

CHARACTER

ELEMENTS

Your character is made up of a number of elements representing your character's identity and background. They're bolded in the Elements section of your character sheet.

You use your character's elements to act and to make your mark on the world. When you roll dice, you roll dice for your elements.

You start with three elements that form the core of your character. As you play, you'll unlock more elements. Which elements you unlock will determine your character's path, and who they become.

SPARKS

Each element (and some tools) have special abilities called sparks. They're printed in grey underneath their name and description on your character sheet.

HEAT

Heat is counted in tokens: red chips or red glass beads work very well. There's a spot on your character sheet to stack or pile them.

You gain Heat when you choose to roll a d4, when you choose to forward your character arc, and other times when you play your character as imperfect or vulnerable.

You spend Heat to activate your sparks and to fuel some special techniques in rule modules.

ARCS

Your character has an arc, which defines the shape of their current story. Each arc has three actions.

As you perform these actions in the story, your character will change and grow. Eventually, you'll use up your current arc and take a new one.

The GM has a number of arcs ready for you to choose from when the time comes. He's got others ready for if your character transforms in other ways. If you die, for instance, he has an arc called Omen Wraith...

TOOLS

Your character has a number of tools, things that your character possesses that can help him perform better. They're bolded in the Tools section of your character sheet.

Tools come in three basic types: normal, quality, and unique. Normal tools are useful in dice contests. Quality tools can be used in contests, too, and they also have sparks that you can use in the story.

There are a few unique tools which are one-of-a-kind. Some tasks can only be accomplished with the appropriate unique tool: like unlocking a door or decoding a secret message.

OTHER STUFF

There are some other things on your character sheet like Wounds, Drain, and the like. They're used by rule modules. If you're not using the rules modules that reference these bits, don't worry about them.

GMING

YOUR VICIOUS CRUCIBLE

A Vicious Crucible game can take up to six players (plus a GM: you). Players pick characters from the available six; when this leaves some left over, the remaining characters become NPCs. You will always use the characters not selected by players.

In addition to the cast-offs, there are six supporting characters. You will use only those supporting characters whose write-ups specifically mention a character selected by a player. For example, Peyman is Kamraan's son and Miquela's ex-lover; if neither Kamraan or Miquela are in play, Peyman does not appear.

Lastly, you have a list of locations, each with a handful of location elements. It's your job to play the setting as much as it is to play the NPCs.

When you roll dice, you can roll the elements of NPCs and the elements of the current location interchangeably.

YOUR JOB

When you run a Vicious Crucible game, it's your job to use the NPCs, setting, and situation to force the player characters to make hard choices. Sometimes, those choices will fall neatly into the first and second stages of each character's Arc. Other times, the choices will arise from play.

Make a list of the characters' Arcs. Your focus should be on creating opportunities for players to take these actions. If you're stuck for what to do next, consult those Arcs.

FRAMING SCENES

Kick off a scene by selecting a location on the map with character markers on it. Describe what the location looks like and what's happening. End your description with something that the characters must react to immediately: an approaching army, a slaving monster, a demanding succubus.

Push, push, push until the PCs do or say something interesting. Follow that to its immediate consequences, then frame the next scene, cutting away to different PCs.

PORTRAYING NPCs

Supporting NPCs have Plans: this tells you exactly what that character wants to get done. Cast-off PCs will have Arcs. Use these as you do the other NPCs' Plans: as guidelines and spurs for action. You do not get any benefits from pursuing Arcs. Your NPCs do not grow, learn lessons, or develop. They exist to poke and prod the PCs.

Most of your NPCs are going to "lose:" they are not going to achieve their goals or complete their plans unless a PC decides to join their side (and if they ever do, sabotage that alliance from within and without). That's okay. As long the PCs made hard, interesting decisions, you've "won."

WHEN TO ROLL DICE

You never decide when to roll dice for a contest. You just say what happens and how the situation and circumstances bowl over the player characters. If they take exception to something you narrate, they'll pick up dice and roll. Until that happens, it's your job to push, push, push.

