

# CHIMAERA

1. a mythological, fire-breathing monster, commonly represented with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail.
2. any similarly grotesque monster having disparate parts, *esp.* as depicted in decorative art.
3. a horrible or unreal creature of the imagination; a vain or idle fancy: *He is far different from the chimaera your fears have made of him.*
4. *Genetics.* an organism composed of two or more genetically distinct tissues, as an organism that is partly male and partly female, or an artificially produced individual having tissues of several species.
5. A game about all of this, plus friendship, environmentalism, the Murdered Earth, sacrifice, damnation, redemption, and mega monster battles, ©2006 by Fred Hicks, based on a character sheet design by Adam Dray, used with permission.

# CRY VENGEANCE FOR THE MURDER OF THE WORLD

In centuries past the dagger of science was driven into the heart of the world. Great cities rose from the ground, reaching for but never managing to grasp the heavens. In our struggle to leave the Earth behind, the Earth was neglected, mistreated, abused. Our eyes turned upwards, we never looked down to see the violence committed daily upon the planet's soul. And soon enough it was too late, and we scarcely noticed the blood upon our hands.

But the death of a murdered world is a slow dark deed, and the defiance it throws against the fading

light is fierce. Even something dead can be revived, given actions dangerous and drastic enough.

And so into this broken land of ancient machinery, rust, mutation, and despair, come the Chimaera. We have been foolish enough to think they are our doing, created in genetic laboratories as our eleventh hour attempt to undo centuries of evil. We flatter ourselves that it was free will that guided the hands of newly enlightened science.

It is only when in the fullness of their wrath, when their rage drives them to heal the planet by scouring our infection, when around them we see the ghostly shapes of beasts long dead rise in the air in a conjoining of ageless and mythic power, that we will begin to realize our arrogance.

We do not control them. We cannot control them. Our time here is done.

## What is this?

This is a role-playing game, designed fast and fierce as part of the Reverse Engineering Challenge.

The Challenge is the brainchild of Kevin Allen Jr., who proposed that a bunch of designers create character sheets for games that didn't exist, and then swap around sheets so the games got designed by people other than the sheet designers.

I ended up with Adam Dray's character sheet, which you'll find elsewhere in this game. It's a doozy.

This game went through a lot of rapid evolution as I worked parts of it out, both on my LiveJournal and the ever-popular "meatspace". My usual partner in crime, Rob Donoghue, did his level best to explode several of my cherished notions over the course of the project and, as always, the end result is all the better for it.

Thanks go to all of the above, and more.

## What is the game about?

It's about very human people who have been chosen, by a mad mixture of fate and science, to sound the angry death rattle of a murdered world, and must do so, even at the cost of the things they hold dear. These characters are the Earth's last Chimaera.

## What do the characters do?

They'll try to walk the narrow line between holding on to precious things, and sounding the world's rage – though that may be as healers, destroyers, or other things. The Murdered Earth is a harsh and implacable mistress; she may demand the blood of friends and family upon her altar before the day is done.

## What do the players do?

Each player guides the actions of one Chimaeric character, trying to find a compromise with their human wants and needs and the demands of the Murdered Earth. Players will also take up some of the traditional GMing duties relative to other characters around the table by making the demands of the Murdered Earth upon them. Finally, everyone will collaborate to create the particulars of the Murdered Earth, answering questions like, “What wrongs are there to be answered?” and “How are the characters tangled up in them?”

## How is that fun?

Did you ever watch the movie version of *Akira*? It was back in high school when I saw it at the local bleeding-edge movie theater. And, sure, it had its flaws (it ends in an explosion – of white light and

vague philosophy!), but, man. Look at Tetsuo and Kaneda go at it. On one level they're fighting for the soul of the planet, but on another they are very simply just friends who try, now and again and failingly, to scrabble and grasp for what they once had.

Now imagine that one of them is the Murdered Earth's destroying wrath (Tetsuo). Now imagine that the other has a similar kind of power (instead of a bad-ass bike and a big gun) and he is, instead, the Murdered Earth's *healing* wrath (Kaneda).

Now throw the two of them into the blender, with all the weight of that old friendship, and radically different core missions, brought on by the demands of a dying world.

For me, *that's fun*. In spades.

## What are the important verbs?

From a game system perspective, the important verb here is **activate**. Characters ramp up in power over the course of play, sometimes drastically, by using variations on that word.

From a character perspective, the important verbs are **heal** and **destroy**. The whole heal and destroy thing is central to the story – will the Murdered Earth destroy itself in its final convulsions, or heal itself through harsh and necessary action?

Together, and through the characters, heal and destroy will form one of the strongest axes (that's the plural of axis, not a metal wedge on the end of a big stick) of conflict in the game.

Other verbs that come to mind here are exciting ones, like **fight**, **explode**, **blame**, and **bleed**. We'll explore how those come up throughout the game.

## What do I need?

Each of you will need about ten ten-sided dice, though a few extras would be helpful. You'll need a stack of poker chips, each a different color.

You'll need a couple small tokens (pennies or glass beads). You'll need copies of the character sheet, printed up in such a way that the second page is on the back of the first, with the altered states in the correct position on each side relative to one another. You'll need pencils, a few hours of free time, at least two to three players and one GM.

## the gm

Before you start, determine who will be the players, and who will be the GM. The GM's job here will be to facilitate the story, by adding motive and detail to the world and, more importantly, acting as an impartial authority to push certain game-necessary events into play. Unlike some "traditional" games, the GM is not the sole locus of such things; she'll have help from the other players in some specific, controlled ways.

## creating chimaera

Once you're clear on who the players are, it's time to create their Chimaera. But no character can easily exist without a context, so first the players must murder the world.

## murdering the world

Think *Final Fantasy VII*. Think *Mad Max*. Think *Dying Earth*. Think *Akira*. Think *Gamma World*. Put it in a blender. Hit "puree".

That's where you live.

## what is cool about it?

Take all of your favorite mythic post-apocalyptic ideas and get them out there on the table. Talk about them with one another.

Get a yellow pad of lined paper and start writing down your top three ideas. Pass it around the table, with each player (and the GM) contributing one at a time, or all three at a pop.

### An Alternative

This approach, with one pad of paper, can get a little constraining if everyone's riffing at the same time. If you're running into that sort of a problem, open it up by giving everyone a stack of three or four index cards. Toss them into the middle of the table, and then parcel them out for the later phases.

The upside of the pad of paper approach is that it leaves you with a single document, a "setting manifesto", if you will, that points out the cool that everyone is going for.

The upside of the index card approach is that everyone can work on it at the same time, and maybe slide those cards around like pieces on a map, discovering some new and exciting combinations that you might not see in a straight, linear list.

Go with what works for *you*.

Once you're done, pass it around a second time, filling in the cracks, and putting stars next to anything that excites you – especially the stuff that you didn't come up with, yourself.

Now pass it around a third time, and do some judicious subtraction. Each player has the option to cross out one item that doesn't have much potential for them – so long as it doesn't have a star next to it, since that indicates an idea that *really works* for another one of the players.

### A + B = Whaaaaa?

Do *not* be afraid of things that don't seem to belong together. If someone's written down *Angry Gods Built Time Bombs* and another person's written *Nanotech Viruses Ate My Home*, and they both got stars next to them, *great*. They both belong here.

This is high-flown post-apocalyptic science fantasy. Everything that sets the players on fire has a place – even when it seems contradictory.

Those contradictions produce friction, and where there's friction, there's heat.

Go with the crazy, point out the friction, and discuss the hell out of it. Get an idea of how those two concepts do work together, and make your Murdered Earth live in the intersection between them. More often than not, it turns out this stuff works.

You're done? Now you have your setting **grab bag**. These are ideas and trappings and elements of color that you all can draw on during play. Use them as touchstones for character concepts, and seeds for growing other parts of the setting.

## how was it done?

So, you know the world was murdered. How was it done? The answer is probably in your grab bag, so *start grabbing!*

The goals for this step are to focus on the particulars of the methods for murdering the Earth and to put some specifics to them – places, names, events, and so forth. It's not just *Angry Gods Built Time Bombs* any more. You answer: who are the Angry Gods? Where did the bombs get planted? What happened to those places when the bombs went off?

This must be a collaborative process, with each player getting a chance to define some aspect. Here's a recommended procedure – feel free to come up with one that works for your group, but I think this one will work fairly well for most.

