

ASPECTS AND FATE POINTS

DEFINING ASPECTS

An aspect is a phrase that describes something unique or noteworthy about whatever it's attached to. They're the primary way you spend and gain fate points, and they influence the story by providing an opportunity for a character to get a bonus, complicating a character's life, or adding to another character's roll or passive opposition.

DEFINING FATE POINTS

Fate points are the currency you use to invoke aspects, and you gain them back by accepting compels. When your aspects come into play, you will usually spend or gain a fate point.

TYPES OF ASPECTS

Every game of Fate has a few different kinds of aspects: game aspects, character aspects, situation aspects, consequences, and boosts. They mainly differ from one another in terms of what they're attached to and how long they last.

GAME ASPECTS

Game aspects are the broadest kind, representing the issues and setting elements decided on during game creation. They tend to be very permanent, sticking around for the whole campaign unless the group decides to change them.

Everyone can invoke, compel, or create an advantage on a game aspect at any time; they're always there and available for anyone's use.

CHARACTER ASPECTS

Character aspects are just as permanent, but smaller in scope, attached to an individual PC or NPC. They describe a near-infinite number of things that set the character apart, such as:

- ♦ Significant personality traits or beliefs.
- ♦ The character's background or profession.
- ♦ An important possession or noticeable feature.
- ♦ Relationships to people and organizations.
- ♦ Problems, goals, or issues the character is dealing with.
- ♦ Titles, reputations, or obligations the character may have.

You can invoke or call for a compel on any of your character aspects whenever they're relevant. GMs, you can always propose compels to any PC. Players, you can suggest compels for other people's characters, but the GM is always going to get the final say on whether or not it's a valid suggestion.

SITUATION ASPECTS

Situation aspects are temporary, lasting only for a scene (or sometimes a scenario), representing something about the environment or immediate circumstances. Situation aspects describe significant features of the circumstances the characters are dealing with in a scene. That includes:

- ♦ Physical features of the environment.
- ♦ Positioning or placement.
- ♦ Immediate obstacles.
- ♦ Contextual details that are likely to come into play.
- ♦ Sudden changes in a character's status.

Who can use a situation aspect depends a lot on narrative context—sometimes it'll be very clear, and sometimes you'll need to justify how you're using the aspect to make sense based on what's happening in the scene. GMs, you're the final arbiter on what claims on an aspect are valid.

Sometimes situation aspects become obstacles that characters need to overcome. Other times they give you justification to provide active opposition against someone else's action.

CONSEQUENCES

Consequences are a special kind of aspect gained in a conflict, representing lasting harm to a character. They're always negatively phrased, describing the type of hurt the character has suffered.

Consequences stick around for a variable length of time, from a few scenes to a scenario or two, depending on how severe they are. Because of their negative phrasing, you're likely to get compelled a lot when you have them, and anyone who can justifiably benefit from the consequence can invoke it or create an advantage on it.

BOOSTS

Boosts are a super-transient kind of aspect. You get a boost when you're trying to create an advantage but don't succeed well enough, or as an added benefit to succeeding especially well at an action. You get to invoke them for free, but as soon as you do, the aspect goes away.

If you want, you can also allow another character to invoke your boost, if it's relevant and could help them out.

WHAT ASPECTS DO

In Fate, aspects do two major things: they tell you what's important about the game, and they help you decide when to use the mechanics.

IMPORTANCE

Your collection of game and character aspects tell you what you need to focus on during your game. Think of them as a message from yourself to yourself, a set of flags waving you towards the path with the most fun.

DECIDING WHEN TO USE MECHANICS

Because aspects tell us what's important, they also tell us when it's most appropriate to use the mechanics to deal with a situation, rather than just letting people decide what happens just by describing what they do.

Players, this comes up for you most often when invoking your aspects and considering compels. Your aspects highlight what makes your character an individual, and you want to play that up, right? So when the opportunity comes up to make your character more awesome by invoking, go for it! When you see an opportunity to influence the story by suggesting a compel for your character, do it! The game will be much richer for it as a whole.

