

Runt Roleplaying System Guidebook



Version 1.02

A system by Devon Wiersma

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If you do make something with Runt please give me a shout! I'd love to see what you create :)

Credits

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Introduction

Runt is an ultra-light tabletop system designed to be used in any setting, alongside any plot or theme. From classic fantasy, science fiction, supernatural, apocalyptic, slice of life, comedy, tragedy - Runt should be able to handle it all, no matter what story you want to tell.

Runt is designed to be played without additional tools, accessories or materials - this means no pens, no paper, no cards and no dice required in the core game. Just one player who runs the game, (referred to as the “Host”) and any number of additional players who will play through the events the Host describes.

The Runt system is ideal for one-shots or a small number of sessions. That isn't to say longer campaigns can't or shouldn't be played with the Runt system, it is simply recommended that players take notes with pen and paper or on electronic devices to recall information about previous sessions to prevent important details from being forgotten.

Cut And Break

Runt is a game that works best when everyone at the table trusts one another; communicate openly and honestly with every player at the table as you play the game. To this end, Runt uses a system called “Cut and Break” which players may use to signal when they feel the content of the game is moving in a direction that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Cut: A player may say “Cut” at any time during gameplay to signal that the roleplay has ventured into territory a player does not feel comfortable with. At this point, all players must restart the current scene in a new and safer direction.

Break: A player may say “Break” at any time during gameplay to signal the roleplay is venturing into territory they are uncomfortable with. Upon declaring break, all players must coordinate to steer the roleplay into a new and safer direction.

No player is required to give their reasoning for calling a Cut or a Break. It is highly recommended for players to speak openly and honestly about what type of content which they are not comfortable exploring in the roleplay before the game begins.

Additionally, players must read through the [TTRPG Safety Toolkit](#) to find any additional safety methods they would like to incorporate into their game of Runt.

Character Creation

In the Runt system, players create characters to interact with a setting or world collaboratively. A player can choose to play any character they wish and they can be as complex or simple as the player desires, so long as the character can fit in and interact within the game's world. Players should discuss the elements which make up their character openly with the rest of the group: elements such as where they came from, their backstory, and their personality, and any other detail which will be relevant for the course of exploring the world the Host has created. The more detail you put into your character the more other players will be able to build their characters to create interesting dynamics between them

Ideally, a character should have both negative and positive character traits as well as a motivator - something which drives them to pursue a goal. The Host should assist in helping players ideate for their characters to assist in integrating them into the world and narrative, but ultimately it's up to the players to decide what they want their character will be. The Host should take every effort to support their goals of play.

If a player is struggling to create a character other players should help them by asking questions about their character to flesh out their concept, or help brainstorm together to assist them. A struggling player may wish to refer to the following methods to help them with the process:

Method A: The Prompt

If players are struggling to create a character, they may choose to create one based on the following prompt instead:

“My name is [Character Name]. I am a [adjective] [role] who wants [motivator].”

In this prompt, a “role” can be anything from an occupation to how they interact with the world around them (i.e. “baseball player”, “bastard”, “mountain climber” and “empath” are all appropriate roles).

Method B: Borrow A Trope

A player can choose to take an archetype or trope from popular media and use it for their character. However, they are encouraged to apply ‘twists’ to these characters in order to keep them unique to the game and to avoid simply playing as a character from another medium entirely.

The Host decides the setting is a science fiction space adventure. Clara decides her character is Andy, the Psychokinetic Soldier, who is similar to a cool soldier character in her favourite anime. She grew up on a farm and served in the military as a sergeant. She has experience with guns and hand-to-hand combat, but has poor people skills. She has vowed revenge against the androids that killed her family.

Tom creates his character named Kyra, with the following prompt:

“My name is Kyra Mehta. I am an intelligent Galactic Academy Student who wants a best friend.”

Equipment

A player's character should be assumed to have whatever equipment and gear suits their profession or backstory, unless the story prohibits this. All players must state what they believe their character should possess or special items they may own, and are permitted to those items so long as all other players can agree upon it. Each character must have the means to carry their belongings.

Clara proposes that Andy the Psychokinetic Soldier has guns she fights with, a bulletproof suit, and a first aid kit for patching up wounds. She also owns a spaceship which she uses to explore the galaxy.

Tom decides Kyra might have school textbooks, a school uniform, a pencil case full of school supplies as well as a backpack.

Unique Ability

A Unique Ability is something a character can do which an average person in the setting cannot. Magic powers, firearm competency, speaking multiple languages, celestial navigation, expert knowledge of specific subjects, and medical proficiency are some examples of what might be considered Unique Abilities. If a character can do something which most people can't, it's probably a Unique Ability.