Pick up to three elements from the grab-bag (starred ones are preferred) that suggest a strong role in the murder of the world. This should be done as a group activity.

Each player then poses one question about each chosen element, and proposes an answer to it – or chooses a specific other person to give an answer. The rest of the group can chime in with

suggestions and alterations, but in each case, it's up to the answerer to accept or refuse these.

With this method, lather, rinse, and repeat until each element has an answered question for each player in the game.

### Under Pressure

Some players will hate getting the keys to the car, and they won't want to drive. And since this is a game and it's about players having fun, whatever you do, *don't* pressure them to do something they aren't comfortable with (a little stretching of a comfort zone is a good thing, but it's a fine, fine line to walk).

But it is important that they be a participant in some stripe. At minimum, they should be allowed to exercise a little veto power. Or, maybe, they'd be fine with the *asking questions* part, but they want to leave the *providing answers* bit to the GM, or another player.

All of these approaches are fine, so long as none of them amount to absolutely no participation whatsoever. Participation in the collaborative process of building the setting is *paramount* to building player investment in the game. Without that investment, you run a real risk of falling flat.

## who is to blame?

No setting truly comes alive without putting faces to it – it is people and personalities that make stories sing. But when the setting involves a murdered planet howling for revenge, those faces are the faces of the guilty. The next step is determining who they are.

As a group, your job is to look not for the faces of the past that *did* the murderous deed, necessarily (and such faces may already be named and detailed by this point), so much as the current *inheritors* and *descendants* of those ancestral murderers.

Descent, here, does not necessarily need to involve actual parentage – someone might be a spiritual or conceptual descendant of the God-Scientist who unmade civilization, rather than his souped-up genengineered progeny.

Sometimes those faces of the past may also be the faces of the present – most common in games where the past apocalypse is still fresh.

Regardless, these people may be outright complicit in the dark deeds of the past, as dyed-black villains looking to inflict a final apocalypse. But as often as not, they'll be well-meaning sorts, chock full of Hell's paving stones (good intentions) and some palpable human dimensions. If anything, this latter group should be more prevalent than the former, as they'll offer up chewier fare for the players' eager teeth.

As with the larger elements of the setting, putting faces to the setting should be a collaborative effort involving the players – even more so, in fact, since these are the faces that the players' characters will be familiar with (perhaps even *intimately*). Don't exit this step without a strong feeling that the faces you're placing on the board are pregnant with the potential for villainy and, even better, tragedy.

## does it pass the acid test?

At this point in your creation of the Murdered Earth, you should be able to look at it and answer these questions to your satisfaction:

**Can this world be saved?** The answer here *must* be yes, but thinly so: able to be saved, but only at great cost.

**Is it worth saving?** The answer here must also be yes. If everything sucks so much that nobody sees a point in trying to save the world, you've probably turned the dial a couple shades too dark.

**What's the price of salvation?** As indicated before, the answer to this must be "great". Salvation at pennies on the dollar will simply not

do. You don't have to get specific about this, so long as you see at least one, if not many, ways the price *could* be set (painfully).

If these questions don't produce satisfactory answers, you'll need to prod and tweak the setting until it does. Or, put it off, but stay aware that you need to get these to a place of satisfaction – and probably the way to get there will be by adding people and places and ideas to the world that are worth saving, but who might get put on the line in the attempt (which is something we'll cover in greater detail shortly). Regardless, once you've addressed that, it's time to ask...

## how are chimaera created?

To answer this question, turn to the faces you've outlined in the "Who Is To Blame?" step. Remember the ones who are full of good intentions – who may, themselves, want to fix the wrongs of the past? It's probably *them* who started the project or experiment or what-have-you that gave birth to the Chimaera.

It doesn't even have to be a single one of them or a single method – the Chimaera may have been created by a number of different methods in places all over the globe.

As such, this is a question that each player must be ready to answer as they move from setting creation to character creation. This is the question that bridges the gap, and is the first step in connecting them to the setting, and thus the story, and thus the tragic potential of it all.

## a call for vengeance

Whether they understand it or not, the player characters in this game are the tools of the Murdered Earth. They are avatars, and while, yes, they have free will, that will is sometimes crushed under the relentless demands of the true source of

their power. The only way to escape their call is to take it to its ultimate end – whatever that may be. It could end in their own death, the true death of the world, or merely the destruction of those people and places they hold dear.

Whatever the case may be, they are also *monsters*. As much as you should play their human sides to the hilt, play their monstrous natures to the fullest as well. Don't fear *extreme action*, and open up the gates of your inner mega-monster desires to stomp a few city blocks just because you're having a fit of pique.

You've created Tokyo; now it's time to go Godzilla on its ass.

#### Hang on a second...

Is this a story game, or a fighting game? Is this about exploring the painful knots of character-driven angst, or is it about turning into giant mega-monsters and thrashing lots of landscape in the process?

The answer is *yes*.

## Who matters to them?

First and possibly most important for the human character side of things is the position of your Chimaera in the world.

This is done by establishing relationships. Use the middle back of the character sheet to list and track the ones that are important to your character specifically, but also track them on index cards that are put out on the table to show a sort of "relationship map" of the world.

You've already got some potent faces out in the world, with the "Who is to Blame?" step, from above. Make sure that you have an index card out on the table representing these people.

Going around the table, each player should establish a *positive* relationship with one of these people. It can be indirectly or directly done.

Indirect relationships are done by adding another face to the world, who in turn has a direct relationship to the one of the Who-Is-To-Blame faces. This means putting another index card out on the table for that character!

#### Direct and Indirect Relationships

A direct relationship might be, "Doctor Paulson is the man who mentored me, taught me what I know about science, and ultimately led to my transformation."

An indirect relationship might be, "I'm a street kid who has caught the eye of Doctor Paulson's daughter, Eve. We're in the early stages of dating."

The GM may contribute to this as well, by establishing some additional faces who are connected to those who have been put on the table (so even if you went for the direct relationship with Doctor Paulson, the GM might create Eve as the doctor's daughter).

Remember, on this go-round with the table, you're establishing positive relationships to NPCs in the world. Your characters are human, and humans live in a social way, with relationships that keep them vital.

The second time around the table is for a darker purpose – determining who will be set against your characters. But this can't be done in a vacuum – while you know Who Is To Blame, this alone doesn't make them the target of your wrath (yet).

No, you have to pick from among those people who are tied into the other players' characters positive relationships. You can do this directly or indirectly, as before, but this time the relationship is definitively negative.

#### Rixor and Gosst

Fred's Chimaera ("Rixor") has an indirect, positive relationship to Doctor Paulson by dating the doctor's daughter, Eve. This means that Doctor Paulson and Eve Paulson are both

viable candidates for the other players' antagonistic relationships...

Adam's Chimaera ("Gosst") is considering his options for antagonism. He could decide that Doctor Paulson created his Chimaeric abilities, but was terrified of the result, and had Gosst cryogenically frozen and shipped off to a warehouse somewhere. Gosst would want revenge for that when he inevitably escapes at the story's opening.

But he could also establish a relationship, instead, with Eve Paulson – possibly as an "ex" of hers. Clearly breaking off the relationship was Eve's idea, and Gosst would enter the story determined to win her back. This option is especially potent given that Rixor is currently dating Eve.

A tussle over a girl that escalates into city-block-smashing megamonster fighting sounds exactly right for Chimaera. And this being the way that the Murdered Earth gets back at Science for its deadly legacy (by ensuring that premiere scientist Doctor Paulson's daughter gets helplessly trapped in the middle of all of it) is very much spot on.

Now we have an idea for how this will get started!

Over the course of all of this, you should be working out the basic concept for who your character is. If additional relationships beyond the required ones shown above present themselves, feel free to establish them – there aren't any limits here, just a basic minimum.

Players should also establish whether their characters know one another from the past, whether they're friendly to one another (something I would encourage), indifferent (something I would discourage), or unfriendly (could go either way on that).

If this is done, make sure to make note of it the way you would any other character relationship.

## What are they now?

You've covered most of the "soft" stuff. Finish fleshing out the character by turning this stuff into on-sheet character elements.

Give the character a **name** if you haven't already.

Skip past **type** for just now – that'll be covered shortly.

For **body**, **mind**, and **soul** (the "core stats"), you won't be giving a number or rating to it, but you should write down, in the box, the core **motifs** for the character, as fits the type of stat – a short list of two or three ideas that fit how your character would use that stat.

These motifs will be a necessary part of how your character tackles certain kinds of activities during conflict resolution. They might be positive, and they might be negative.