MAKING A GOOD ASPECT

Because aspects are so important to the game, it's important to make the best aspects you can. So, how do you know what a good aspect is?

The best aspects are double-edged, say more than one thing, and keep the phrasing simple.

DOUBLE-EDGED

Players, good aspects offer a clear benefit to your character while also providing opportunities to complicate their lives or be used to their detriment.

An aspect with a double-edge is going to come up in play more often than a mostly positive or negative one. You can use them frequently to be awesome, and you'll be able to accept more compels and gain more fate points.

Try this as a litmus test—list two ways you might invoke the aspect, and two ways someone else could invoke it or you could get a compel from it. If the examples come easily to mind, great! If not, add more context to make that aspect work or put that idea to the side and come up with a new aspect.

Let's look at an aspect like *Computer Genius*. The benefits of having this aspect are pretty obvious—any time you're hacking or working with technology, you could justify invoking it. But it doesn't seem like there's a lot of room for that aspect to work against you. So, let's think of a way we can spice that up a bit.

What if we change that aspect to *Nerdy McNerdson*? That still carries the connotations that would allow you to take advantage of it while working with computers, but it adds a downside—you're awkward around people.

GMs, this is just as true of your game and situation aspects. Any feature of a scene you call out should be something that either the PCs or their foes could use in a dramatic fashion.

SAY MORE THAN ONE THING

Earlier, we noted several things that a character aspect might describe: personality traits, backgrounds, relationships, problems, possessions, and so forth. The best aspects overlap across a few of those categories, because that means you have more ways to bring them into play.

Let's look at a simple aspect that a soldier might have: *I Must Prove Myself*. You can invoke this whenever you're trying to do something to gain the approval of others or demonstrate your competence. Someone might compel it to bait you into a difficult situation you'd rather avoid, or to accept a hardship for the sake of reputation. So we know it has a double edge, so far so good.

That'll work for a bit, but eventually this aspect will run out of steam. It says just one thing about the character. Either you're trying to prove yourself, or this aspect isn't going to come up.

GMs, for your situation aspects, you don't have to worry about this as much, because they're only intended to stick around for a scene. It's much more important for game and character aspects to suggest multiple contexts for use.

CLEAR PHRASING

Because aspects are phrases, they come with all the ambiguities of language. If no one knows what your aspect means, it won't get used enough.

That isn't to say you have to avoid poetic or fanciful expression. *Just a Simple Farmboy* isn't quite as fetching as *Child of Pastoral Bliss*. If that's the tone your game is going for, feel free to indulge your linguistic desires.

However, don't do this at the expense of clarity. Avoid metaphors and implications, when you can get away with just saying what you mean. That way, other people don't have to stop and ask you during play if a certain aspect would apply, or get bogged down in discussions about what it means.

If you're wondering if your aspect is unclear, ask the people at the table what they think it means.

IF YOU GET STUCK

Now you know what makes for a good aspect, but that doesn't narrow down your potential choices any—you still have a nearly infinite set of topics and ideas to choose from.

If you're still stuck about what to choose, here are some tips to make things a little easier on you.

SOMETIMES, IT'S BETTER NOT TO CHOOSE

If you can't think of an aspect that really grabs you and the other people at the table, you're better off leaving that space blank, or just keeping whatever ideas you had scribbled in the margins. Sometimes it's much easier to wait for your character to get into play before you figure out how you want to word a particular aspect.

So when in doubt, leave it blank. The same thing is true if you have more than one idea that seems juicy, but they don't work together and you don't know which one to pick. Write them all down in the margins and see which one seems to really sing in play.

ALWAYS ASK WHAT MATTERS AND WHY

We said above that aspects tell you why something matters in the game and why we care about it. This is your primary compass and guide to choosing the best possible aspect. When in doubt, always ask: what do we really care about here, and why?

The events of the phases should help you figure out what your aspect should be. Ask yourself what really matters about the phase:

- ♦ What was the outcome? Is that important?
- ♦ Did the character develop any important relationships or connections during this phase?
- ♦ Does the phase help establish anything important about the character's personality or beliefs?
- ♦ Did the phase give the character a reputation?
- ♦ Did the phase create a problem for the character in the game world?

