

# 五德

THE FIVE POWERS



# SRD

COOPERATIVE STORYTELLING

*五德 is pronounced wǔ dé.*

*五- wǔ is easily translated from Chinese and stands for 5.*

*德 - dé (/də/) is much more complex. Scholars have discussed its correct translation into English within the works of Daoist's like Laozi or Zhuangzi.*

*Peter A. Boodberg called it the most significant character besides dao 道 and Arthur Waley suggest the translation 'power' instead of the commonly used 'virtue' to highlight the Yin & Yang nature of this character.*

*De also stands for the individual phases or aspects of East-Asian Philosophy and its manifestations in the elements of:*

*木 wood, 火 fire, 土 earth, 金 metal and 水 water.*

*This very meaning is used as basis for this game.*

To use the WuDe - The Five Powers as SRD for your game, simple attribute us in the following for - and drop us a message on Twitter @wuderpg, so we can cheer you on:

This game is Powered by the Elements, based on the WuDe - The Five Powers designed by Ralf Mayenberger, WuDeRPG. This game is in no way affiliated with Ralf Mayenberger or WuDeRPG.

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Created by:       Ralf Mayenberger

Play-tested by:  Danielle, Kade, Ryan, Peter, Jeph, Rusty & Scott

Artwork by:      Caitlin Du (Phantalism)

Chinese

Translation by:  Sissi Chen & Benjamin Wang

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## 五德 – WU DE – THE FIVE POWERS

Wu De is a narrative, story-driven Role-Play-Game, based on East-Asian Philosophy of Yin & Yang and the 5 Powers or Elements – Wood 木, Fire 火, Earth 土, Metal 金 and Water 水. Wu De is all about Chaos, Balance and Consequences and developing a common story cooperatively.

The game is fit into a narrative frame that helps to develop the story further and advances the scenes forward to the stories conclusion. Wu De is set up to be played without a Game Master (GM), giving the players control over their story. The rules, however, also work in a set-up with a GM – something novice players should consider getting used to the system and the creative possibilities. You can find suggestions for a game with a GM in chapter 11. *The Role of the Game Master.*

The Game Mechanics are based on the balancing nature of Yin & Yang and how they are represented within the 5 Powers. These mechanics propel the story through rolls on players actions and decisions and show consequences, that the players have to resolve in their shared narrative – but more on these game elements later. The best way to understand Wu De is to play it:

## 1. *Choose your Setting:*

First, we need to set the stage: decide together in which setting your game will take place. This could be for example during the Warring States period in China, the time of the Samurai in Japan, modern day Hong Kong or a future Utopia or Dystopia.

Although, this guide will introduce Wu De in East-Asian settings, you shouldn't limit yourself to these, Wu De can be played in the Roman Empire, Medieval Europe, the Wild West or on board of an intergalactic spaceship.

Furthermore, decide on the aspects of your setting. Do you want to stay true to history or do you want to alter the setting through aspects like magic, technological advances (Steampunk) or monsters, dragons or alien races? The limit is your imagination.

You should, however, as a group set some guidelines to these aspects. Ask yourself questions on how these aspects influence your world: If there is magic, is everyone able to use it? Or are magic abilities only available to selected few. If there are Zombies, are they a slow and looming doom, or are they fast and vicious monsters? If there is space-exploration, do you want to dig into a realistic setting, or do you want to leave the physics to your imagination.

Give yourself some leeway to alter your setting along the way. You might stumble into an unforeseen situation that calls for a slight change in your setting.

*To visualize this world building, let's look at this example: Ryan, Danielle, Kade and Peter decided to stay mostly true to our world and set their game in modern day Hong-Kong. They initially decided that there are neither magic nor mystical creatures involved, but within the game they ran into a situation where they had to make the decision if the actions of 'Hit-Women' (women that curse people by hitting a slipper on a picture of the victim) in modern day Hong Kong are actually able to deliver a curse or not: The group had to decide if curses are real.*

You can also take a quick look at the proposed Settings and Storylines in the second half of this booklet to give you an idea. This is also beneficial for our next step: *Character Creation*.

