of successes. For example, the group has to search through a warehouse of boxes in order to find a lost artifact. Each player rolls and when the groups total reaches the target, the thing has been found. The number of tries needed determines how long the process takes.

For a more discrete action, like lifting a heavy metal door or making a room look presentable, the primary character rolls and each helping character simply adds a bonus die to the attempt, up to +3. If the project is technical, then helping characters must have some relevant ability. Alternately, the GM may allow helping characters to offset penalties for environmental factors. They may even reduce the number needed for success instead of giving extra dice. For each two players devoted to doing this, the number needed for success is reduced by 1, up to a maximum of 5+ for success.

PART FOUR: COMBAT

Combat signals the beginning of crunchiness in the system. There's a little more detail to handling combat operations, but overall the system follows the same rules.

Who Goes First?

If order of combatants doesn't matter the GM may go around the table. If it does matter, each combatant (or group of combatants if the GM wants to bundle some together) rolls 1d10. If they have an ability like Fast or Quick Reflexes they may add +1 to this roll for each ability. Actions happen from the highest roll to the lowest-- dice off again for ties. Turn order remains the same throughout the scene.

What Can I Do on a Turn?

On their action, a player may move **and then** do something. That something can be an attack, operating machinery, moving further or any other standard action. Incidental actions like looking around, shouting out orders, ducking, pulling out a weapon are free and don't cost an action.

How Do I Attack?

Declare a target and roll COMBAT plus dice for the relevant ability. If the target is unaware of the attack and out in the open, then a player just needs a single success. See below for more discussion about combat situation modifiers.

If the target is aware of the attack they may take a defense. This is either a Parry (based on Combat stat) or Dodge (based on Agility stat). In both cases they may add dice for a relevant ability. Missile weapons cannot be parried without special tricks or the like.

If the attacker rolls fewer success than the defender, the attack misses. If the attacker rolls more successes than the defender, the attack hits. If the result is tied, then the defender wins-- unless the defender is wearing heavy armor in which case they lose ties.

How Do I Determine Damage?

Weapons are broken into broad categories and each has a certain number of dice rolled for damage. For each ten the attacker rolled on the original attack, they may add +1 die to the damage roll. The GM may allow certain abilities to add an extra die of damage as well-- for example the Strong Swing ability with a baseball bat or Headshot with a pistol. In general these abilities only give a bonus if they weren't used for the original attack.

The roll needed to do damage depends on the target's armor.

Clothing/Naked	4+
Jacket/Heavier Wear	5+
Half-Armor (Vest/Jacket)-- Light	6+
Half-Armor (Vest/Jacket)--Heavy	6+ (Reduce Damage 1)
Full Armor (Suit)--Light	7+
Full Armor (Suit)--Heavy	7+ (Reduce Damage 2)

Heavy armor is pretty obvious and bulky and the GM may apply penalties to agility actions based on it. But it also subtracts an amount from any damage rolled. These are the standard armors-- special gear and devices may be different than these.

Each success rolled does one wound-- tens rolled on damage count as two wounds.

Ouch.

Yes. Each character has ten wounds-- when a character is down to their last wound they're really, really badly injured. They lose two dice from any physical actions and the GM may make them make a Physique test to see if they stay conscious if they do anything strenuous. When players go to zero or below, they have to make a Physique test to stay conscious each round-- with a difficulty equal to 1+ the number of wounds they've taken past zero. Unconscious characters sleep happily, though medics may try to wake them up. If a player continues to be battered or beaten once they go out they may die-- the GM may call for Physique-based death checks at this point.

Players may heal the first five wounds they take pretty easily, damage after that may require more time and care (perhaps a Physique test)



The Highly Detailed Weapon Chart

Punch/Kick/Choke	5d10
Light Melee	6d10
(daggers, knives, swords, maces, hammers, sticks, etc)	
Heavy Melee	7d10
(katanas, big swords, aluminum bats, chainsaw, large axe, etc)	
Light Ranged	7d10
(bows, crossbows, thrown daggers, small pistols)	
Heavy Ranged	8d10
(rifles, shotguns close range, big pistols, submachine guns)	
Really Heavy Ranged	10d10
(rocket launcher blast radius, grenades, laser cannons)	

COMBAT COMPLICATIONS

The abstract nature of this system means that all of the factor of combat won't be detailed. Here are some below are some general guidelines and some tip for specific situations.

