

"Pique" RPG System Concept 2 (diceless, court intrigue)

Pique is a role-playing game system that uses cards to represent aspects of each character. It was designed by [Brent P. Newhall](#).

Design Constraints

- The game must be comfortably **playable at Starbucks**. E.g., the group should only need a small table for playing space, and not attract undue attention with distracting props.
- The only physical object required to play is a set of **custom cards**. I may include other objects, as long as they're easily portable and would fit on a small table, but I think I can stretch those cards to do everything needed.
- The game will be playable with **no GM**, though GM-based play will also be supported.
- Gameplay will focus on **court intrigue**, though combat will certainly be supported.

Please critique this system.

This system was initially inspired by the article [Playing at Starbucks at Some Space to Think](#), and by reviews of Warhammer FRP 3rd Edition and Everway. Hallmarks are pulled directly from [Lady Blackbird](#).

Character Creation

Each character has:

- A set of **skills**, divided among 5 elements (see below).
- Three **resource** cards. These are setting-dependent, and define the resources the character can draw on. A total of 20 resource points can be distributed among these three cards.
- Three **hallmark** cards, which are defining characteristics that can provide an advantage in certain circumstances
- Two **goal** cards

You have 25 Chi Points to distribute amongst the five elements:

- **Fire**, representing raw physical power and intimidation.
- **Water**, representing physical dexterity, adaptability, and flexible thinking.
- **Earth**, representing endurance and toughness.
- **Air**, representing spiritual reserves, calmness, concern for morality, and social grace.
- **Metal**, representing raw brainpower, numerical calculating ability, and analytical thinking.

Within each element, choose a set of skills. For each Chi Point in that element, you have 5 Skill Points to distribute among those skills.

Example

My character has 4 Chi Points in Fire. I think up three skills: Smashing Blow, Fleet of Foot, and Intimidation. I have 20 Skill Points (4 Chi Points x 5) to distribute among them, so I put 9 in Smashing Blow, 4 in Fleet of Foot, and 5 in Intimidation.

Each of these skills is written on a card. That card contains the name of the skill, its related element, its Skill Points, and an optional description of the skill.

Conflict Resolution

Before each conflict, every player in the conflict decides on the stakes. The stakes indicate what the character is attempting to achieve.

Conflicts are resolved in rounds, with the goal of accumulating a certain number of victory points (typically 5; may be increased or decreased at the GM's discretion). At the beginning of each round, each player secretly chooses an element to represent the character's stance during that round.

The players in the conflict then reveal their stances.

- Fire – 3 victory points on a win. Win or lose, take 2 risk cards.
- Earth – 1 victory point on a win. If you lose, take 1 risk card.
- Water – 2 victory points on a win. If you lose, take 2 risk cards.
- Air – 1 victory point on a win. If you lose, take 1 ongoing condition.
- Metal – 2 victory points on a win. Win or lose, take 1 risk card.

If you choose an element that is weak against your opponent, you draw an extra risk card at the end of the conflict. Wood parts Earth, Earth absorbs Water, Water quenches Fire, Fire melts Metal, and Metal chops Wood.

During each round, players play skill cards from their chosen stance element in turns. Players may stop playing cards at any time. Once played, a skill card cannot be used again in that conflict. The player with the highest total of skill points played in that round wins that round.

Resources can also be committed to a conflict, and played like skill cards, with resource points valued the same as skill points.

Once a player reaches the target number of victory points, the player receives the stakes specified at the beginning of the conflict.

Hallmarks

A Hallmark is a special ability specific to a character, that provides that character with a benefit in a certain circumstance. The more specific the circumstance, the more powerful the benefit may be.

Example

In Love with Juliet - May only be used in a scene related to securing a stable relationship with Juliet. Count this card as an extra 2 Skill Points, but all of the character's interactions must be directly related to this goal for the remainder of this scene. As soon as the character takes any action not directly related to this goal, the Hallmark's effect ends and it may not be used again in this scene.

Risk Cards

Risk cards represent some kind of disadvantage or problem. One third of the risk deck contains blank cards; the rest lay out some kind of disadvantage, such as taking an ongoing condition.

Fortune Cards

A fortune card represents a twist in the story. Fortune cards are played at the end of every conflict, to indicate the direction of the story.

Fortune cards are like Tarot cards – they suggest some change in fate: a betrayal or a bit of enlightenment, for example.

Conditions

An ongoing condition affects your character for a prolonged period. All conditions can be removed; some by the passage of time, others by meeting certain prerequisites.

Example conditions:

- Sick
- Blackmailed
- Tied up
- Owes another player a favor (very common, I think)
- Life-debt
- Hurt (scratches/bruises)
- Wounded
- Seriously wounded
- Poor
- Tired
- Angry
- Fearful
- Amnesia
- Power tripping

Sample Settings

The Fey Worldjumpers

Thanks to the opening of the world gates, the fey have gained the ability to move between worlds. The Grand Court grants permission for many of the Lords and Ladies to explore new lands and claim them for their own. The fey folk now find themselves with burgeoning

power, and must navigate ever-more treacherous political waters as they seek to expand their empires.

The high elves in a high fantasy world have learned how to build gates that act as semi-permanent portals to other worlds. A few hundred of the most powerful elves are allowed to venture out and claim as much as they wish of these worlds as their own.

Of course, many of these worlds are extremely dangerous, and their inhabitants may operate at any technological level imaginable. The high elves have strong magic on their side, and in this setting should be at least capable of winning any territory they encounter.

The players play elven nobles who are now building empires that span worlds. They may explore these worlds themselves -- as few elven underlings will risk their necks on an alien world without their lord nearby -- but they must always deal with larger fey problems, including:

- The Gate Keepers, who establish new world gates. The gates cannot be kept open indefinitely, so the Keepers will often prod the nobles to decommission a gate (and open a new one in a new location) after a few months.
- The Clerics, who provide magical blessings to the houses. Some houses forego this, and are considered renegades. There's no direct advantage to the blessing, and it chews up valuable time and expense, but not getting one is a faux pas.
- The Wizards who craft focus stones. Without a focus stone, one cannot control magic (though one can definitely feel and use it; it just might overwhelm and kill you).
- The Makers' Guild, master craftworkers who make the actual swords and shields needed for these conquests.
- The Faery King and Queen, who expect tribute and are looking to expand their own influence. They do not grant these fiefdoms lightly.

The Court of a Thousand Suns

The Emperor rules the Third Empire with absolute sovereignty. You are one of his Exarchs, responsible for keeping order amongst a few dozen of the Empire's many hundreds of worlds. Trade must flow between star systems, uprisings must be crushed, the religious orders must be respected, and you must gain further control.

You play one of the Exarchs who answer directly to the ruler of a vast interstellar empire. You are part warlord, part administrator, and part ambassador. You are responsible for many worlds, each of which have their own problems. The Emperor may send you on a specific mission, or you may have to deal with your own problems.

The main factions include:

- The Priesthood, who maintain a vicious standing army. These are the elite soldiers from which all Exarchs draw their most effective fighting forces.
- The Shadow Police, who make problematic people disappear. Then torture them viciously.
- The Spacers, a tightly-controlled guild composed of 95% of the empire's space-faring

merchants.

- The Emperor.

Design Notes

This is an area for ideas and "cool features" that aren't yet baked sufficiently to warrant inclusion in the the main document.

Challenges

Each scene has a Challenge associated with it, drawn from a deck. If playing with a Director, the Director may choose a Challenge card.

(This is still a vague idea at this point. I'm thinking of making it some kind of goal or difficulty that drives the scene in some way. It could be an optional thing; the player that satisfies it gets some bonus. Or it could be a requirement for completing the scene. Would also be interesting if players could issue Challenges to each other.)

Representing Character-to-Character Conflicts

The PCs are going to come into conflict with other characters (often, each other). How should the ongoing conflicts between characters be represented?

That is, Alicia wants Taran's fabulous sword, while Taran wants Alicia's daughter Mara's hand in marriage. And these are just the most obvious things; you'd want some way of representing *subtle* conflicts, like feuds, Mother-always-liked-you-best, *etc.*