### Motif Examples

**Body Motifs** would cover physical activities, talents, and even props and appearance. *Such as:* Physical Weakling, Star Athlete, Ace Pilot, Cool Motorcycle, Plain Looking, and Two Fists of Fury.

**Mind Motifs** cover activities involving reason, perception, and knowledge. *Such as:* Scientific Genius, Thick-Witted, Nose for Trouble, Ancient History, and Librarian.

**Soul Motifs** involve hopes, loves, fears, ideals, philosophies, and feelings. *Such as:* Zen Buddhist, Heart on My Sleeve, Question Authority, Anarchist, and Remembering My Dead Father.

Next, take all of what you've done so far, and determine your character's **type**. Think of type as a way of summarizing the character in a single word (or pair of words). Players should take

special care not to duplicate one another, even if it's closely.

Thus, if someone takes "Warrior" as their type, other people shouldn't take synonyms of that as their type, unless you can very clearly spell out a major way that they differ from one another.

### A Pair of Warriors

Adam decides that Gosst is a "Warrior" for his type. Fred looks at Rixor's sheet and sees he's written down "Streetfighter". They check with the GM, who makes a few pained faces, and suggests that these two are a little close to one another.

Fred and Adam talk this through.

Adam says he sees Gosst as a relentless warrior, one who will keep coming for his target until there's nothing left of it – even to the point of gathering up an army of angels to raze the land, if that's what it takes.

Fred nods, and looks for some differences to offer up. He decides that Rixor is a street warrior, yes, but in a very street-wise way. He doesn't go for the violence if he can help it, and when he strikes, it's to end a fight, not escalate the violence.

Looking at these two perspectives on things, the GM suggests that Gosst is a "Warmonger", while Rixor is a "Peaceful Warrior". These suggestions strike a chord for both players, so that's what they stick with.

In play, both core stat motifs and character type will determine the ways your character can build up charge (which is a big deal, as you'll discover shortly).

## What do they become?

A Chimaera has two natures that are more than human, called **altered states**. One altered state is always active, with the other one in some kind of dormancy until it gets brought out (we'll cover

that later on when we talk about how to play the game).

**Altered state one** is a less powerful creature than **altered state two**, though in the first altered state, you're able to function as a human, at least to some extent. You maintain your normal (or at least normal-ish) appearance, though whenever you get into a conflict and start using your traits (discussed below), bits of your Chimaeric self will start to leak through. Ghostly shapes of dead beasts may hover in the air around you, your forehead may grow and pulse, and so on. In other words, you'll still be tapping into some serious special effects.

**Altered state two** is a very powerful entity, but activating this second state creates a kind of inevitable momentum that you can't easily control. You'll find yourself leveling city blocks without meaning to, stepping on the family car with your wife trapped inside, and summoning down the wrath of the Murdered Earth without a thought for the playground nearby. It's bad juju – but it's much better at winning fights. Here, the special effects budget goes way up, and while you don't always turn into a mega movie monster (maybe your skin just turns black, you start hovering two feet off the ground, you can summon meteor strikes from out of the heavens, and your voice causes people's fillings to explode in their teeth), the amount of devastation you can cause is comparable to such a beast.

If you fold the flaps on either side of the character sheet toward you, you'll see that the backside of each has a few details for you to fill out: nature, and activation.

**Nature** is where you free associate by doodling, or photocopying or tracing a small picture and cutting and pasting, a representation or inspiration for what that superpowered side of the character is like. Remember, the character's first altered state is less powerful than his second.

### Dude, I Can't Draw!

You don't need to be good at doodling to do this. This is as much for your inspiration as anything, so think of it as a sketchpad that you'll use to inspire ideas, rather than as a work of art that will be somehow judged and evaluated. This is "art" for *your* sake. Find your groove and go with it – even if that means ignoring the whole picture gig here and writing a haiku, or writing down an interlinked web of free-associated verbs. The only guideline is that you do something that is in some way *art* rather than directly descriptive.

Look at the nature you've determined and think about the ways that that nature might be brought out of the character.

For the *second* altered state, you should think in terms of what sorts of behaviors, phrases, events, and other such things would trigger the character "hulking out" and going from "normal dude with superpowers" mode into "mega monster" mode.

For the *first* altered state, this is more about "calming down" and lowering your power level in order to get some control back. So for the *first* altered state, think in terms of what sorts of behaviors, phrases, events, and other triggers would reach the human being inside the monstrous shell and get him to lose some of his grip on the Murdered World's rage.

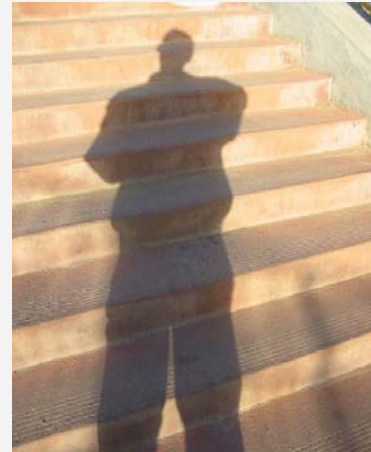
In both cases, look for things that are reasonably broad in application. Emotional states (and phrases that hint at it) as well as drastic but common events can work pretty well.

Pick three of them as appropriate to each altered state, and write them down under the **activate** headers, to indicate what triggers can cause the activation of that altered state.

### Rixor's Chimaeric Natures

Fred decides he's going to go grabbing some pictures from public domain photo sources and print them out for his character's natures.

For Rixor's first altered state, Fred pastes this in the nature box:



For Rixor's second altered state, Fred pastes this in:



Looking at the first altered state, which seems to be about light and shadow, Fred decides that one of Rixor's "calming" triggers is Bright Light. He also goes for Seeing His Shadow, and rounds it out with Memories of Trust.

For the second altered state, which brings fire into collision with shadow, Fred is looking for things that would send Rixor over the edge. Given this image, he chooses Something Is

Burning, Screams of Rage, and A Moment of Triumph.

Thinking about the special effects for each state, he figures that in the first altered state, Rixor’s shadow can become animated, playing weird tricks with the light in the area, and (looking at how that shadow stretches out), he can seem to become taller.

In the second state, the “big devastation” one, he becomes a living shadow wreathed in flame, exulting in the destruction of civilization by fire.

Now that you’ve figured out what your Chimaeric altered states are like, fold the flaps out flat so you can see the whole of the front of the character sheet. You’ll notice that each altered state has six **traits** associated with it. These are superpowered traits that you can use whenever an altered state is active (see “Altered States” later on).

You’ll use the rectangular box for each trait to give your superpowers a colorful name that hints at what sorts of special effects go off whenever you use them. In the circles, you’ll put a symbol which indicates the type of ability each trait represents. In general, traits have a normal and a “mega” type, with the “mega” types represented by filling in the shapes.

Look at these definitions first before finding out how to select traits:

### Types of Traits

□ **Melee** – A melee ability acts at close range, is stronger against psychic traits, and is blocked by range traits.

■ **Mega-Melee** – Identical to a melee ability, but more powerful, and is only weakened rather than blocked by range traits.

○ **Range** – A range ability acts at long range, is stronger against melee traits, and is blocked by psychic traits.

● **Mega-Range** – Identical to a range ability, but more powerful, and is only weakened rather than blocked by psychic traits.

△ **Psychic** – A psychic ability moves with the speed of thought, but that’s hard to do while someone’s right in your face. Psychic abilities are blocked by melee traits, but at range are stronger against the slower range traits are.

▲ **Mega-Psychic** – Identical to a psychic ability, but more powerful, and is only weakened rather than blocked by melee traits.

◇ **Protection** – A protection trait can’t ever be blocked, and can be used to reduce the potency of an attack.

★ **Ultra** – A devastating attack that can’t be blocked or weakened, but may only be used once.

Altered states may select packages from the following lists (but will be allowed to make alterations to them, so wait before you start putting ink to paper!)

### First Altered State Trait Packages

□□□○○△	□□□○△△
□□○○○△	□○○○△△
□□○△△△	□○○△△△

A first altered state may swap out one or more of the same type of symbol for ◇ (protection) traits. So, if you took the first package shown (□□□○○△), you could replace any one of those symbols with a ◇, or either two of □ or two of ○ with two ◇, or all three of the □ with three ◇.