Circumstances

Some things such as size, range, speed, whether something's on fire or not can make a target easier or harder to hit. Players may also ask to try to trick shots or special maneuvers to cause an additional effect: grappling, blinding shots, etc.

Rule of Thumb #1: All factors are relatively equal-- a penalty cancels a bonus. The GM can apply one or more of the following penalties or bonuses to the attack or defense.

- *Increase/decrease the number of successes needed
- *Increase/decrease the number need for success on an attack/defense roll
- *Increase/reduce damage dice rolled
- *Increase/reduce the number needed to cause wounds

Rule of Thumb #2: For each additional effect a player wants to add on to an attack, apply one penalty.

Difficulty for Unaware Targets

If a target doesn't get a defense roll because they're unaware of the attack, the attacker generally needs one success to hit. However circumstances like cover, distance or speed may make that attack more difficult. Generally this shouldn't be too high-- so that not taking a defense, for example, becomes a more viable option than taking a defense.

Multiple Defenses

If a defender has to dodge or parry multiple attackers in a round, they lose one die for each attack after the first they have to defend against (so -1 for the second attacker, -2 for the third). This only applies to attacks made by opponents of the same Rank (see *Hierarchy of Villainy*). If the opponent is of a lesser rank, then the defender takes no penalty.

PART FIVE: HIERARCHY OF VILLAINY

Minions exist at the bottom of a pyramid of power and ability. And they will always be there. Mind you there may be the rare minion irradiated on duty or who manages to steal top secret armor technology, but those are one in a thousand and even they really only move one rank up the food chain. No, minions have a tenuous and desperate existence-- balanced between a desire to advance and a desire for the boss to not remember their name and make them the subject of the latest experiment.

In the course of this game players will not rise in ranks on this hierarchy-- unless they want to retire their character. They may do well, accumulate money and benefits but for the purposes of play they will remain Minion/Normal Rank (Rank One).

In Witless Minions these ranks have a practical game effect. Minions might be able to take out characters one rank above them, they might even be able to slow or temporarily stop characters two ranks above them. But as the ranks great higher, the ability for a Mook to do something about these people gets more and more reduced. In some cases this is because they have superpowers or super-science gadgets at their disposal, but in others it simply comes from the NPC being more cagey or better trained.

Rank One: Minions, Everyday Normal Joes, Police Officers, Standard Military

Rank Two: Beginning Mad Scientists and Masterminds (Dr. Horrible), Villains with Problems (The Monarch), Named Lieutenants, Code Named Members of an organization (G.I. Joe), Inexperienced Sidekicks, Mooks with Super Gear

Rank Three: Mafia Capos, Standard Mad Scientist, Supervillains with Gadgets (ala Flash's Rogues Gallery), Themed Supervillains (The Riddler, Penguin), Experienced Sidekicks, Vigilante Adventurers, Inexperienced Mutants

Rank Four: Standard Superheroes with powers, Villainous Organization Leaders (Cobra Commander), Insane Non-Powered Supervillains (The Joker), Two-Fisted Men of Mystery

Rank Five: Paragon Superheroes and Supervillains, Legendary Leaders of Ancient Orders of Evil, David Bowie

Facing adversaries of a higher rank has a practical effect:

*If an adversary is of a higher rank, they don't have to worry about penalties for being ganged up on-- i.e. they do not lose dice for making multiple defense tests against lower ranked attackers.

*Characters may take a number of actions per round equal to their rank. The actions may be their own actions or activating other mooks, devices or traps.

*At Rank Two and Four, the number to do damage goes up by +1 & +2 respectively.

