

# GAME CREATION

---

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD FATE GAME?

You can use Fate to tell stories in many different genres, with a variety of premises. There is no default setting; you and your group will make that up yourselves. The very best Fate games, however, have certain ideas in common with one another, which we think best showcase what the game is designed to do.

Whether you're talking about fantasy, science fiction, superheroes, or gritty cop shows, Fate works best when you use it to tell stories about people who are proactive, competent, and dramatic.

### PROACTIVITY

Characters in a game of Fate should be proactive. They have a variety of abilities that lend themselves to active problem solving, and they aren't timid about using them. They don't sit around waiting for the solution to a crisis to come to them—they go out and apply their energies, taking risks and overcoming obstacles to achieve their goals.

This doesn't mean that they don't ever plan or strategize, or that they're all careless to a fault. It just means that even the most patient among them will eventually rise and take action in a tangible, demonstrable way.

Any Fate game you play should give a clear opportunity for the characters to be proactive in solving their problems, and have a variety of ways they might go about it. A game about librarians spending all their time among dusty tomes and learning things isn't Fate. A game about librarians using forgotten knowledge to save the world is.

### COMPETENCE

Characters in a game of Fate are good at things. They aren't bumbling fools who routinely look ridiculous when they're trying to get things done—they're highly skilled, talented, or trained individuals who are capable of making visible change in the world they inhabit. They are the right people for the job, and they get involved in a crisis because they have a good chance of being able to resolve it for the better.

This doesn't mean they always succeed, or that their actions are without unintended consequence. It just means that when they fail, it isn't because they made dumb mistakes or weren't prepared for the risks.

Any Fate game that you play should treat the characters like competent people, worthy of the risks and challenges that come their way. A game about garbage men who are forced to fight supervillains and get their asses constantly handed to them isn't Fate. A game about garbage men who become an awesome anti-supervillain hit squad is.

## DRAMA

Characters in a game of Fate lead dramatic lives. The stakes are always high for them, both in terms of what they have to deal with in their world, and what they're dealing with in the six inches of space between their ears. Like us, they have interpersonal troubles and struggle with their issues, and though the external circumstances of their lives might be a lot bigger in scope than what we go through, we can still relate to and sympathize with them.

This doesn't mean they spend all their time wallowing in misery and pain, or that everything in their lives is always a world-shaking crisis. It just means that their lives require them to make hard choices and live with the consequences—in other words, that they're essentially human.

Any Fate game that you play should provide the potential and opportunity for drama among and between the characters, and give you a chance to relate to them as people. A game about adventurers mindlessly punching increasing numbers of bigger, badder bad guys is not Fate. A game about adventurers struggling to lead normal lives despite being destined to fight ultimate evil is.

### WHEN CREATING YOUR GAME:

- ♦ **Setting:** Decide what the world that surrounds the protagonists is like.
- ♦ **Scale:** Decide how epic or personal your story will be.
- ♦ **Issues:** Decide what threats and pressures inherent to the setting will spur the protagonists to action.
- ♦ **NPCs:** Decide who the important people and locations are.
- ♦ **Skills and Stunts:** Decide what sorts of things characters in the setting are likely to want to do.
- ♦ **Character Creation:** Make the PCs.

## SETTING UP YOUR GAME

First, we'll start by talking about your setting. We'll handle the specifics on the protagonists later, in Character Creation.

### MAKING THE SETTING WORK IN FATE

#### Decide what the world that surrounds the protagonists is like.

You're probably already familiar with the idea of a setting, but in short, it's everything that the characters interact with, such as people, organizations and institutions, technology, strange phenomena, and mysteries (crime, intrigue, and cosmic or historical legend). These are the sort of things that characters want to engage with, are forced to engage with, look to for help, or stand in their way.

If you're using a setting that already exists, from a movie, novel, or other game book, then many of these ideas are ready for you to use. Of course, you'll also likely add your own spin on things: new organizations or different mysteries to uncover.

Amanda, Lenny, Lily, and Ryan sit down to talk about the setting. They're all jonesing for a low fantasy game, as Lenny and Lily have recently read some of the *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser* stories. So they pitch "two guys and a girl with swords." The world is "vaguely medieval, Earth with the serial numbers filed off."

Ryan suggests "guy and girl with swords, and guy without a sword" so that there's a difference between the two guys. Also, because he wants to play someone who is more bookish (for contrast). Everyone's on board with this, and they move on.

## A GAME'S SCALE

### Decide how epic or personal your story will be.

The setting might be small or it might be vast, but where your stories take place determines the scale of your game.

In a small-scale game, characters deal with problems in a city or region, they don't travel a great deal, and the problems are local. A large-scale game involves dealing with problems that affect a world, a civilization, or even a galaxy if the genre you're playing in can handle that kind of thing. (Sometimes, a small-scale game will turn into a large-scale one over time, as you've probably seen in long-running novel series or television shows.)

Amanda likes the vibe of "guy and girl with sword," and thinks it'll shine as a small-scale game, where they might travel from town to town, but the problems they have to deal with are local—like a thieves' guild or the regent's vile machinations.

## THE SETTING'S BIG ISSUES

### Decide what threats and pressures inherent to the setting will spur the protagonists to action.

Every setting needs to have something going on that the characters care about, often a peril they want to fight or undermine. These are the setting's issues.

You'll come up with two issues as a group and write them down on index cards or a game creation worksheet. These issues are aspects and will be available to invoke or compel throughout the entirety of the game.

The issues should reflect the scale of your game and what the characters will face. They're broad ideas; they don't just affect your characters, but many people in the world. Issues take two forms:

**Current Issues:** These are problems or threats that exist in the world already, possibly for a long time. Protagonists

- tackling these issues are trying to change the world, to make it a better place. Examples: a corrupt regime, organized crime, rampant poverty and disease, a generations-long war.