### Second Altered State Trait Packages

■ ■ ■ ● ● ▲	■ ■ ■ ● ▲ ▲
■ ■ ● ● ● ▲	■ ● ● ● ▲ ▲
■ ■ ● ▲ ▲ ▲	■ ● ● ▲ ▲ ▲

A second altered state may swap out one or more of the same type of symbol for ◇ (protection) traits, the same as described above. They may also swap out any one symbol that has no others like it left for a ★ (ultra) trait. This may be done either with the singleton of the package, or may be done if only one of a symbol is left after the others of its type have been converted to ◇ traits.

### Rixor's Traits

Fred sits down to detail Rixor's second altered state. When he's in this state, he's a flame-wreathed creature of shadow, which sounds like a lot of range and/or psychic mojo to him, so he starts by selecting the ■●●●▲▲ package.

He figures that he's only semi-physical in this state, so a protection trait might make sense for that. He also definitely wants an ultra attack.

He decides he doesn't need much of the psychic stuff, so he swaps out one ▲ for a ◇. This leaves him with two options for the ultra attack, either the ■ or the ▲. Fred thinks about it for a bit, then decides the heck with this psychic stuff, and goes for the ▲, leaving him with a final set of traits like so:

■●●●◇★.

He breaks down the descriptions as follows:

- |                |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| ■ Aura of Fire | ● Flame Blast Phoenix |
| ● Pyro Blossom | ● Hundred Suns Strike |
| ◇ Shadowy Form | ★ Apocalypse Now!     |

## get ready for what you got yourself into!

At this point, you should be primed for players to be invested in what happens to the world, because they've built it. In fact, this is ultimately how you hook them in. They've contributed places and faces to the world (and will continue to do so during play). That's their stuff out there, and it's

all vulnerable to what's going to come to pass as you play the game.

But when the fire washes over the world, they won't have total control over what happens to those things – much as they might scream and try. That's where you get empathy going for your characters – tragic avatars of the Murdered World's death-fury.

They will be the agents of their, and our, undoing.

Revel in it.

## playing the game

You've set it all up. Now let's get to putting it in motion.

## SCENES

I'm going to repeat some of my favorite lines about scene framing here, just to get them said: this is something you're already doing in your games, even if you don't know what it means. When you say, "So you're standing outside a bar, when X happens," you've just framed a scene. All that the term is meant to do, if you ask me, is to make sure that you're *aware* of that activity – both in terms of when you're *starting* a scene and when you're *ending* one. By staying on top of when you start a scene (hint: only at the point where something interesting is starting to happen) and when you end one (hint: at the point when the interesting stuff is *done*), you'll find it sensitizes you to how to control the  *pacing of things*  in the story that is your game. This is a great power, and one that in *Chimaera* is shared by everyone – players and GM alike.

## the order of play

Starting one player clockwise from the GM, and proceeding clockwise, each player (including the GM) takes a turn framing a scene (on his turn, that player is called the **framing player**).

In this game, scenes break down into two clear types: character development scenes, and conflicts.

## character development

A **character development** scene is a *short* (remember: it is bound by the start of something interesting, and the end of it!) scene that doesn't lead to a conflict resolution, but does contribute to the development and exposition of player and non-player characters – it could even be one that doesn't involve the framing player's character directly.

*The game effect of a character development scene is this:* The framing player gains a point of charge (see “Charge”, below) for his character.

The framing player sets the stage and picks a character in the scene to play – if his character is in it, then he automatically plays that one. If any other player characters are framed into the scene, those players step up and play their characters as well.

The GM takes care of playing the rest of the characters (as well as animating the environment), though she may feel free to parcel roles out to other players to play (so long as those players' characters are not directly involved in the scene). This is a good way to make sure that everyone at the table who wants to play gets to play.

The GM also has the authority to call for the scene to wrap, in the interests of enforcing pacing. This should be watched carefully; the GM is the story's watchdog and advocate, and needs to be sure that everything's working all around the table. Big scenes with multiple player-characters are probably actually a collection of contiguous smaller scenes. Push the smaller scenes to conclude, and move around the table.

The framing player doesn't have to be certain that a scene is a character development scene. It can be declared to be a character development scene in

retrospect, once the scene concludes and it is seen that no conflict (see below) occurred during it. In such a case the framing player still gets a point of charge.

### More charge from scenes using type and stats

Not only do you get charge when you frame a character development scene, you also get it whenever your Chimaera acts in a way that's consistent with his stated type, or uses one of the motifs from his body, mind, or soul. You'll only get one point of charge *per scene* in this way, but it can add up, so hit those motifs whenever you can.

## conflicts

A **conflict scene** is, simply, one where a conflict occurs. In this game, the dice are only rolled in conflicts, and conflicts arise only when two or more parties are interested in achieving one or more opposing goals.

The rubber hits the road with the game rules in a conflict scene, so it's important to tour some of those rules first. We'll come back to directly addressing the resolution of conflicts below (“Resolving Conflicts”).

## altered states

Chimaeric characters have two altered states, as discussed previously. The first altered state is the “normal” one, and the second state is the “mega monster” one, to oversimplify it a bit.

## SOME TERMS

The character sheet shows these states as “flaps” on either side of the character's core. When a flap is laid flat, the state is said to be **active**. When it is folded behind the sheet and, thus, unseen, it is said to be **dormant**. When it is folded forward so the backside of the flap is scene (with the nature and the activation triggers showing), it's said to be **primed**.

At the start of a game, the first altered state is *active*, and the second altered state is *dormant*. We'll talk about what each state means next.

## dormancy

When a state is dormant, none of its traits are available to be used.

Waking an altered state out of dormancy requires a player to spend a point of charge to prime it (see below). This point of charge can be spent by any player, *on* any player's character, for any dormant state.

Whenever the first altered state activates, the second altered state is immediately sent into dormancy. Whenever the second altered state activates, the first altered state is immediately sent into dormancy.

Whenever an altered state is sent into dormancy, all of the damage bubbles on that side of the character sheet (the little ovals linked together by a web of grey lines) get their marks removed. However, the player of that Chimaera also loses all of the charge he's built up at that point (the healing effect, however, is a more than fair trade).

The effect of this is profound: Chimaeric individuals are *very* hard to kill, due to the healing power of their transformations. By sending part of their nature into hibernation, rapid healing is possible. A Chimaera can only truly be killed by utterly overwhelming him before he gets a chance to activate one of his states.

## priming

As discussed above, an altered state becomes primed when a point of charge is spent to do so. The player folds that flap forward revealing the activation triggers for that character.

Whenever one of a Chimaera's primed activation triggers is "hit" during play, any player may spend a point of charge in order to cause that altered state

to become active. This immediately sends the other altered state into dormancy, as described earlier.

## activation

When an altered state becomes active, the other state is sent into dormancy, as described above. An active state is able to its traits in a conflict resolution, which is a big deal, as that allows the character to bring some pretty serious dice to bear.

Whenever the first altered state is active, the Chimaera's nonhuman side isn't terribly obvious *unless* he makes use of the powers represented by his traits.

Whenever the second altered state is active, the character's appearance is transformed significantly; he's suffused with the fury of the Murdered Earth, and it often isn't pretty.

### The Loss of Choice and the Power of That Loss

Players aren't always in control of when their Chimaera activate their altered states, as described above. This is entirely intentional and, in fact, is one of the "dirty tricks" the game uses to create investment.

The players have contributed to the game world and have created their characters, but they aren't always in control of either of those things. This deepens the experience by giving them something to struggle over, to dread, to hope.

That's where the emotion can really live, from a purely manipulative perspective on things. *And that's a good thing.* Make them *care*, make them *helpless*, and then give them *power* (and, perhaps, responsibility) to do something in the face of that.

Nasty trick? Sure. *Nasty world.* See if they don't love you for it.

# resolving conflicts

When a conflict scene is called for, it's time for the dice to hit the table. But first, you need to get a grip on what the people in the scene want to do.

## talking about the conflict

At the beginning of a conflict scene, after the play leading up to the conflict is done, it's time to talk about what the characters have in mind to achieve.

Each player will talk about the goals for the character he's controlling in the scene. The GM will talk about goals for non-player characters in the scene, if they're involved in the conflict.

Often these goals will be in direct opposition to one another, *e.g.*, "I want to tear down Paulson Labs" *vs.* "I want to stop him." In such a case, these goals are together said to form a single **axis of conflict**.

Any given axis of conflict is defined in essentially the same way: an intention to do something, and the intention to prevent that. If no one is taking one or the other end of an axis, then the axis may still exist.