*At Rank Three and Five, difficulty to hit the character goes up by +1 & +2 respectively.

*Each rank gives above one gives the character +2 effective wounds.

That's in addition to any special abilities, tricks or powers the adversary may have.

Holy Crap.

The trick here for minions, should they have to face these kinds of characters is to find a way to equalize the playing field-- essentially the characters have to find ways-- through the use of flashbacks, capers or abilities to even the playing field. Part of the challenge of fighting (or escaping) higher rank adversaries should be coming up with dramatic plot devices and capers to use against them. The GM may have the characters play these out, make them a quest, simply require spending drama points, or have them based on a single or series of ability checks. Example plots for leveling: kidnapping a loved one, a cleverly laid booby trap, finding unobtainium-- which robs the adversary of his powers, setting up a rival to distract them, gaining additional specialized firepower.

Each effective and well played gambit reduces the effective rank of a single adversary by one for a scene. A target's rank may only be reduced by up to two-- to a minimum of one.



"WHO REARRANGED MY LAB?!"

PART SIX: OTHER MECHANICS

DRAMA POINTS

Drama Points provide a mechanic for players to gain a little more control over the game or make up for bad rolls. Players begin each session with zero drama points.

Using Drama Points

A player may spend a drama point to do the following:

- *Reroll their own roll-- standard action, attack, defense, damage
- *Add +2 dice to a their own roll
- *Heal three wounds
- *Activate a Flashback (see below)
- *Buy a clue if the player feels they're stuck and want some help or hint about what to do next.
- *"Buy" an ability-- the player must still spend experience either then or at the end of the session to pay for the ability.

A player may only spend one drama point per roll or effect, but multiple points may be spent for different purposes on the same turn.

Drama points not used during a session are lost. If the group is using the Prisoner's Dilemma optional rule (see below), then at the end of a session players may turn in unused drama points for experience points at a rate of three drama points to one experience point.

Gaining Drama Points

When a player does something really cool-- in genre, highly descriptive and which makes the table cheer, the GM should give that player a drama point.

Alternately, at the beginning of a session, the GM will put out a stack of drama point chips. During the game, the players may take one of those chips by invoking one of their limits. There are two basic ways to do this: the player can take an automatic failure before even rolling. They have to explain how their limit caused them to screw up. The check failed must have some consequence, stakes or else provide an interesting dramatic moment. Just failing a drive down to the store check isn't enough.

Alternately, if the player fails a significant action test roll in play they can take a drama point. They must narrate how their limit plays into the failure and accept an additional consequence from the GM for failing. If they do so they can take a drama point chip.

FLASHBACKS

During a session, players may invoke a flashback in order to change the situation and give them an advantage. A flashback represents some plot, plan, device or object they put into play before the operation which is now useful. Flashbacks cost an action and a drama point.

The other requirement is that the player spin a convincing narrative about how they knew to do this and how they went about it. This should be based around the flavor of the flashback as given in their archetype. For example, the group comes across a robot sentry in the course of a break in. A Technician character might use his flashback to have a specialized EMP device on hand to disrupt the robot. An Arm Candy character might have sweet-talked the robots designer into telling them about a secret weakness of the sentry. The Specialist Animal Handler might have brought along a trained mouse which could draw the attention of the sentry away from the group.

This mechanic allows the group to simulate advance planning without having to spend a great deal of time at the table planning out a caper. Instead the group can do a little planning and rely on improvisation. It simulates caper movies or TV shows where the audience ends up surprised by the twists and turns the characters had up their sleeve (i.e. *The Sting*, *Firefly*, *The Brothers Bloom*, etc). If GMs feel the mechanic is too powerful or want a less player control of the narrative, they may wish to limit players to one use of a flashback per session.

Once a player has used a particular Flashback in a campaign, they may not use the same one again. They must come up with a different story or technique. For example, if a player has used their Flashback to blackmail someone into turning over office blueprints revealing a hidden passage before, they can't do exactly the same thing again. They might gain blueprints to reveal something else or perhaps find a hidden passage by drugging someone and getting them to spill the beans. If a character has used a Flashback for a special gadget or technique to save their bacon, that gadget can't be used again unless they buy it as an Trick.