THE BASICS

CONTESTS

When one of the PCs acts to change the situation around him, it's time for a contest. You're going to roll dice to see if you succeed and how well you succeed.

Select three of your character's elements and roll a die for each one:

- † roll a d6 if the element **helps** him.
- † roll a d8 if he is using a **tool** that complements the element.
- † roll a d4 if the element **hinders** him

You will always pick three elements to roll dice for and describe how they help or hinder you.

Starting characters only have three elements available to them, so they use all three in every contest. If you can't decide if an element helps or hinders you, treat it as a hindrance and move on.

Additionally, for every d4 you roll, you generate Heat. Take one Heat token and set it beside your character sheet.

There are always at least two sides to a contest. If no other PC is rolling, the GM rolls using the elements of NPCs acting against you or elements of the location.

Roll all dice and present your highest die.

High die wins. In case of a tie, reroll the die you presented and present it again.

WINNING

A win means you are on top in this situation. Depending on what happened, you may:

- † **Convince:** offer your opposition one Heat from supply as a bribe to play along. He can stubbornly refuse by paying you a Heat from his pile and describe how one of his elements lets him do this.
- † **Prepare:** claim one Heat for your next Contest. What you did now will help you later.
- † **Deny:** make one of your opposition's Tools unavailable until they succeed in getting it back.

If there are more than two sides to the contest, the victor can apply one of these to each loser.

HARD PLACES

Some location elements that the GM rolls begin play always rolling d8s. This usually represents places where things are especially difficult for the PCs because of the planning of NPCs or sheer circumstance.

The PCs can use a contest to soften up the element: they might loot the secret cache in the woods or beguile away the guards manning the gates. When they succeed, the element reverts to a d4 for the remainder of the game.

INVOKING RULESHEETS

Before you roll, you may invoke a rulesheet that extends the contest, such as Combat or Influence. These rules often either use all the dice you roll or involve multiple rounds of smaller interactions.

PLAYING YOUR
ARC

USING SPARKS

THE BASICS

PLAYING YOUR ARC

Your character has an Arc that defines the shape of his current story. Each Arc has three actions.

The first action is the Flux. When your character performs this action in the story, you earn Heat and Flux. Flux is recorded in the boxes in the center of the sheet.

The next action is the Alloy. When your character performs this action in the story, you may spend five Flux to unlock one of the Arc's Elements. Color in its circle your sheet; you can use it for the rest of the story.

The last action is the Reify. When your character performs this action in the story, they end their Arc and gain a new one. Each Arc has a different cost, usually in terms of Elements that you must sacrifice. Pick one, pay the cost, and start the next chapter of your story.

Each Vicious Crucible comes with a number of Arcs ready for you to Reify into. Ask the GM to see them if you think you're done with this chapter of your character's story.

USING SPARKS

Sparks are tricks that come with elements and some tools. They're printed in grey on your character sheet. They let you:

REROLL A DIE

You may reroll any of the dice you just rolled. This costs one Heat, and you may only reroll a given die once.

DOUBLE YOUR HEAT

When you roll a d4 for this element, you gain two Heat instead of one.

SHIFT A POINT

When you shift points, you turn one die down a step and turn another die up a step. You might turn your 3 to a 2 to turn your 5 to a 6. You can't shift a die lower than 1 or higher than the die has faces (no 7s on d6s). You may shift two points for two Heat, three points for three Heat, and so on.

You may use sparks on a die only *after* you have presented the die, never before.

SPARKS AND OTHER RULESHEETS

Some sparks work directly with certain rulesheets, such as:

- † - inflict two wounds instead of one
- † - add an extra spark to a design

Sparks always cost 1 Heat unless it says so otherwise. The GM never spends Heat; NPC Sparks work for no cost.

CONTESTS

WINNING

INVOKING
MODULES