The setting, but also the storyline you chose might influence the character you create and vice versa, the character you have in mind might influence the setting and storyline you choose. Allow yourself some flexibility. You can always make adjustments.

## 2. Character Creation.

Each player creates a character based on one of the 5 elements that defines the character (木 Wood, 火 Fire, 土 Earth, 金 Metal, 水 Water). Check the characteristics of each element on the table and consider also the Yin & Yang aspects of the element. This element is the defining characteristic of your character and sets the tone for how you would play your character. (Qi 气 is not an element, but the omnipotent energy that creates everything.)

### The Five Powers and Qi

*	Elements		Season		Yin	Yang/Virtue	Characteristic
1	木	Wood	Spring	growth, vitality	anger	kindness, benevolence	idealism, curiosity, spontaneity
2	火	Fire	Summer	swelling, energy	hate, shame	honor, awe, joy, wisdom	passion, intensity
3	土	Earth	Late Summer	levelling, fruition	worry, anxiety	faith, integrity	agreeableness, honesty
4	金	Metal	Autumn	harvest, collect	sadness, grief	righteousness, bravery	intuition, mind, rationality
5	水	Water	Winter	retreat, stillness	fear	passion, propriety	erudition, wit, resourcefulness
6	气	Qi	This is the omnipotent energy in everything that creates Yin & Yang				

\*If you use regular dice, use the numbers to refer to the element for your rolls.

After you defined your characters main attribute, you **pick a profession** that fits your setting (and storyline) and ties into your idea of your character. This profession will define, which abilities your character possesses.

In a modern setting, an engineer is probably good with machines and computers and possesses a logical understanding of things, she might on the other hand not necessarily be very social.

Be as specific as you want to be and try to give your character some interesting aspects, some rough edges and a backstory. These aspects will help you better understand your character and will also come in handy, when it comes to actually playing out encounters. The better you know your character, the better you can interact in the world you are creating.

You also want to think about, how your characters are related to each other. Are they strangers that have been brought to the same place by fate? Are they a group of adventurers? Or are they even from the same family or clan?

Finally, create your characters motivation or goal and tie this to your backstory. It will give your character the final touch and will help you developing your story.

*In our example, Kade decided to be a high school student accepted to go to university to study engineering, even though his real passion was food, or better eating food. Ryan created his character as a security guard and referred to his background of being bullied in school. Danielle chose to be a hit-woman (someone cursing people by hitting a slipper on a picture of the victim) trained by her aunt, working close to the Ferry terminal and Peter created a rebellious teenager, a problem child kicked out of school for repeated theft and inappropriate behavior.*

### **3. Framing your story:**

Every story should be set up with some hints and expectations, where the story will take you. You should include at least two aspects: a **specific situation (1)**, and a **threat (2)**. It can also be helpful to include some **instruction on how to approach the threat** or maybe an intriguing and interesting object: **a MacGuffin!**

Think about your story as a great book or movie. You could open your story with something memorable that sets the tone for the rest of the story and points you in a certain direction, or you could slowly ease into your story giving you more options for the story to develop on its own. Consider this when you set out to frame your setting.

*Our group decided to play one of the template stories:*

*Dim-Sum (p. 22):*

*“Your grandma has worked hard her entire life building a reputation for her little Dim-Sum shop. Locals and well-informed tourist enjoy her delicacies, but her shop is threatened by a fast food chain...”*

*This story setting uses a **specific situation** and a **threat** and hints through the family connection (‘Your grandma’) how you might want to approach this threat. The setting includes a relation between the characters – or at least one – and the situation. In our example, the players decided, they are all part of the same family with ‘grandma’ as family head.*

#### **4. The MacGuffin**

A MacGuffin could be anything: a thumb drive, a small chest, an ivory figurine. MacGuffins are mostly used in movies as a plot device and you can use them to create an arc within your story to propel it forward. Be original when creating a MacGuffin and don’t worry about whether it makes sense: MacGuffins are supposed to be mysterious.