Using this model, you can handle multiple axes (that's the plural of axis, hoss) of conflict in the same conflict scene (though this will involve splitting up your dice).

### Let's hurt each other!

Sometimes a conflict will be stated in terms of "A wants to hurt B" and "B wants to hurt A". Whether this is one or two axes of conflict depends on whether A and B want the possibility of exiting the conflict with both parties damaged.

If the answer's no, then just do it as one axis, with "... and protect himself in the process" being considered implicit.

If the answer's yes, then it's two axes. Note, however, that it's entirely possible that both

axes of conflict might be resolved in favor of one side, in which case the losing side (for both axes) would take damage from the results of both!

Whenever running a conflict with multiple axes, you'll want to make sure you set aside a specific area of the table where the dice apply to one or the other conflict. With enough play surface this shouldn't be too much trouble.

### Show me a multi-sided conflict!

Adam, playing Gosst, and Fred, playing Rixor, have gotten into a big battle outside Paulson Labs. The GM is throwing the robotic defense systems of Paulson Labs into the mix as well.

Adam has said, "Gosst wants to tear down Paulson Labs", while Fred has said "I want to stop Gosst's rampage". That's our first axis of conflict.

The GM says, "Well, the Lab Robots want to stop Gosst, but they're going after Rixor too." This means two things.

One, the GM is a participant on the "I want to stop Gosst" end of the first axis of conflict.

Two, the GM has introduced a second axis of conflict: "The Robots want to put a hurtin' on Rixor." This naturally creates the other end of the axis, "Rixor wants to avoid getting hurt by the robots."

While these axes could potentially be broken down along different lines, this works well enough to get the job done, and with the GM's approval, the conflict continues.

Each axis will get resolved separately. As the players roll their dice, they'll get to choose which axis (and which end of the axis, though that's usually obvious) that their dice go to. The dice will be compared at the end of the conflict, and *damage is always the result*. But we'll get to how that works in a few.

## stats IN action

Going clockwise around the table for each player involved in the conflict, starting with the framing player for the conflict scene, each player chooses a single stat (body, mind, or soul) that their character is using to lead off the conflict.

Whenever using a stat (or a trait) to roll dice, the player should always provide some narration explaining how it's being used in the scene. *This is not optional*, but it is a requirement that can be satisfied with a single sentence.

For each undamaged "bubble" (those ovals to either side of the stat on the sheet) that a stat has, roll one die (a d10). With a fresh sheet, that's two bubbles per stat, so you'll be rolling two dice regardless of which stat you choose.

### What to do with the zeroes

The d10's rolled in *Chimaera* consider the '0' or '10' result on the die to be a zero.

Zeroes don't contribute to the direct conflict resolution. Instead, they indicate the amount of side effects (collateral damage, mainly) that will occur.

Any dice that roll a zero – for both stats, traits, and any other rolls – should be set aside or collected in a bowl or at least tallied. This total's important, because it'll get spent after the conflict resolves to see exactly where all the rubble landed.

Because stats have motifs, you can add an extra die (but only one die total) to your use of a stat by incorporating one of those motifs into your narration.

Once per conflict, you may narrate in a detail of your character's type, and gain a die from that as well.

You can also gain one additional die beyond the rest by incorporating a *negative* motif from one of

the stats of any character opposing you on an axis of conflict. Doing so, however, gives that character's player a point of charge.

### What's my big entrance?

In total, this means that someone could open a conflict with five dice!

- Two for the chosen stat
- One for using a motif of that stat
- One for using a negative motif from one of the opposition's stats.
- One for using your once-per-conflict type

When selecting a stat to be used to open the conflict, place a glass bead or other small token on the stat. This will be your place marker, making it clear what your most recently used attribute was.

### Meanwhile, at Paulson Labs...

Rixor is starting out the conflict trying to reason with Gosst. He's making an emotional appeal to him, so he decides he's leading in with soul, which is at two dice. He's a Peaceful Warrior type, and decides to grab that bonus right off, adding a third die, and makes use of his Street Wisdom motif for a fourth.

Gosst is coming in with the intent to smash things to bits, so he's straight-up Body (at two dice), and grabs a third for the motif of Two Fists of Fury, describing how he's pounding on the walls with his clenched Chimaeric fists!

The GM's Robots are taking time to target and analyze Rixor and Gosst, so they're going with Reason, which has only one bubble with it. That's 1 die. He tosses in some razzmatazz about seeing Rixor and Gosst through robotic targeting cameras, which is enough to bring in the Advanced Targeting Systems motif, for a second die.

## rolling and placing dice

As the conflict plays out, dice are rolled. Each time a player rolls dice, he must consider each die and allocate it to one end of one axis of conflict, after setting aside the zeroes as described above.

### Rolling at the Labs

Rixor rolls, and gets 6, 7, 8, 9.

Gosst rolls, and gets 4, 0, 0 – Ouch! Both of those zeroes go into the collateral tally, leaving him with only a 4 to place. (On some level, this is awesome, since collateral damage is sure to mess up the Labs; on the other hand, Gosst could hurt a lot for it.)

The Robots get 3 and 9.

In order to keep things as fair as possible when multiple axes are in play, starting with the framing player, each player places only one die on one of the axes at a time, until all rolled dice have been placed.

### Placing at the Labs

Rixor is involved in two axes, and must place first, followed by Gosst, and then the GM. As things settle out, it looks like this:

#### First Axis

Rixor and the Robots “Stop Gosst”: 8, 7, 3

vs. Gosst “Tear It Down”: 4

#### Second Axis

Rixor “Avoid the Robots”: 9, 6

vs. Robots “Defeat Rixor”: 9

## comparing dice

Once the dice are placed on opposite ends of a given axis of conflict, they eliminate opposed duplicates (*i.e.*, identical dice on opposite ends of an axis cancel each other out and are removed).

### Comparing at the Labs

There aren’t any ties in the first axis, so all of those dice stand.

On the second axis, there’s one nine on each end, so a nine is removed from each side. Now the second axis looks like this:

#### Second Axis

Rixor “Avoid the Robots”: 6

vs. Robots “Defeat Rixor”: (nothing!)

At this point, you’re already wondering what these dice actually *mean*; you’ll find out more about that in detail down in “Concluding the Conflict” and “Damage”. But for the short term, you’re going to be ending up with dice that function much like Ron Edwards’ *Sorcerer*, where you count the number of higher dice on one side of the conflict than the highest of the other side. We’ll get to the details and examples of that shortly.

## using the web to escalate

After the first go-round the table and the rolling and placement of dice, the action continues around the table until all of the players pass their option to **escalate**.

Escalating is done by sliding the glass bead marker along one of the paths of the **web** on the character sheet that connects stats to traits.

Escalation must occur along these paths, and as such, that means that *in order to escalate* from your initial stat roll, you must make use of one of your character’s available traits (more on how this works below). Once you’ve escalated to a trait, you can then escalate to a stat, and so forth, when your turn comes back around.

Again, you have to do at least a sentence of narration describing how that trait or stat is brought into use. Once you do, you get to roll more dice and place them (all of them) immediately.

*There are some key limitations, however.*

You can't use the same stat or trait twice in the same conflict resolution. This means that once your glass bead has visited a particular stat or trait, it can't visit them again until a new conflict scene is framed. This is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it limits the length of a particular conflict.

You also can't escalate to a trait if its damage bubble (the little oval at the ends of the grey lines) for that trait is filled in. You can always escalate from a trait *to* a stat, even if both of its bubbles are filled in, but unless you bring in a motif, there's no way you'll be getting dice from such an escalation ("Stats in Action", above).

#### Must I?

No! You are not obligated to escalate on your turn!

In fact, if you're in the lead and aren't looking to grow that lead, you can always pass. If someone escalates and manages to turn the tables, you'll get another swing at it when it comes round to be your turn again. Remember: escalation continues until everyone has passed a full round around the table!

Sometimes passing has some strategic value due to not changing what the last trait is that was used on your side of a given axis. (Don't understand what this means? Keep reading.)

## traits in action

When traits get involved in escalation, they provide a variable amount of dice, as well as set the "most recently used trait" mode for your end of the axis (or axes) you place your dice on.

This second part is important, because it affects what traits the opposition can use, and how effective those traits are in terms of the dice rolled when a trait is used in response.

#### It's in the cards

It's useful to have a set of cards with the various symbols for melee, psychic, and range, at least, in order to convey what trait was last used at a particular end of an axis of conflict.