All players should discuss collaboratively the limits and nature of a character's Unique Ability. Additionally, the strength or potency of a character's Unique Ability should (in most cases) be informed by the character's backstory as well as their experience practicing that Unique Ability.

Unique Abilities may grow stronger the more a character practices with them and has more experiences in the campaign, to the discretion of the Host.

Clara decides that Andy has powers which she can use to push things around telepathically, light things on fire and to make herself fly. All the players agree that Andy shouldn't be able to lift anything heavier than a person with her mind, and that she can only fly for a few seconds before getting tired.

Tom's character Kyra the Student is a genius at all sorts of math. Kyra could hack a computer, calculate a trajectory for objects thrown, or plan the construction of a dog house with this ability, among many other applications. Later in the campaign, Kyra finds a pistol and gradually learns to use firearms.



Challenges

Whenever a character attempts an action that the Host determines to be difficult to perform based on a character's experiences or difficult to perform under the circumstances, then it is considered a "Challenge".

Climbing a rope, baking a delicious pie, punching a person in a fight, dodging a fist in a fight, defusing a bomb, breaking into a vault, or casting a spell could all be considered a challenge for a character.

When determining if something is a Challenge, context and a character's experience in the action are key; what is considered a Challenge for a character depends largely on the skills of the character attempting to perform the action and the context of the situation. A master thief might have no trouble picking a lock, but it would likely constitute a Challenge for a character with no lockpicking experience. Conversely, picking a lock might be a Challenge for the master thief if they don't have a lockpick with them, or if they're being attacked by a swarm of bees while doing so. A Challenge is a very common-sense based consideration - if it seems like it would be challenging for a character, then it's probably a Challenge!

A Challenge can be also be longer process, such as a fight, car chase, or white-water rafting tour, where multiple consecutive Challenges may occur in sequence to determine the final outcome. An NPC encountering a Challenge need not treat it as a Challenge - they can simply treat the action resolving in whatever means seems natural to the Host. However, an NPC taking an action against a player character (i.e. throwing a punch) can be treated as a Challenge which the player character should overcome with an action (i.e. dodging the punch) and should be treated via Challenge resolution.

If a player feels a situation shouldn't be considered a challenge for their character, or if the Host thinks a certain situation should be considered a Challenge, they are encouraged to discuss it openly to agree upon the best course of resolution.

When the Host declares a character has encountered a Challenge, Challenge resolution occurs according to the steps listed on the following page.

Clara's character Andy the Psychokinetic Soldier and Tom's character Kyra are sneaking into a security station on the planet VI-Six.

Clara and Tom agree they will enter through the unlocked back entrance to sneak their way inside. On the way through the back alley, the Host tells them they notice a single guard patrolling the alleyway. The Host informs them that sneaking past him will be a challenge.

Step	Action	Example
1) Player: Declare an Action Against the Challenge	The player declares what action(s) they wish to attempt to overcome the challenge.	<p>Andy the Psychokinetic Soldier is trying to sneak past a guard. The Host determines that doing so will be difficult for her and decides it constitutes a Challenge.</p> <p>Clara declares that Andy will try to do a somersault behind the guard's back.</p>
2) Host: Determine Difficulty	<p>The Host thinks of any number in their head on a scale of 1-10.</p> <p>10 and 1 are considered adjacent numbers for challenge resolution.</p>	<p>The Host secretly determines that Clara must guess the number 10 to succeed.</p> <p>The Host tells Clara they have selected a number.</p>
3) Player: Pick A Number Between 1 and 10	The player chooses a number between 1-10.	Clara tells the Host that she chooses the number 1.
4) Host: Resolve the Character's Action	<p>The Host describes how the action plays out based on how close the player's guess is to the number they chose. The closer the player is to guessing the number correctly, the more successful their action can be interpreted to be.</p> <p>It is up to the Host's discretion how difficult a Challenge's range may be, and thus how close the player must guess to succeed. The Host should determine the success range based off their understanding of the character's abilities and the context of the situation. Challenges which are easy might have a wide success range (i.e. 3 integers higher or lower than the Host's number), while more difficult challenges might have a narrow success range (i.e. an exact guess only).</p>	<p>Clara has guessed a 1 compared to the Host's 10. The Host knows that Clara had described Andy as being good at sneaking; however, because Andy is also trying to do a somersault while sneaking, the action will be harder to complete.</p> <p>The Host decides that since the number Clara guessed was only one number away from theirs, the action was mostly successful.</p> <p>The Host tells Clara that the number she needed to guess was 10. The Host describes Andy as having barely managed to stick the landing of the somersault, but the guard doesn't notice her presence.</p>

5) Repeat For All Players

Each member of the party may take one action towards the completion of the challenge if they choose to participate in it. To do so, repeating the process from step 1.