If there's more than one option, poll the other players and GM to see what they find interesting.

VARY IT UP

You don't want all your aspects to describe the same kind of thing. Five relationships means that you can't use your aspects unless one of them is in play, but five personality traits means that you have no connection to the game world. If you're stuck on what to pick for an aspect, looking at what kinds of things your other aspects describe may help you figure out which way to go for the current phase.

INVOKING ASPECTS

The primary way you're going to use aspects in a game of Fate is to invoke them. If you're in a situation where an aspect is beneficial to your character somehow, you can invoke it.

In order to invoke an aspect, explain why the aspect is relevant, spend a fate point, and you can choose one of these benefits:

- ♦ Take a +2 on your current skill roll after you've rolled the dice.
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- ♦ Reroll all your dice.
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- ♦ Pass a +2 benefit to another character's roll, if it's reasonable that the aspect you're invoking would be able to help.
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- Add +2 to any source of passive opposition, if it's reasonable that the aspect you're invoking could contribute to
- ♦ making things more difficult. You can also use this to create passive opposition at Fair (+2) if there wasn't going to be any.

Rerolling the dice is a little riskier than just getting the +2 bonus, but has the potential for greater benefit. We recommend you reserve this option for when you've rolled a -3 or a -4 on the dice, to maximize the chance that you'll get a beneficial result from rerolling.

The group has to buy into the relevance of a particular aspect when you invoke it; GMs, you're the final arbiter on this one. The use of an aspect should make sense, or you should be able to creatively narrate your way into ensuring it makes sense.

If the aspect you invoke is on someone else's character sheet, including situation aspects attached to them, you give them the fate point you spent. They don't actually get to use it until after the end of the scene, though.

FREE INVOCATIONS

You don't always have to pay a fate point to invoke an aspect—sometimes it's free.

When you succeed at creating an advantage, you "stick" a free invocation onto an aspect. If you succeed with style, you get two invocations. Some of the other actions also give you free boosts.

You also get to stick a free invocation on any consequences you inflict in a conflict. After you've used your free invocation, if the aspect in question is still around, you can keep invoking it by spending fate points.

If you want, you can pass your free invocation to another character. That allows you to get some teamwork going between you and a buddy. This is really useful in a conflict if you want to set someone up for a big blow—have everyone create an advantage and pass their free invocations onto one person, then that person stacks all of them up at once for a huge bonus.

COMPELLING ASPECTS

A compel is the primary way you're going to bring an aspect's complications into the story. It works kind of like invoking an aspect, but in reverse—instead of paying a fate point for a bonus, you're going to gain a fate point, because whoever compels the aspect is bringing a complication into the story related to it.

In order to compel an aspect, explain why the aspect is relevant, and then make an offer as to what the complication is. You can negotiate the terms of the complication a bit, until you reach a reasonable consensus. Whoever is getting compelled then has two options:

- ♦ Accept the complication and receive a fate point
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- ♦ Pay a fate point to prevent the complication from happening

The complication from a compel occurs regardless of anyone's efforts—once you've made a deal and taken the fate point, you can't use your skills or anything else to mitigate the situation. You have to deal with the new story developments that arise from the complication.

GMs, you're the final arbiter here, as always—not just on how the result of a compel plays out, but on whether or not a compel is valid in the first place.

Finally, and this is very important: if a player wants to compel another character, it costs a fate point to propose the complication. The GM can always compel for free, and any player can propose a compel on his or her own character for free.

TYPES OF COMPELS

There are two major categories for what a compel looks like in the game: events and decisions. These are tools to help you figure out what a compel should look like and help break any mental blocks.

An event-based compel happens to the character in spite of herself, when the world around her responds to a certain aspect in a certain way and creates a complicating circumstance. It looks like this: you have ____ aspect and are in ____ situation, so it makes sense that, unfortunately, ____ would happen to you. Damn your luck.

GMs, event-based compels are your opportunity to shine. You're expected to control the world around the PCs, so having that world react to them in an unexpected way is pretty much part and parcel of your job description.

