

A Duet of Steel

**A roleplaying game
of long term rivalries
for two players.**

Adrian Thoen.

Throughout your life, throughout generations of your family, throughout the various fronts of your war, you have had one great rival. Again and again you clash with them, one walking away the victor of the battle, but bearing the scars of your war.

A Duet Of Steel is a game about Rivals who engage each other in charged exchanges over an extended period of time.

Two philosophers who trade barbs in public arguments and diatribes over decades.

Neighboring nations' spend their youths in pitched battles for shifting fronts and alliances with vassal states on the stage of a protracted war.

Two rival paramours peacocking for the affections of the city's most eligible heir over a hot, thirsty summer.

Two criminal dynasties trapped in a bloody cycle of vengeance in their struggle for domination.

A pair of immortals diametrically opposed, going centuries without contact before violent confrontations.

Whatever the setting and scope, the focus of A Duet Of Steel is the two Duelists, their climatic duels, and the aftermath of these confrontations. The Duet Of Steel is a dance of antagonism, with an ebb and flow of conflict and recovery. But it is a Duet, with the two parties playing off each other. It takes two to tango.

Getting ready To Play

To play, you need two players, some pencils & erasers, The Duelists sheets and the Conflicts sheet, and a deck of playing cards.

Establishing Your Setting

As a group, discuss the setting and scale you want to play on. This is your chance to create a broad sketch of your Duelists and the stage of place and time that their conflicts are played across. When describing your Duelists and the setting for their conflict, use your favourite media as inspiration for your ideas.

Who Are The Duelists?

Who are your Duelists? Individual people? Gangs? Societies? Armies? Entire nations?

Your Duelists are who you follow over the course of the game. This can do a lot to establish the scale of the conflicts and stakes. The smaller the scale, the more intimate your relationships with the Duelists.

Where Do We See Them?

Your Rivalry plays out on a stage. This stage may be common ground - a university campus, the streets and public places of their city, various evocative destinations around the world, a shifting battlefield across nations' borders. The scale of your Stage is the middle ground between the scale of your Duelists & the scale of your Timeline.

What Is The Conflict's Timescale?

Your Duels don't happen all at once. There is the distance of time between your Duelists' conflicts. Distance to lick your wounds, reflect on the fallout, and prepare for the next struggle. While much of this downtime is abstracted out, setting a time scale helps establish the closeness to the Duelists, the kinds of moments that matter to them. Do we watch them play their drama over a single momentous season? A handful of formative years? A lifetime? Generations? Centuries? Use the intimacy with the Duelists and their stage to guide you to your time frame.

Playsets

While Players are free to create their Conflict setting & Duelists all by themselves, Playsets may be used to start off with already established details & more specifically themed elements of the game.

The Duelist Sheets & Conflict Sheet.

Now that you have the big picture stuff broadly sketched, it's time to nail down some specifics for your Duelists and their extended Conflict. Each Player takes a Duelist sheet and the group shares the Conflict sheet.

The Duelist Sheets.

The Duelist sheet is where you build and track the Duelist you play. Take note of the 8 Reprisals they can impose on their opponent if they lose a Duel. You start with all of your reprisals open & a Hand limit of 5. Choose 1 Special to unlock now.

Describe your Duelist by giving them a Name, between 2 and 5 Motivations & Flaws each, and a Description.

Motivations & Flaws

Motivations & Flaws may be simple, broad 1 or 2 word concepts, or something specific. Motivations may be "Family" or "Marry the duchess of Monterey". Flaws may be "Prideful" or "Can never let an insult to my strength pass". Motivations & Flaws are leveraged by Specials to perform certain actions during play, but are also used to flavour the descriptions of your Duelists behaviour or set the specifics of Stakes.

Description

The Description is how others see your Duelist. Gender, their appearance, their behaviour, accent, abilities they're renowned for, actions or status they're renowned for.

Reprisals

Reprisals are the mechanical conditions you inflict on your rival when you lose a duel.

Specials

Specials are special abilities you use to change the rules under special fictional & mechanical circumstances. You start with 1 Special unlocked. When you use a Special, tick the Used box. You can't use it again until you recover the Special in a Passing Time Scene.

The Conflict Sheet.