Once each player has completed one action, proceed to Step 6.

Challenge resolution continues for Tom's characters, Kyra. She hides in the corner and just hopes the guard will leave.

The Host thinks of the number 6 and Tom guesses the number 1. The Host describes Kyra as having accidentally knocked an object over which alerted the guard.

6) Host: Describes the World's Response

The Host describes the action of any relevant NPCs or events that occur in response to the challenge. If the challenge hasn't been resolved, or a new challenge has occurred by this Step, return to Step 1 and repeat the process from all players until the challenge is resolved.

The Host describes the guard turning around and noticing Kyra. Raising his baton, he approaches her.

Since the next challenge will be stopping the guard, The Host returns to Step 1 and asks Clara what her next move will be, and the new Challenge begins.



How To Host

Every game of Runt is run by one player, known as “the Host”. The Host is functionally similar to a Game Master in other tabletop roleplaying games; their role is to facilitate play between players and help drive the story forward. The Host is responsible for establishing the game setting, running the game, as well as managing the various scenarios players will encounter throughout their adventure.

The Host’s objective is not to try and ‘defeat’ the players or hold power over them, or ensure the adventure carry out exactly as the Host has planned; their goal should be to make an experience fun for everyone at the table. It is highly recommended for a prospective Host to find their own style of hosting and leverage various storytelling and Game Master techniques and tools from other games as appropriate to help flesh out their story and setting for the players.

Hosting a game of Runt relies on many skills transferable from other tabletop roleplaying games (planning story beats, encounter design, thinking on the fly, etc). As such, there is an expectation that the person Hosting a game of Runt be familiar with some of the processes involved in planning and running other tabletop roleplaying games. Many of the strategies and responsibilities required for Hosting a game of Runt are identical to being a Game Master in any other tabletop roleplaying game; therefore the strategies for doing so are already extensively covered in other media and will not be covered within this guide.

Creating Your Game

A game played in Runt can be virtually any genre the Host chooses to host: mystery, supernatural, fantasy, science fiction, and anything beyond that. Since the possibility space for a game in the Runt system is so large, there can be no right or wrong way to prepare your game, so the following approach is merely a suggestion.

A good starting point for creating your game could simply be the genre and tone of the story. Is it a dark horror game where players search an abandoned mansion for a missing friend? A science fiction action tale where players deliver illegal goods across a war-torn galaxy? A comedic romp as players try to find dates for tomorrow’s prom?

Establishing your tone and what the group’s goal could be are a good way to start planning your game as well as establishing the basis of what sort of things your players may encounter on their journey.

From here, the Host may get more granular with their planning and start fleshing out the story beats the players may encounter along the way. Maybe the travelers discover an ancient artifact which helps them toward their goal? Or they may meet a group of assassins who are hired to kill them? Or perhaps they simply find a hotel where they can rest their eyes until the morning comes? From here it’s a matter of introducing your players to these beats and filling in the gaps in between them all.

You may want to consider your ending as well and discuss it with your players. Will the game be over when all the player characters have died? Will it end when someone achieves their ultimate goal? Will it keep going as long as everyone is having fun?

Remember to stay flexible with your plans as players will rarely do as you expect and adapting to their direction is often the best way at keeping the game interesting for everyone!

Running A Game

The Host is responsible for acting as a mediator for the players in the game. This includes establishing the setting the players are exploring, communicating the mood and themes of your game, and facilitating Challenge resolution between players.

However, there are certain guidelines which a Host is advised to follow in order to ensure all players have a fun experience playing a game of Runt:

1) Keep The Mood Open

Wherever possible, try and encourage player participation and open conversation between players. Your job is not to be a rule book, but rather to be a mediator for the player's experience and to guide them along a fun and interesting path as a group. Stay approachable to all players and treat everyone equally, and ensure that every player has something to engage with.

2) Know The Group's Comfort Range

Some players may be new to Runt, other players may be new to tabletop games or even roleplaying in general. Know each player's capabilities and try to find the common ground among everyone.

3) Consult The Players Often

Not sure how competent a player's character is at a certain task? Not sure about a detail of a player character's backstory? Not sure how a player's character is intending to perform a certain action? Ask the player directly! This will help them flesh out everyone's understanding of the player's character, as well as help inform other players as to how to play alongside them and contribute to fleshing out the world.

4) Let The Players Call The Shots

Whenever possible, defer to the player on their description of events. If they successfully attack someone? Ask them what the result of the attack is. Do they fail to use an ancient relic? Ask them how it backfires. Allow them to take ownership of their interesting moments to help them tell their own stories where possible.