**Impending Issues:** These are things that have begun to rear their ugly heads, and threaten to make the world worse if they come to pass or achieve a goal. Protagonists tackling these issues are trying to keep the world from slipping

- into chaos or destruction. Examples: an invasion from a neighboring country, the sudden rising of a zombie horde, the imposition of martial law.

The default number of issues in a Fate game is two: Either two current issues (for a story solely about trying to make the world a better place), two impending issues (for a story about striving to save people from threats), or one of each. The latter option is common in fiction: think about the stalwart heroes who work against some impending doom while already discontent with the world around them.

**CHANGING THE NUMBER OF ISSUES:** you don't have to stick to two—larger casts or broader premises can support more, and a tighter, smaller-scale game can get by with just one.

The group thinks about the sort of problems they want to deal with in the world. Ryan immediately says "organized crime," and they flesh that out a little. They come up with the idea of "The Scar Triad," a group of thugs who are known for thievery, extortion, and other nasty things that the world could do without. This is clearly a current issue.

Lily wants the story to also be about something on the verge of happening, something Really Bad. They come up with an impending issue: a vile cult that seeks to summon something horrible into the world (which means they're also saying that their setting includes horrible, Lovecraft-inspired things). Lenny calls it "The Doom that Is to Come," and Ryan really likes this idea because it gives his bookish character a hook into things going on in the world.

## MAKING THE ISSUES INTO ASPECTS

As we said earlier, issues are aspects. Turn the ideas you have into aspects that you could conceivably use at different times in the story (often as compels to the protagonists or as invocations for foes, but clever players will always find other uses for aspects). Write them down, and then if you need to add a little bit to remember the context or some details, write those down alongside the aspects.

If you're new to making aspects, hold off on this for now. You'll get quite a bit of practice making aspects for your characters. Once you're done with character creation, turn these issue ideas into aspects.

**CHANGING ISSUES IN PLAY:** *The Long Game* chapter will talk about this in detail, but issues can change as the game progresses. Sometimes, the issue evolves into something new. Sometimes, the characters will successfully fight against it, and it'll be gone. And sometimes, new issues will emerge. So the ones you make are just what you're starting off with.

## DRILLING DOWN

You can also use issues to flesh out smaller, but nonetheless important pieces of your setting. An important location (a major city or nation, or even a memorable local restaurant) or organization (a knightly order, a king's court, or a corporation) can have impending and/or current issues as well.

We recommend you start by giving only one issue to each setting element, just to keep things from getting too bogged down, but you can always add more as the campaign progresses. Likewise, you don't have to do this right now—if you find a setting element becoming more important later in the game, you can give it issues then.

The Cult of Tranquility keeps popping up in pre-game discussions, so the group decides that it also needs an issue. After some discussion, the group decides it'd be interesting if there was some tension in the cult's ranks, and makes a current issue called "Two Conflicting Prophecies"—different branches of the cult have different ideas of what the doom is going to be.

## FACES AND PLACES

**Decide who the important people and locations are.**

At this point, you've probably got your issues figured out, and you may have thought of some organizations or groups that feature prominently in your game.

Now you have to put some faces on those issues and those groups, so that your PCs have people to interact with when they're dealing with those elements. Do they have any particular people who represent them, or stand out as exemplars of what the issue's referring to? If you have any ideas at this point, write them down on an index card: a name, a relationship to the organization or issue, and an aspect detailing their significance to the story.

Do the same for any notable places in your setting. Are there any important places where things happen, either important to the world, important to an issue, or important to the protagonists? If there's a place where you envision multiple scenes taking place, then talk about that. Unlike NPCs, they don't require aspects.

The GM may flesh these characters and places out later, depending on their role in the story. Or one of these ideas might be a great inspiration for a protagonist! And, of course, new ones will unfold as the story progresses.

If there's a piece of your setting that's meant to be a mystery which the protagonists uncover, define it only in loose terms. The specifics can be detailed as they are revealed in play.

After a few minutes of discussion, the group writes down:

- ♦ *Hugo the Charitable, a lieutenant in the Scar Triad. His aspect is Everyone in Riverton Fears Me.*
- ♦ *Which brings us to a place, the city of Riverton. There are two rivers here, so it's a hub for trade.*
- ♦ *Amanda comes up with a sympathetic character, Kale Westal, who owns a shop in Riverton. She isn't cowed by Hugo's extortion, and will likely fall victim to an "accident." Her aspect is Stubborn Because I'm Right.*
- ♦ *The Primarch, the leader of the Cult of Tranquility, whose identity is a mystery. Because that part of the setting is a mystery, they aren't going to come up with an aspect or otherwise go any further, leaving those details to Amanda to figure out in secret.*

They could go on, but they know they'll have more ideas after character creation and as they play. That's just enough to paint a picture of what's going on at the very beginning of the story.

## MAKE CHARACTERS

### Each player makes a protagonist.

It's worth noting that the protagonists should have some connections to the faces and places you named in the previous step. If it's difficult to relate the characters to the setting, then you may want to rethink your protagonists or revise your game so it will make a better fit for the new characters.

When you're making characters, you'll also discover a bit more about the setting as people talk about who their characters know and what their characters do. If anything comes up that should be added to your game creation notes, do so before pushing forward with playing the game.

**SKILLS AND YOUR SETTING:** a big part of your setting is what people can do in it. The various skills in *Skills and Stunts* cover many situations, but you'll want to look over them to see if any don't apply or if there's a skill you need to add.

Adding a skill is covered in more detail in the *Extras* chapter.