The Conflict sheet tracks the tale of your Duelists many Duels over time, and the quiet moments of recovery and reflection between them.

Setting

The overall premise for the Conflict's setting & what's at stake on the largest scale. What your Duelists are ultimately fighting for.

Duelists

Write the two Duelists names & a short description of them.

Victory & Reconciliation

The victory condition for the Conflict. Once you have completed the last Duel, the track with the most checks is the outcome for the Conflict.

Victory

The Duelist is the Victor, they get what they want out of the Conflict, their Rival left only with defeat & failure.

Reconciliation

The Duelists come to some kind of standoff, status quo, or reconciliation. You and your Partner get to say whether this is a happy ending or mutual destruction. Were they able to make amends or go down together?

Conflict Timeline

The Conflict Timeline shows 6 Duels with a Stake & Spoils each, & 7 Passing Time scenes in between the Duels.

Duels

A Duel is made from a Stake determined by the value of the duel card, & a Spoil determined by the suit of the card. In the Duel the Duelists vie for fictional & mechanical rewards.

Stakes

The Stakes are 13 prompts for creating the fictional tension for a Duel. Use the description along with the Duelists Motivations, Flaws, & Descriptions along with the previous Duels, events, & setting you've already established.

Spoils

Spoils are the mechanical awards for winning a Duel. Moving towards Victory or Reconciliation or gaining a new Special for your Duelist.

Passing Time

Passing Time scenes happen between Duels. They represent the periods of recovery or preparation, vignettes of the Duelists when they aren't facing each other. During each Passing Time scene you may do one of the following: Recover Reprisals, Recover 1 Special, Discard & Draw cards, Force your Rival to Discard up to 2 Cards.

Playing.

Now that you have the stage of your Conflict and your Duelists defined, it's time to start playing. Play starts with your first Duel, then follows the timeline on the conflict sheet. Use details you have established on the Conflict sheet & Duelist sheets to set the scene for your first Duel, then it is time to engage your opponent!

Duels.

Your goal is to make your opponent forfeit the Duel, or make them pay a high price for their victory. Players draw up to their maximum Hand size. At the start of the game, this is 5 cards. Keep your hands secret! Dueling is about bluffing and strategy. Once each Player has their Hand, draw a card to determine the Stakes & Spoils for the Duel.

Stakes

Stakes are the Fictional gains and losses of the Duel, and are defined by the Value of the Scene Card.

- A: A petty matter of pride or position.
- 2: The skills or knowledge of a resourceful ally.
- 3: A ransom or valuable trinket.
- 4: A moral or rhetorical victory.
- 5: Status or renown amongst peers.
- 6: An injury or compromise of one's well-being.
- 7: The affections or favour of someone influential.
- 8: Claim to valuable territory or turf.
- 9: VIP status at a social event or diplomatic negotiation.
- 10: A lingering wound or insult.
- J: A major setback or defeat in the overall Conflict.
- Q: A major setback or defeat in the overall Conflict.
- K: A major setback or defeat in the overall Conflict.

Spoils

Spoils are the mechanical gains and losses of the Duel, and are defined by the Suit of the Scene Card.

- H: A point to Reconciliation.
- D: A point to victory, or a point to reconciliation.
- S: A point to victory.
- C: A new Special for your Duelist.

Players each flip a card from the deck, the player with the highest card chooses who Attacks first. If it's a tie draw again until one player has a higher card.

Players take turns to Attack each other.

The Attacker plays a card face down, and describes their attack – what they say, how they strike, what they are aiming for.

The Defender then chooses 1 of the following:

- Block: The Defender plays a card from their hand face down and describes how they attempt to block, evade, or nullify the attack.
 - Both players flip their cards, the highest value wins. Defender wins ties. Aces count as 1, unless modified by a Special.
 - If the Attacker wins, they eliminate a Reprisal from the defender's sheet that matches the Suit of the Attackers card.
 - If the Defender wins, their Reprisal is not eliminated.
- Endure: The Defender does not play a card, but instead describes how they weather the storm of the attack and accepts to have one of their Reprisals eliminated.
 - The Attacker flips their card, and one of the Defender's Reprisals of the matching suit is eliminated.