A decision is a kind of compel that is internal to the character. It happens because of a decision he makes, hence the name. It looks like this: you have ____ aspect in ____ situation, so it makes sense that you'd decide to _____. This goes wrong when ____ happens.

So the real dramatic impact from these kinds of compels is not what decision the character makes, most of the time—it's how things go wrong. Before something goes wrong, the first sentence could be a prelude to making a skill roll or simply a matter of roleplaying. The complication that the decision creates is really what makes it a compel.

The decision part should be very self-evident, and something a player might have been thinking about doing anyway. If you offer a decision-based compel, and no one can agree on what the decision part should be, it shouldn't cost a fate point to counter—just drop it.

RETROACTIVE COMPELS

Sometimes, you'll notice during the game that you've fulfilled the criteria for a compel without a fate point getting awarded. Anyone who realizes this in play can mention it, and the fate point can be awarded retroactively, treating it like a compel after the fact. GMs, you're the final arbiter—look at the guidelines for event and decision compels above, and see if you can summarize what happened in the game according to those guidelines. If you can, award a fate point.

COMPELLING WITH SITUATION ASPECTS

Just like with every other kind of aspect use, you can use situation aspects (and by extension, game aspects) for compels. Because situation aspects are usually external to characters, you're almost always looking at event-based compels rather than decision-based ones. The character or characters affected get a fate point for the compel.

USING ASPECTS FOR ROLEPLAYING

Finally, aspects have a passive use that you can draw on in almost every instance of play. Players, you can use them as a guide to roleplaying your character. This may seem self-evident, but we figured we'd call it out anyway—the aspects on your character sheet are true of your character at all times, not just when they're invoked or compelled.

Playing to your aspects also has another benefit: you're feeding the GM ideas for compels. You're already bringing your aspects into the game, so all she has to do is offer you complications and you're good to go.

Inserting these kinds of aspect-related details into your narration can help your game seem more vivid and consistent, even when you're not shuffling fate points around.

REMOVING OR CHANGING AN ASPECT

Game and character aspects change through advancement. See the Milestones section in *The Long Game* for that.

Situation aspects can be removed with an overcome action if a character is trying to get rid of a negative one, or simply narrated away by the GM when it stops making sense for them to be around. If a character can interfere with your action, they get to roll active opposition against you as per normal. Otherwise, GMs, it's your job to set passive opposition or just allow the player to get rid of the aspect without a roll, if there's nothing risky or interesting in the way.

Finally, if at any point it simply makes no sense for a situation aspect to be in play, get rid of it.

CREATING AND DISCOVERING NEW ASPECTS IN PLAY

In addition to your character aspects, game aspects, and the situation aspects that the GM presents, you have the ability to create, discover, or gain access to other aspects as you play.

Most commonly, you'll do this with the create an advantage action, which lets you either make a new situation aspect and get a free invocation on it, or discover an aspect that's already there (like a weakness on an enemy) and get a free invocation on that instead.

With some skills, it's going to make more sense to stick an advantage to an aspect that's already on some other character's sheet. In this case, the PC or NPC you're targeting would provide active opposition to keep you from being able to use that aspect.

If you're not looking for a free invocation, and you just think it'd make sense if there were a particular situation aspect in play, you don't need to roll the dice or anything to make new aspects—just suggest them, and if the group thinks they're interesting, write them down.

SECRET OR HIDDEN ASPECTS

Some skills also let you use the create an advantage action to reveal aspects that are hidden, either on NPCs or environments—in this case, the GM simply tells you what the aspect is if you get a tie or better on the roll. You can use this to “fish” for aspects if you’re not precisely sure what to look for—doing well on the roll is sufficient justification for being able to find something advantage-worthy.

Remember that aspects can help deepen the story only if you get to use them—aspects that are never discovered might as well never have existed in the first place. So most of the time, the players should always know what aspects are available for their use, and if there’s a question as to whether or not the character knows, use the dice to help you decide.