PRISONERS'S DILEMMA (Optional)

Minions lead dangerous lives. They end up involved in capers that go horribly awry and then have to come back to the boss and explain themselves. Every minion is caught between two drives: having to rely on his buddies to survive and looking out for #1. And when p-ush comes to shove choosing between those options can have serious repercussions.

This variant creates a slightly more competitive game and has the potential to create tension between players. Therefore it works better with a short run campaign, one-shot or group that really loves playing Paranoia. Through the course of each session, the GM should build up a stack of chips representing additional drama points. The GM should begin with a stack of points equal to the number of players and then add another chip whenever the risk or dramatic stakes get raised at the table.

At some point, as they inevitably do, things will go horribly awry for the group-- perhaps they're captured and questioned, maybe they have a choice between fleeing and finishing the op, or possibly the boss wants to know where the slush fund went to. The GM can immediately call for a dilemma check. Each player should take a coin or token and place it secretly with heads or tails showing in front of them. All players reveal simultaneously.

If they place it heads up, then they are staying solid-- not fleeing, not squealing, not selling the others out.

If they place it tails up, they the cheese it-- running for the hills leaving everyone behind, spilling the beans, selling everyone else down the river (truthfully or not).

If everyone shows heads, then the stack of drama points is split out equally among the group with any extra remaining in the pot.

If one person shows tails and the rest show heads, then the person who showed tails gets the entire pot of drama points.

If more than one person shows tails, then the pot is completely lost.

Whatever their choices, the characters then have to play out those results and take the consequences.

EXPERIENCE

Players should get 1-3 experience points per session, depending on how much was accomplished. Interim sessions should get less but climatic sessions should get more. *Witless Minion* assumes all players gain the same amount of experience, but some groups give bonuses to players.

Buying a new ability costs one point.

Buying a stat up costs three times the current value

PART SEVEN: RUNNING AND CAMPAIGN FRAMES

Dealing with Tone

Early on as a GM, you should decide what kind of tone to strike with the game. With it be as wild and absurd as *Dr. Horrible* or will it take the genre a little more seriously. It is worth considering the lethality of the campaign-- with death be cheap or will they be able to squeak out of situations. Gentler GMs who still want some grit to the game may want to consider an options which allows players to reduce or skip damage from a bit hit by having them acquire a scar or a temporary (or permanent) debilitating injury.

As with any game where the characters run “bad guys” it is easy to lose sympathy if the players decide to be really evil. Make clear how you picture the morality of the game-- is it cartoonish or more real? Consider the solution which *The Venture Brothers* presents-- minions and villains don't coldly kill heroes because of all of the flack they'll have to take for it. In this case villains and heroes abide by a set of rules. The possibility of consequences should make the players hesitate about being casual killers or sadists. The wrath of one's boss can also be a hook to keep the players from becoming gun-happy-- if they take matters into their own hands then they may end up punished later.

It has become hip to ironically comment of the foolishness of masterminds and supervillains (witness the “What I'd Do If I Became an Evil Overlord List”). However part of the fun here lies in playing within the genre-- too much breaking of the conventions destroys the dramatic reality and suspension of disbelief.

Creating the Opposition

In a normal game, there'd be a long section on how to go about creating enemies, equipment and opposition. Instead, I suggest you wing it. Sketch out some stats and keep track of wounds, of course. However for most things you can estimate the effects.

For Ranked and Named Adversaries, I suggest you decide on some general stats (a character at Rank Two might have 16-18 points to throw around on stats for example). Figure out generally what kinds of powers or effects they might be able to create-- 3-5 cool things they can do and run with those. The easiest approach is to use analogues to existing heroes and villains the players are familiar with. So if you say, “Well, the Savage Shrew is this world's equivalent to Batman...” the group will be properly warned.