Trust me. Props are king, and since you may have to maintain the "state of the traits" on multiple axes of conflict, cards like the ones I'm describing will be life-savers.

I'll provide a set of such cards for your easy printing and use along with the game.

Each "normal" trait (□○△) provides a single die as its baseline (and causes special effects to occur when you use it). Each "mega" trait (■●▲) provides two dice as its baseline (and causes massive special effects to occur when you use it).

The baseline is adjusted up or down by one if the opposite end of the axis shows the last used trait to be one that's inferior or superior to it. A trait which would provide no dice can't be used for escalation at all.

- **Melee traits** (□■) are superior to Psychic traits (△▲) and inferior to Range traits (○●).
- **Psychic traits** (△▲) are superior to Range traits (○●) and inferior to Melee traits (□■).
- **Range traits** (○●) are superior to Melee traits (□■) and inferior to Psychic traits (△▲).

#### Dude! This is "Rock, Paper, Scissors"

You noticed! Instead of Rock beats Scissors beats Paper beats Rock, you have Melee beats Psychic beats Range beats Melee. Remember that, and the idea that "mega" adds a die, and you'll pretty much have it internalized.

Now that you understand the principle, you should be able to look at this table without being

overwhelmed by its strange symbology – especially given that you’ve used these symbols to represent what your traits can do, on your sheet:

### Opposing (Previous) Trait

Acting (Escalating) Trait	□ or ■		○ or ●		△ or ▲		None/ Other
	□	1d	Can't!	2d	1d	Can't!	1d
○	2d	1d	Can't!	1d	Can't!	1d	1d
△	Can't!	2d	1d	1d	1d	1d	1d
■	2d	1d	3d	2d	2d	2d	2d
●	3d	2d	1d	2d	2d	2d	2d
▲	1d	3d	2d	2d	2d	2d	2d

The upshot of this is that mega traits are never blocked from escalation-action, but they can be reduced in effectiveness, while normal traits may not always be viable for escalation.

Also note that escalating to a stat (body, mind, soul) does not clear the “previous trait” for the opposition. The only time “previous trait” will ever be “None” is at the start of a conflict, when everyone has just rolled their one initial stat.

If your action will affect only one axis, then the opposing trait is taken from that axis alone. If your action will potentially affect multiple axes, then you may take most favorable number of dice appropriate to the opposing trait – but this commits you to putting at least one of the resulting dice on each axis.

You may have noticed two types of traits missing from the table (technically, they’re not missing in one sense, as they count as “Other”). This is because special rules apply.

When you escalate to either a **protection** (◇) or an **ultra** (★) trait, they set your side of the axis to a previous trait of “Other”.

When you escalate to a **protection** (◇) trait, roll two dice, and *keep the zeroes*; they count as tens for your purposes. When you place one of these dice at the end of an axis, it removes both *itself* and any

one die of your choice of an *equal or lesser value*. Any dice from this roll don’t hang around if you don’t use them; they’re rolled and used immediately, or discarded.

When you escalate to an **ultra** (★) trait, roll *four dice* and use them as you would see fit. Doing so, however, means that you must immediately mark off the damage bubble for the ultra trait. You only get one use until you manage to heal and reactivate your second form.

### Throwing down at the Labs

We start with this as the state of things:

#### First Axis

**Rixor and the Robots “Stop Gosst”**: 8, 7, 3

vs. **Gosst “Tear It Down”**: 4

#### Second Axis

**Rixor “Avoid the Robots”**: 6

vs. **Robots “Defeat Rixor”**: (nothing)

Rixor is first to act and is in his second altered state. He escalates from his Soul to Hundred Suns Strike (●), hoping that exposing Gosst to his fiery fury will snap him out of it – or at least get him to come after Rixor instead! There’s no previous trait on Gosst’s end of the first axis yet, so Rixor rolls two dice, and gets a 0 and a 5. The 0 goes away immediately, into the collateral total (it’s now up to three), and Rixor places the 5 on his end of the axis, and notes ● as the opposing trait.

Gosst gets to act next, and he’s also in his second altered state. He laughs pitilessly in the face of the flames, and unleashes his Ancient Dragon Summoning, which is classed as a psychic ability ▲. The clouds swirl overhead, and the ghostly form of a dragon descends from the sky, bathing Rixor and the Robots a memory of terrors past. He rolls three dice since Psychic is superior to Range, getting a 0, 1,

and 3. Gosst's dice luck is certainly producing collateral damage tonight, but not much help for himself! The 0 goes away to add to collateral (now 4), and he places the 1 and 3 on his end of the one axis he's a part of. The 3 cancels out a 3 on Rixor's end of the axis, and both are removed.

It's the GM's turn, as the Robots. The Robots are very simple, having only one trait (Guns For Arms, ○) and two stats (Mind and Body; they opened with Mind). The Robots don't see their shot yet (they can't even shoot at Gosst, because they'd be facing a psychic ability), so the GM passes.

#### *First Axis*

**Rixor and the Robots "Stop Gosst": 8,7,5●**

vs. **Gosst "Tear It Down": 4,1▲**

#### *Second Axis*

**Rixor "Avoid the Robots": 6**

vs. **Robots "Defeat Rixor": (nothing)**

It's Rixor's turn again, and he decides to keep escalating. With his token sitting over on his trait, he must escalate to an unused stat next. He goes for Body, using his "Fast Feet" motif to describe how he runs around the battlefield in a blur, for a total of three dice on the escalation, but only manages a 2, 3, and 4. He puts the 2 and 3 on the "Avoid the Robots" second axis, and the 4 on the first axis, canceling out Gosst's 4, removing both from the board.

Gosst escalates as well, to his Mind stat, saying that he's keeping an eye on all of the targets, certain not to get flanked. This doesn't match a motif, so he takes two dice and rolls: 3, 7 (finally, a 7!). Again, Gosst is only in one axis, so both dice go to the first one, and the 7's eliminate each other.

The Robots: there's no change in terms of the previous traits, since this was a round of escalating to stats only, so they still don't have their optimum shot. They pass again.

#### *First Axis*

**Rixor and the Robots "Stop Gosst": 8,5●**

vs. **Gosst "Tear It Down": 1,3▲**

#### *Second Axis*

**Rixor "Avoid the Robots": 6,3,2**

vs. **Robots "Defeat Rixor": (nothing)**

Rixor sees that Gosst isn't backing down, and charges him, turning up the juice on his Aura of Flame(■). Against Gosst's psychic ability, melee gets three dice: 1, 6, and 0. Collateral goes up to 5 (ouch), and ■ will be set on any axis that Rixor drops dice on. A melee trait on the second axis would help the robots shoot him, so Rixor keeps his distance, and drops both remaining dice on the first axis. The 1's on opposite sides of the axis cancel each other.

Gosst, bathed in Rixor's aura, snarls and commands Dead Armies (▲) to surge forth and overwhelm his opposition – Rixor would go for a range talent if he could, but he swapped his one range slot in favor of an ultra attack (which he wants to sit on). This is at a disadvantage in the face of melee opposition (■), and only gets one die. Gosst is a Warmonger type, however, and armies of ghosts are definitely a part of war, so he grabs an extra once-per-scene die for a total of two: 2, 6. The 6's cancel out!

The Robots, seeing that Rixor isn't going to bring melee against them to allow for an optimal shot, go ahead and take a blast at him, in the second axis – they can't target Gosst, who's stuck with psychic as his mode. Still facing "None" on the opposing side, the Robots

escalate to their ○ for a single die: A 7! (That's the highest yet on that axis.)

#### *First Axis*

**Rixor and the Robots “Stop Gosst”:** 8, 5 ■

vs. **Gosst “Tear It Down”:** 3,2 ▲

#### *Second Axis*

**Rixor “Avoid the Robots”:** 6,3,2

vs. **Robots “Defeat Rixor”:** 7 ○

Rixor looks at the situation and decides he may need to address the robots. He has escalated twice so far, having used his soul and body, and one of his traits. He can only escalate to his mind, which he quickly describes as trying to outsmart the robots: he rolls two dice, getting a 7 and a 6. They both go into the second axis based on his action, and the 7's cancel each other.

Gosst is in it to the end, and rages, having a “Fit of Anger” – a motif on his Soul, the laststat he can escalate to. Three dice: 3, 7, 5 (he just can't seem to beat that 8...) – the 5's cancel each other, at least.