In cases where a GM is keeping a genuine secret from the players, we recommend you don’t make an aspect directly out of whatever fact you’re trying to keep secret. Instead, make the aspect a detail that makes sense in context after the secret is revealed.

THE FATE POINT ECONOMY

For the most part, the use of aspects revolves around fate points. You indicate your supply of fate points by using tokens, such as poker chips, glass beads, or other markers.

Ideally, you want a consistent ebb and flow of fate points going on throughout your sessions. Players spend them in order to be awesome in a crucial moment, and they get them back when their lives get dramatic and complicated. So if your fate points are flowing the way they’re supposed to, you’ll end up with these cycles of triumphs and setbacks that make for a fun and interesting story.

REFRESH

Each player gets a number of fate points to start each session off with. That total is called the refresh rate. The refresh for a default, starting character is three fate points, but you can opt to spend up to two of your refresh to buy additional stunts.

At the start of each session, if you have fewer fate points than your refresh, you refresh up to that number. If you have more fate points than your refresh at the start of a session (because you didn’t spend them all last time), you keep the higher total instead.

You get additional refresh as your character achieves a major milestone (which we discuss in *The Long Game*), which you can spend on getting more stunts or keep in order to increase your starting fate point total. You can never have less than one refresh at any time.

At the start of a new scenario, you reset your fate points to your refresh rate no matter what.

SPENDING FATE POINTS

You spend fate points in any of the following ways:

- ♦ **Invoke an Aspect:** Invoking an aspect costs you one fate point, unless the invocation is free.
- ♦ **Power a Stunt:** Some stunts are very potent, and as such, cost a fate point in order to activate.
- ♦ **Refuse a Compel:** Once a compel is proposed, you can pay a fate point to avoid the complication associated with it.
- ♦ **Declare a Story Detail:** To add something to the narrative based on one of your aspects, spend a fate point.

EARNING FATE POINTS

You earn fate points in any of the following ways:

- ♦ **Accept a Compel:** You get a fate point when you agree to the complication associated with a compel. As we said above, this may sometimes happen retroactively if the circumstances warrant.
- ♦ **Have Your Aspects Invoked Against You:** If someone pays a fate point to invoke an aspect attached to your character, you gain their fate point at the end of the scene. This includes advantages created on your character, as well as consequences.

THE GM AND FATE POINTS

GMs, you also get to use fate points, but the rules are a little bit different than the rules for players.

When you award players fate points for compels or concession, they come out of an unlimited pool you have for doing so —you don't have to worry about running out of fate points to award, and you always get to compel for free.

The NPCs under your control are not so lucky. They have a limited pool of fate points you get to use on their behalf. Whenever a scene starts, you get one fate point for every PC in that scene. You can use these points on behalf of any NPC you want, but you can get more in that scene if they take a compel, like PCs do.

You reset to your default total, one per PC, at the beginning of every scene. There are two exceptions:

- ♦ You accepted a compel that effectively ended the last scene or starts the next one. If that happens, take an extra fate point in the next scene.
- ♦ You conceded a conflict to the PCs in the previous scene. If that happens, take the fate points you'd normally get for the concession into the next scene and add them to the default total.

If the immediate next scene doesn't present a significant interaction with NPCs, you can save these extra points until the next scene that does.

Amanda is running a climactic conflict, where the PCs are battling a nemesis they've been trying to subdue for several scenarios now. Here are the characters in the scene: Barathar, Smuggler Queen of the Sindral Reach, a main NPC; Og the Strong, one of her chief enforcers, a supporting NPC; Teran the Swift, an old nemesis of the PCs hired to do Barathar's bidding, a supporting NPC; two nameless NPC sergeants; Landon; Cynere; and Zird the Arcane.

Her total fate point pool for this scene is 3 fate points—one each for Landon, Cynere, and Zird. If Zird had been elsewhere (say, doing some arcane research), Amanda would've gotten two fate points, one for Landon and one for Cynere.

Later, Barathar is forced to concede so she can get away unharmed. She has taken two consequences in the conflict, meaning that she gets three fate points for conceding. Those three fate points carry over to the next scene.