- Concede: The defender yields to the attacker, forfeiting the Duel. The Attacker wins the Stakes & Spoils, but may suffer a Reprisal from the defender.
 - The Attacker resolves the Stakes & Spoils.
 - The Defender holds out their remaining Hand, and the attacker randomly selects 1 card.
 - If the selected card matches one of the defender's Reprisals that have not been Eliminated, the Attacker suffers that penalty.
 - All played cards are discarded, and play resumes until another conflict arises
- If the Duel is not over, the played cards are discarded and the Defender becomes the Attacker & the process starts again.

Reprisals reduce the effectiveness of a Duelist temporarily or permanently, reducing their hand size or meaning they never take the first turn as Attacker, or permanently eliminate a Reprisal.

Reprisals

Duelist Sheets have eight Reprisals, conditions the loser of a Duel may inflict on the Victor

Specials.

Duelist Sheets have special abilities players may use to give themselves an Advantage in a Duel based on the cards they play. Each Special is spent when used, and may be recovered during the Passing Time phase. New Specials may be unlocked as Spoils of a Victory.

Vicious Reversal

When you exploit one of your rival's Flaws & use an Ace to Block an Attack, you successfully Block, and make an unblockable attack on your opponent's Reprisal that matches the suit of your Ace.

Relentless Attack

When you are inspired by one of your Motivations & win an Attack with a Face card, you may eliminate up to 2 Reprisals in that card's Suit.

Spiteful Rebuke

When you forfeit a Duel & call out your Rival for underhanded actions in the Duel, , choose up to 2 available reprisals from that Suit your partner draws from your Hand instead of 1.

All According to Plan

When you win a Duel and explain how you set up a plan to turn your rival's Motivations against them, play a Face card from your hand to replace the suit of the Duel's Spoils.

Always Prepared

Start the next Duel with 1 extra card. After drawing, you may discard up to 3 cards and draw 3 replacements.

Feint

When you have played a non-face card and are losing this turn, say how you lured your Rival into overextending themselves & play another non-Face card of the same Suit & add the value of your 2 cards together.

Passing Time.

When your Duelists aren't trying to literally or figuratively destroy each other, they have lives to lead. At least, that's what they like to tell themselves. Passing time is where we see more peaceful moments for the Duelists, recovering from their hurts, gathering their resources, and positioning themselves for the next inevitable duel.

Recovering Reprisals

Show a vignette of your Duelist licking their literal or metaphorical wounds & recover any Reprisals that have not been permanently eliminated.

Recovering Specials.

Show a vignette of your Duelist gathering their resources & recover 1 Spent Special.

Draw & Discard Cards.

Show your Duelist researching or practicing their strategies, and discard as many cards as you like, & draw the same amount of cards.

Sabotage your Opponent.

Show how your Duelist saps their rival's resources & make them Discard up to 2 of their Cards.

Common Terms.

These are the common terms used throughout the game

Conflict

The timeline & Event Map tracking the Stakes, Duelists, Major Players, Duels, Spoils, & Passing Time for a game of A Duet of Steel.

Duel

An event where the two Duelists face each other in a struggle for supremacy & Spoils.

Passing Time

Time between Duels where the duelists have opportunities to lick their wounds and prepare for the next duel.

Player

One of the people playing the game.

Duelist

The character, force, or organization a Player is playing as.

You

It's you! The person a rule is addressed to, the person reading this.

Your Duelist

The character, force, or organization you are playing as.

Your Partner

The person that you're playing A Duet of Steel with. Your Duelists are locked in a feud, but you are working together to create their story.

Your Duelist

The character, force, or organization your Partner is playing as.

Attacker

The Duelist/Player who is making an Attack in a Duel.

Defender

The Duelist/Player who is being Attacked.

Victor

The winning Duelist of a Duel.

Stakes

The fictional gains and losses of a Conflict or Duel.

Spoils

The mechanical gains from winning a Duel, often a new Special.

Reprisals

The mechanical & fictional cost a Victor pays for winning the Stakes & Spoils of a Duel. Each Duelist play sheet has a list of Reprisals organised by the 4 suits in a deck of playing cards.

Specials

Specials are abilities that let you break the basic rules in some way - usually tied to a card's value or suit. Specials discharge when you use them, and may be recharged if you meet the requirements when you have a Passing time Scene.