The Robots can only escalate to their body as a final move, which gives them one die. They come clanging after Rixor, trying to mob him, and roll a 5 – that'll at least cut down the pain they have coming their way.

#### *First Axis*

**Rixor and the Robots “Stop Gosst”:** 8 ■

vs. **Gosst “Tear It Down”:** 7,3,3,2 ▲

#### *Second Axis*

**Rixor “Avoid the Robots”:** 6,6,3,2

vs. **Robots “Defeat Rixor”:** 5 ○

The robots have escalated all they have, and Rixor and Gosst have both used all three of their stats, so a final escalation to one last trait

is all that can be done for this conflict for each of the Chimaera.

Rixor expects nothing further from the Robots, and is beating them, so he considers the second axis to be done. He looks at the first. He's beating Gosst, but Gosst isn't going to be hurt bad enough to stop him from continuing his rampage. It's time for Apocalypse Now – his ultra attack! Four dice: 8, 8, 4, and a zero. Ah well – collateral goes up to 6, and Rixor places all three dice into the first axis, without any cancellations. The “previous trait” type gets set to “Other” since Rixor used a ★ trait. Rixor marks off the damage bubble next to his ultra attack trait, and won't be able to use it again until he is able to heal the damage and reactivate his second state.

Gosst decides scorched earth is the best policy, and answers with his own ultra attack, Ragnarlyrock! Norse gods rain down from the heavens, laying waste to Rixor, the Robots, and everything around them – or so he hopes. Four dice roll: 9, 6, 1, and zero! Gosst marks off his ultra trait damage bubble, Collateral goes up to a *whopping* 7, and the 9, 6, and 1 go onto his end of the axis – giving him the highest die in a stunning reversal!

No one can do any more escalations at this point, and things definitely did not turn out quite as Rixor had hoped... But all of the axes of conflict are at a close, and Rixor doesn't feel like he has the charge to spare on a narrow gamble (see “Charge in Action”, below).

It's time to resolve the conflict (see “Resolving the Conflict”, where this example will be continued).

#### *First Axis*

**Rixor and the Robots “Stop Gosst”:** 8,8,8,4 ★

vs. **Gosst “Tear It Down”:** 9,7,6,3,3,2,1 ★

## charge can get you dice

If you need extra dice during the conflict, but don't want to escalate to a trait or stat to get them just yet, you can spend a point of charge to roll an additional die. You can spend multiple points of charge in this way, whenever you want – even as part of an escalation.

### Oh, If Only: Regret at the Labs

If Rixor had had the charge to spare, he might have spent a few points of it to roll a few more dice at the conclusion of the conflict, rather than accept the reversal. But he'd need to roll a 9 on those dice to retake the day, and he's just not feelin' it.

## concluding the conflict

The first thing to do when concluding a conflict is to look at each axis and see who lost – that's whichever side didn't roll highest. Whoever was in the conflict on that side gets a point of charge (maximum one per conflict, no matter how many losses).

### We aren't the champions, my friends

In the previous conflict example, Rixor and the Robots (*a.k.a.* the GM) lost the first axis of conflict, and the Robots lost the second one. Rixor gets one point of charge, and so does the GM. The GM does not get *two* points, despite losing on two axes.

Damage is then dealt to the losing side, by counting up the number of winning dice that are higher than the losing side's highest die. This damage is spread among the losers according to the winner's choice (but then the losers get to make a few choices about where it lands – see the "Damage" section below).

At the winner's choice, he may apply the damage as an addition to collateral instead, but this can be a very, very bad idea, as you'll see shortly.

### Fallout at the Labs

Rixor lost the first axis of conflict, along with the Robots. There's only one die higher on Gosst's side, however, so he only has one level of damage to apply. He snorts derisively at Rixor and applies the damage to the Robots – after all, they're part of the labs that Gosst was setting out to destroy.

The Robots lost the second axis of conflict, and were beaten by two dice. Rixor has no real choice but to apply the two dice to the Robots – with the collateral at 7, he definitely doesn't want to toss it there.

Sadly for the Robots, they can only take 3 bubbles of damage, and the concluding narration makes it clear that most of the robots end up gutted by fearsome Valkyries and spitted on the end of angry gods' spears.

Collateral damage is also taken care of as part of the conclusion, albeit in a more distributed fashion. This is covered in "Collateral Damage", below.

Once you see where the damage lands, a final bit of narration is done, with everyone involved contributing, in a fashion that's consistent with the damage dealt.

### Hey now! What about non-fighty conflicts?

So, hang on a second...

If you're running a conflict which isn't about breaking out the nasty fighting traits, there's no escalation happening, and it's all affected only by the initial dice, and maybe a few extra dice from using charge.

That means that conflicts that don't involve Chimaeric powers going all ape-shit are going to be resolved more quickly, and might have less "texture" and less "meat" to them.

But they're still going to result in the loser taking some damage (not all damage is physical;

sometimes it's due to shaken confidence and other psychological fallout) and getting a point of charge for the losing.

Do I have that straight?

*Yes. Yes, you do.*

## damage

Whenever a conflict concludes, somebody's due some damage (unless a very improbable *draw* results due to all the dice canceling each other out), and the environment isn't liable to fare much better either.

## personal damage

While the winner of a conflict axis determines who gets the damage, it's the recipient that chooses where the damage lands.

Damage is recorded by filling in the bubbles (the little ovals) next to either the stats or the traits. Stats still operate if their damage bubbles get filled, but traits are unavailable for use (*i.e.*, for escalation) if marked off.

The recipient of damage can check off trait and stat damage bubbles as he sees fit – including checking off ones on a side that isn't currently active. This can be risky, however, since that means once that state activates, some of its traits won't be available – it'll have to go dormant to clear those marks off, then activate again. As such, it's *recommended* that you take the hit to your active state's traits, or to your body, mind, or soul – but it's not mandated.

Marks on the body, mind, and soul are considered to act as temporary negative motifs (which someone else can use to get +1 die in a conflict against you).

### Possible words for the temporary motifs

Some suggestions for naming the temporary negative motifs that result from taking damage to one of the core stats:

**Body** with one mark is “Battered” while two is “Broken”

**Mind** with one mark is “Challenged” while two is “Overwhelmed”

**Soul** with one mark is “Shaken” while two is “Shattered”.

Chimaeric characters are in many ways lucky when it comes to taking damage. With such a vast number of traits, they can take a lot of punishment without dropping.

Ultimate defeat of a Chimaera is very rare, but faintly possible. You'd need to deal *eighteen levels of damage* to them before they got a chance to activate one of their altered states and heal a chunk of it. And this is certainly possible in a very nasty succession of conflicts.

## collateral damage

### This is the other part of the picture

Remember what I said about loss of control being a big part of grabbing onto the players with both hands? Collateral damage is part of how this happens. So pay close attention.

It's always the bystanders who get it in the face.

Collateral damage is what happens to everything around powerful entities when they go toe to toe. The amount of collateral damage dealt is equal to the number of zeroes that were rolled during the course of a conflict.

With big Chimaeric battles, where a lot of dice hit the table, that can be a large number of zeroes – in our earlier example, collateral reached a whopping *seven*.

As a rule of thumb, every three to four levels of collateral equates to some large amount of devastation or personal tragedy.

Collateral gets divided up as evenly among the players who participated in the conflict. If someone's going to get the short stick, it should be the GM; if there's a surplus after a reasonably fair distribution, the surplus goes to the framing player.

Each player then spends the collateral to deal damage levels to NPCs that were reasonably present near the scene but *did not* participate directly in the conflict, or to the environment and scenery itself. The environment and scenery may be conceptual as well; reputations might be damaged as easily as furniture.

Environmental damage works out about like so:

- 1 – **Chaos.** Furniture's smashed, bad press is published.
- 2 – **Big Chaos.** Nothing's left untouched, but it's all minor stuff.
- 3 – **Collapse.** Something important but not overly large is permanently damaged. A project might be shut down, or a small building might be in ruins.
- 4 – **Big Collapse.** Something important and big is permanently damaged.
- 5+ – **Devastation.** Things are bad all over, and nearly every property at hand took a mortal blow. Even recovery is a distant option. Every two steps above 4 is considered to be another Big Collapse; alternately, individual steps are considered to be a smaller Collapse.

#### **Paulson Labs, Destroyed?**

In the earlier fight, a whopping 7 collateral was generated. Three players were there: Adam (Gosst), Fred (Rixor), and the GM. Fairly, each one of them gets 2 collateral to spend, and since

Fred was the framing player, he gets the one leftover point for a total of three.