One things to keep in mind, especially with the character's boss or overlord-- these people are temperamental and crazy. Part of the fun should be the players desperately trying to stay on their good side or else just keep their lives under the radar.

Fun with Everyday Lives

While running capers and executing operations can make for a fun time-- part of the enjoyment of a game like this comes from exploring the lives of your ordinary minions. Think of *The Office*, but with a super-villain organization. Take the time to sketch out some co-workers and try to develop personal goals for the characters. Such organizations-- depending on size may be more Kafka-esque or like something out of Stanislaw Lem's *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub*.

Consider the lives of the characters outside of work-- do they have families, private lives or other hobbies? If so, how does that square up with what they do. Introducing these kinds of elements deepen the game but also introduce a lot of complicated baggage-- see what kinds of themes your group seems more interested in.

CAMPAIGN FRAMES

New Hires for the Serpent Lords

The group has been hired by a large and venerable criminal network with branches across the globe. Now they have to deal with the bureaucracy, operations which perhaps weren't thought through enough and the rantings and insanity of the colorful named lieutenants of the organization.

Freelancing with the Rogues Gallery

The group has signed up with a supervillain employment agency, being assigned to various low-level super rogues on a freelance basis. Think of it as a Super Temp agency. This campaign frame allows a wide variety of episodic adventures while the characters try to keep up with their regular lives and expenses as well. A variant of this has the group signing on with Supervillains and then ripping them off-- in a highly risky Robin Hood style escapade.

Evil Genius: Year One

The characters sign on with a Mad Scientist or Mastermind who is just starting out. He leans on the group for advice with the promise of promoting them to named positions. The group has to deal with finding a base, fine tuning the villain's theme, and acquiring uniforms.

SCENARIO IDEAS

Infiltrated by a Hero

The alert has come down-- somehow an enemy agent or superhero has managed to infiltrate the compound. A master of disguise, they could be anyone. Can the PCs avoid getting killed in the paranoid crossfire and uncover the infiltrator before the boss decides to simply set off the self-destruct for the base.

Rival Organizations

Two groups of minions have cooperative on a particularly lucrative heist. However while waiting for in the hideout the two groups discover that someone has made off with the loot. Was it a member of one minion team? One of the two bosses pulling a double-cross? Or someone from the outside?

Fighter-King of the Iron Mortal Soul or Alive Tournament

The Boss has decided to host a major tournament to demonstrate...well, something. Now the players have to watch out for heroes sneaking in, guard sensitive areas of the complex and also cater to the whims of these egotistical entrants. Can they escape the inevitable showdown?

Delivery Mix Up

Someone's made an error and the equipment for the upcoming operation has either not been ordered or has been sent to the wrong place. Now the group has to avoid blame and manage to get the equipment...or a reasonable facsimile in time for the caper.

Off By A Couple of Zeroes

One of the members of the group receives an extraordinarily large paycheck. How do they decide to handle it-- was it an intentional mistake? Dare the question their overlord about the discrepancy and potentially question his judgment or omnipotence. Or do they take the money and risk have questions pop up later if it was a mistake.

The Island of Dr. More-or-Less

Their boss has recently heard of a lost island fortress now up for grabs. He's sending in the group to secure the location and uncover its secrets. Has someone already move in or is perhaps the base not as deactivated as they were led to believe?

STILL NEEDS TO BE DEVELOPED

- IDEAS FOR HANDLING CHASES**
- EXAMPLE VILLAINOUS ORGANIZATIONS**
- EXAMPLE MASTERMINDS**
- EXAMPLE ADVERSARIES**
- SAMPLE NPC'S 'IN THE BUSINESS' (FIXERS, CRIME DOCTORS, ETC)**

NAME:

ARCHETYPE:

PHYSIQUE:

AGILITY:

COMBAT:

SOCIAL:

WILLPOWER:

SMARTS:

WOUNDS:

DRAMA POINTS:

ABILITIES:

LIMITS/FLASHBACK:

EQUIP/NOTES: