

A VESSEL GAME BY SAMUEL E H YEAGER

# WAR RIG

A role-playing game of survival, desperation, and cooperation in a world that wants you dead.

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# CHAPTER 1: GETTING IT IN GEAR

## THE ENGINE ITSELF

The world has ended, but life has not. The planet has died, but humanity clings to life through grit, hope, and brutality. The last stands of civilization persist in small communities, scattered across the wastes. They get by with scavenging what they can, and stealing from those who can get more. You and yours stay moving, though. You ride upon a beast of steel, fire, and fury, your WAR RIG. Many wheels, many hands upon it, and many miles to go before the next rest.

In WAR RIG, you will play in phases. In some phases, challenging circumstances will be decided by negotiation and the use of resources. In others, challenges will be faced with dice. This is where the VESSEL engine lives. In these high stakes moments of life and death, the engine turns and rumbles to life, and the GM marks the beginning of an encounter. When you, as a player, take action to overcome an obstacle, you will call upon the power of one of your stats, typically the one most fitting for the action you take. You will roll one six-sided die, and if the result is above or equal to 4, it counts as a success. Otherwise, it is a failure. To succeed in an encounter, fight, or challenge, each player will need a specific number of successes (called the threshold.) This number is kept secret by the GM until someone reaches that threshold. Whatever the result of your die roll, you mark down that you have spent 1 die of the stat you called upon. When you use as many dice as you have points in that stat, you cannot call upon that stat for the remainder of the encounter. Should you expend all your options without meeting the threshold, you will be at the mercy of your friends, or the enemy. Should you meet the threshold with dice to spare, you can use those dice to help your friends, or help yourself, by continuing to roll.

If you are under, you can ask your crew, who also rolled their own dice, for help. If you are over, you can give it. When you have more success than you need, you can give as many of those spares as you wish to any who need them to reach the threshold. However, you can also choose to hoard those points, clinging to hope that your frugality will pay off later. More detail is given later, but this is the nature of most of the game. Roll dice to face danger, and decide to put yourself or your crew first.

Keep in mind: the failure/success of the dice may be binary, but the challenge is not. If you fail by a little, perhaps you can make it through with your skin. If you fail by a lot, you're in for pain, or worse. Helping one another is good, but the threshold doesn't always mean life or death.



## CHAPTER 2: THE WORLD GRINDS YOU DOWN

### WHAT'S YOUR STORY, STRANGER?

Now that you understand the core of the game, you can prepare to set off on your adventure. The first thing you need to play WAR RIG is a group of friends, at least three people in total, but at most five. All but one player will then create a character, whom they will play in the game. The one left will be the Game Master, who is in control of the world around the crew, and keeps track of the supporting cast of characters, enemies, and all else that the crew interacts with.

Gather up enough six-sided die (or d6) to accommodate every player (eight per person should be enough.)

The next step is to create your characters. Firstly, you need to know your character's strengths and weaknesses, or their Stats. There are four core statistics to know:

Strength: How hard you hit, how much you lift, how far you leap.

Speed: Your swiftness on foot, reflexes, and agility.

Grit: Your fortitude, your vitality, and the pain you can take before falling to the dirt.

Brains: Your cleverness, skill with words, understanding of complex concepts.

To decide the numbers behind these powers, roll six d6, rerolling any results of 1, and then cut out both the highest and the lowest numbers. This will leave you with four results, which you then place in each Stat as you see fit.

In addition to the four core Stats, there are a handful of other numbers for players to keep track of:

**Wounds:** When you take enough wounds to be equal or greater than twice your Endurance score, your character falls dead. One wound is recovered every time the crew rests safely for a night, perhaps more if drugs or a sawbones are available.

**SCRAP:** Every character starts with a Scrap score of 0. This represents the various goods and supplies you can scavenge from the wasteland. These points increase when high-quality goods are found. When you face a challenge, you can spend one point of Scrap to increase the effectiveness of your dice, to exploit your resources and make life easier. Instead of successes only being 4-6, results of 3-6 are all successes. Alternatively, when you have a negative Scrap score, things get harder, and only results of 5-6 count as successes when facing challenges. Should you ever reach -3 Scrap, you fall to the dirt, never to rise again.

**HOPE:** When you roll and have more success than you need to surpass a challenge, you can choose to hoard your victories to yourself and gain Hope. These points of Hope then give you a choice: in any challenge between when they are earned and your next rest, you can choose to give one success to a friend in need, as if you had rolled that extra success for that challenge. Keep in mind, however, that Hope affects your scavenging chances.

After deciding your scores, you choose your character's nickname. This decides a little of your character's personality, their role in the crew, and gives a bonus to two of their Stats.

Once your nickname is chosen, think about the questions associated. Each of you lost something significant when the world died. Consider how it affects you now. Additionally, should you find a way to justifiably tie in the answer of any of those background questions to a challenge, your GM may reward you! Anything from a reduced difficulty to a guaranteed pass with leftover successes could be your reward, so make it count. Once you resolve that question, make a check next to it and come up with a new one before the next session.

Choose your nickname from the list below:

MADEYE: Crazy and bloody, you are known for taking risks and heads in equal measure.

+1 Strength, +1 Speed

Answer these questions to gain insight into your character:

You had a mind, once. How'd you lose it?

What is the name of the devil on your back?

TREADFOOT: Unstoppable and immovable, you stand between your friends and the end.

+1 Strength, +1 Grit

You've got a limp. How'd it happen?