Collateral expenditure starts with Fred, who spends a point on the environment. He didn't want the Labs to take a hit, but figures that's the safest option.

Adam gets a dark smile and spends a point of collateral on giving Eve Paulson (Rixor's girlfriend) a level of damage; after all, it's reasonable she might have been visiting her father at the Labs when the fight broke out. Fred grins, but cries out, "Eve, noooo!" and the expenditures continue.

The GM spends both of her points on the environment, wryly noting, "I seem to remember someone calling Ragnarok down on the labs? Yeah. They're a wreck."

Fred sighs. "I think I'm due up for some scenes of tragedy shortly. I'm gonna spend a point on Doctor Paulson as well." The GM winces, and nods, noting this down (as she did for Eve, earlier).

Adam chuckles. "So, who gets the worse blow? It takes three damage levels to kill an unpowered and largely fragile NPC, right?"

The GM says, carefully, "More or less."

Adam's response is swift: "I spend my last point on Eve. Whatcha gonna do with your last point, Fred?"

"Ugh," Fred concludes. "I get to choose between killing or nearly killing Eve, and rendering the doctor more fully broken, or pushing the Labs into a Big Collapse, which I think would pretty much wipe out Paulson's livelihood. Hopefully the Doctor can heal then. He takes it."

As a result, the environment gets 3 levels of damage, poor Eve Paulson takes one level to her Soul – she's shaken – and another to her Body

– she’s and the doctor were buried under rubble, the GM concludes. Doctor Paulson takes two levels as well, to the Body and the Mind; he has a broken leg and certainly won’t be able to focus on any sort of scientific endeavor or organized thinking! The Paulson family barely escapes death, but their laboratories are in a shambles, with only half at best in any sort of salvageable state.

## recovery

NPCs will recover slowly – at most one dot’s worth every time it comes around to the GM’s end of the table.

Player Chimaera recover from damage by cycling through their altered states. Whenever one of their altered states activates, the other is sent into dormancy. All damage marks on the side of the sheet that goes into dormancy are cleared out when this happens (essentially, that side of the character is going into “hibernation”, thus healing itself).

## adding to the setting

In addition to what’s been discussed so far, there’s another way for a player to gain charge: by adding to the setting during play. Think of this as exactly like the relationship establishment phase of character creation, only with it going on all the time.

A player who adds another face to the game’s relationship web (remember, any addition has to tie back, directly or indirectly, to someone-to-blame), defining a way his character is positively connected to that face, gets a point of charge.

Similarly, a player who defines a negative relationship to an existing, “available” (remember, this means “positively connected to another PC”) face in the relationship web, also gets a point of charge.

Only one of these additions can be done on a given player’s turn around the table.

### This is another trick, right?

You bet.

Players will want charge, and this is a really easy way to get it. But the only way to do it is by setting up conflicts between the player characters or by putting someone out there into the world that one of the player characters cares about. It’s nasty business and perhaps more plainly shown than to your taste, but boy, it works.

## charge

As discussed in various places above, **charge** (represented by a stack of poker chips for each player) is a currency that drives parts of the game’s rules. Here, we’ll gather together what’s been said in those various places for your reference.

It’s important to note that the GM gains charge as well, as described below. But since the GM is not playing a Chimaera, she uses this charge in order to prime and activate the players’ Chimaera, using the rules already discussed.

## gaining charge

You gain a point of charge when:

- You are the framing player for a character development scene.
- An opposing player narrates in a negative motif from one of your stats.
- You lose a conflict scene.
- You act in a way consistent with your character type or one of your body, mind, or soul motifs (one point of charge per scene, this way).
- You add a new positive relationship.

- You define a new negative relationship with an existing valid candidate.

## losing charge

You spend one point of charge to:

- You bring an altered state from dormant to primed.
- You bring an altered state from primed to active.
- You add another die while resolving a conflict.

In addition, whenever an altered state becomes active, the player *loses all of his charge* (in exchange, the other state which is going dormant causes all of the damage on that side of the sheet to clear out, as discussed previously).

## When is it done?

If your natural story-sense isn't telling you when the game is done, think about it like this:

- Has at least one Chimaera lost everything that he's cherished, or chosen death rather than see that happen?
- Has the Murdered World gasped its final breath?
- Has the Murdered World been resurrected by the dying efforts of one of her Chimaera?

If you can't answer at least one of these with a "yes", keep playing, and play harder.

## thoughts about the gm

The GM has a lot of her responsibilities parceled out to the other players, but still has plenty of teeth and tools.

As a GM, you'll get charge like any other player, and should use this mercilessly to throw the players into their second altered states in.

Relentlessly spend the collateral you do get to lend tragic side-effects to the efforts of the Chimaera.

When someone who's to blame isn't getting targeted enough, have him do something awful; once they start coming for him, have him do something noble.

Muddle the issues. Ensure conflicts that divide the players against themselves. Play with the established relationships like a cruel god.

You'll also get to stat up the NPCs and play them (more on this below). If the players are cooperating too much, create some mega threats, some new horrors birthed in the laboratories of the well-meaning, and unleash them on the landscape. If the players won't fight each other, that doesn't mean that the cities won't get stomped anyway!

And remember: it always comes around to you to take a turn framing a scene. Place the players right into a conflict – get some collateral kicked up and a some charge building all around. Offer contrast or, at minimum, and increased sense of doom every time it gets to be your turn, and the Murdered World will sing a lovely dirge for you.

As Judd Karlman's buddy Jim DelRosso says, "Kick the setting in the teeth."

## putting attributes on the murdered world

Everything that might be involved in a conflict should have some sort of combination of stats and traits. You should think in terms of how many escalations you want something to be able to do, and how much damage you expect it to be able to take (their durability).

**Normal people** are usually just Body, Mind, and Soul, with one damage bubble per stat, a couple motifs, and no traits.

**Mooks** like automated security systems, robots, goons with guns, and so forth, might have one to

two stats and a trait or two. Their stats will only have one bubble apiece. They're represented as a single "character".

**Big kahunas** like a small squad of peace-keeping battletanks, or a lab creation run amok, so a single "character sheet" for them will have two or three stats and one or two traits, one of which might be mega. At least one of the stats will have more than one damage bubble.

**Mega threats** have all three stats and three or more traits, several of which might be mega, making them competitive with other Chimaera.

Refer to this table for a quick baseline:

Stats	Traits	Esc.	Dur.	Category
3	0	0	3	Normal Person w/ a "Face"
1	1	1	2	Mook
1	2	1	3	Mook
2	1	2	3	Mook
2	2	3	4	Tough Mook, Small Kahuna
3	1	3	4	Big Kahuna
3	2	4	5	Big Kahuna
3	3+	5	6+	Mega Threat

NPCs healing isn't a big point; they don't need to be persistent like player characters are, so none of them get the foldy-flap healing thing.

Keep in mind that while you'll want to use them sparingly, the characters may enter into conflicts in a "man vs. the environment" sort of way. You can stat certain aspects of the environment just like you would characters, in such a case. Don't get too stuck on the idea of the word "character"; another equally applicable word would be "difficulty".

## final thanks

Adam Dray designed a hell of a sheet full of fiddly bits that really sang. Those webs between the stats and the traits really burned me for a while until I realized that they were paths for escalation, and the fold-over flap deal is absolutely choice; without those flaps, I wouldn't have hit on the idea of the Chimaera in the first place. They suggested, I dunno, weird parts-of-other-things that were also parts-of-me, and the mythological creature practically jumped off the sheet at me soon as I realized that.

Rob Donoghue also had one of those conversations with me while I was working on the game. You know those conversations. The little ones where he says something circumspect or casual, and it pierces you through the brain like a lance of pure light. He did that to me twice with this game. The first was hitting on the idea that the central question, the one to build all of the NPCs and relationships off of, based on what I'd told him of my concept of the game, was "Who Is To Blame?" Damn if he wasn't right. The second was the notion that I didn't need ratings for things I simply needed *rock, paper, scissors*. I was certainly heading in that direction when he intoned these sacred syllables of wisdom, but I wouldn't have gotten there as quickly as I did without him, once again, seeing where I was headed before I'd finished mapping it out.

And last, but not least, is Kevin Allen Jr. some kind of proto-savant on a mission to reinvent all of gaming, or merely a workaday genius in a clever hat?

You can guess what my answer is.