Something or someone on the rig is precious to you. What is it?

BLACKFINGER: Whipsmart and sturdy, you know how to keep your rig running.

+1 Strength, +1 Brains

Who taught you this art?

You lost one hand. How do you get by?

BOSS: Bold and driven, you're the face of this crew, for better or worse.

+1 Speed, +1 Brains

There's something out there you're searching for. What is it?

You lost an eye. What were you looking at?

SPEEDFREEK: Agile and fiery, you seek the fastest way to the next score.

+1 Speed, +1 Grit

You lost your tongue. What'd you say wrong?

What is it about going fast that gets your heart racing?

THINKTANK: One of the only working minds left, you advise and invent for the crew.

+1 Grit, +1 Brains

You know what killed the world. Why won't anyone believe you?

You can barely breathe on a good day. What filled your lungs and hasn't left?

The final step in preparing for a game of WAR RIG is the machine itself. Sit down as a group and discuss what it looks like, how it works. How many wheels does it have? How is it powered? Is it a commonplace vehicle, or a one-of-a-kind marvel of machinery? Once you and your crew have a clear picture of your rig in your mind, you're ready to hit the road.

## CHAPTER 3: DAYS PASS

### PHASES OF PLAY

A game of WAR RIG takes place over a series of phases. Within each phase, different events can happen, and the stakes are different as well. Ideally, these phases flow naturally. The GM must keep in mind the current phase as they present the world to the crew.

### REST PHASE

At the end of each session, and in the moments in between, the crew should find themselves time to rest. Perhaps they break for camp somewhere in the wasteland, or they find shelter in a settlement somewhere. It is during this phase that players use their Hope to scavenge useful Scrap, where they can converse with themselves, and discover more about their surroundings.

Whenever you rest, you must go out and scavenge for life-sustaining resources. Each character rolls as many dice as they have points in Hope, and each success is counted as an increase in 1 to that character's Scrap score. You cannot spend Scrap to increase your chances on this roll. When these Scraps are first gained, you can divvy them up among the crew as you see fit. Once they are divided up, that choice sticks until the next rest. After scavenging, you reset your Hope score to 1. If you rested without any Hope, you stay at 0. When you rest, if you didn't have enough hope to scavenge, your Scrap score goes to -1, representing your overwhelming hunger and thirst.

### DRIVE PHASE

During this phase, the crew sets out in their Rig upon the wastes. The crew is aboard their mighty vehicle, and the threats they face on the road they always face together. This is where most of the game will take place. At its core, WAR RIG is about the struggle of a band of people on the same machine, working to survive together. Thus, most of the story should take place on that machine.

When the GM presents threats in this phase of play, the conversation should flow something like this: the GM presents a danger, the crew discusses and presents their solution (and how they each contribute to that end), and the GM declares what relevant statistic is being challenged here, and the threshold of successful die needed.

Every member of the crew must roll as many dice as they have in that statistic, and then successes are counted. Any character who falls short of the threshold can ask for help from any who go above the threshold, but that decision ultimately lies alone with the one

who succeeded. Any character who keeps a spare success to themselves marks down that many points of HOPE, as does any character who received help, regardless of whether it brought them to the threshold or not. Then, consequences take place.

Any character who fell short takes wounds, or loses scrap. Between the two statistics, the amount of wounds taken and scrap lost must be equal to the degree they failed the threshold (i.e. if you fail a threshold of 6 with only 4 successes, you must lose 2 scrap, or take 2 wounds, or lose 1 scrap and take 1 wound.) A character cannot be brought below 0 scrap in this way, and any character at 0 scrap must take wounds when they fail.

The players narrate how their results take shape in the world of WAR RIG, and the GM then describes how the world reacts. Play continues in this way until the GM believes either the threat has been successfully negotiated, or the party has been defeated. After a threat is dealt with, the crew may choose to REST, or they may press on.

## WALK PHASE

During this phase, the crew sets their feet upon the ground, and threats are faced individually. Here, no dice are rolled, and instead, the players must negotiate with the GM to get what they want. For example: if a player gets in a fistfight and wants to knock their opponent out, they explain how their character accomplishes it. If the GM thinks it feasible, the player succeeds. If it seems unlikely, the GM declares that the character must sacrifice something to succeed. Perhaps they sacrifice a point of hope, or resources. If the character is in a tense negotiation, perhaps they wind up in debt to the other side of the argument.

A character should never die in the WALK phase without the player's express desire for that outcome. That sort of action and risk should be reserved for the DRIVE phase.

## PARTING WORDS

Once you've got your characters, and you understand the flow of gameplay, you're ready to play! The Game Master sets the scene for your party, describing the world around you, and play begins. Good luck out there on the wastes. You're gonna need it.

Keep in mind: the game is meant to be played TOGETHER. As a player, you can strike off on your own, but you will be at extreme disadvantages, and the story you're telling won't be one the rules necessarily support. If you're having fun, go for it. Just don't expect the

rules to support a solitary journey. What's more, this game is intended for campaigns lasting three or four sessions. Characters don't have many options for long term advancement, but that may change in possible future supplements. Keep eyes out!

Finally, a few thank you's.

First, to my Patrons, especially Greg, Carol, and Morgan! Thanks so much for your support. It honors me, and I hope you enjoy.

Next, to Kat, who supports me in a thousand ways. I could not imagine doing this without you.

Last, to you, dear reader! I hope you enjoy this game, seek and find adventure with it, and have fun!