## 5. *Moving the story along.*

The setting of the story serves as a short introduction and the players should think about where the first scene will take place. If you choose to play one of the template stories, you could just follow the setting of the storyline for the first scene, but you could also be creative and jump in time. If you created your own setting, think about what would make sense for your story.

In the individual scenes, you should always consider aspects that help develop the story further. This could be done through some sort of obstacle or road block to overcome, but your story could also be pushed forward through a personal motivation of one of the characters. A scene might even jump back in time to explain your current situation through a flashback.

Think about the individual scenes and actions in a way, that is fun to read or watch: A *colorful description* of the scene, *narrative details* and *dialogues* are key to breathe life into scenes; playing them, taking over NPCs in dialogues will engage you even more.

While there is no strict rule on the number of scenes, you should aim for three bigger scenes to give your story some texture. A new scene could be based on the introduction of a new obstacle,

a change of location or a skip forward in time, but it should always develop the story further to the concluding scene.

The transition between scenes, as everything else in this game, should always follow a consensus between the players and while a single player shouldn't dominate the progression of the story, each player could be in charge for the creation of a crude outline for an individual scene. To choose the player that brings the next scene into play you have many options. You could:

- follow the personal elements of each character, starting with *wood* going down the table and ending with *water*,
- spontaneously decide who goes next,
- let the player whose character was most effected by the last scene set up the next scene, or
- choose the player that stored some of the elements in a roll for a later scene (more on this mechanic later in *Chapter 10*).

Having a different player take the wheel and create each new scene is a great way to get different voices into the story, but it could also create some imbalance. If you decide to let one player set up a new scene, the remaining players should take over and be vocal about how this scene plays out. This way, the creation process of your story is balanced, and everyone's voice is heard.

Another way to set up your next scene, something you should consider if you want to introduce chance into this process is to roll for it. The next chapter will introduce the game mechanics in detail, so let's just say for now, you start on an even roll with an equal amount of black and white dice, 3 for each color. With each new scene, you remove one white die from the dice pool. The elements on each die will give you more details about the scene when you resolve them.

## *6. Game Mechanics*

During the game, on your path down the rabbit hole of your story, you will encounter moments where you need to act, make a decision or where you face an obstacle. In these moments, you are called to roll the dice. Rolling the dice represents your action interfering with the existing Harmony and creating Chaos.

Since this game is based on the idea of Chaos, Balance and Consequences, you will always roll for both sides, **Yin** (black dice, opposition) and **Yang** (white dice, ally). Your goal is it to restore Balance in the Chaos of the roll. You want to balance out or eliminate the Yin elements of the roll with your Yang elements. To resolve your roll, you go through the following five steps:

1. Find **equal elements** in Yin and Yang. These will **balance each other out** and are removed from the roll.

2. Find **elements that destroy other elements**. You can find them according to the **red arrows (→)** in the diagram. Look first which Yang elements destroy Yin elements, and then vice versa. The **destroyed elements** are also removed from the roll.



3. The **remaining dice represent the consequences of the action**. The remaining Yin elements show negative effects, while the remaining Yang elements show the positive effects. Yin and Yang elements should be resolved right away showing the effects of the action. But you can also choose to store some elements and resolve these as an aspect of the following scene (*Chapter 10*). These are long-term consequences.

4. If you roll a Yang-气, you can choose to either balance out one Yin element, or you create your characters' element. A Yin-气 can only be balanced out with a Yang-气 or the attempted action was a complete failure.

5. Rolling your character's element will enhance it's effect.

## 7. *Defining Success*

A roll is successful, when equal or more Yang elements than Yin elements remain: Yang dominates Yin (Yang > Yin). If Yin & Yang are in complete balance and no dice remain, the action succeeds with no further effect. If Yin dominates Yang the action fails, but positive effects can come from the Yang elements remaining. You can store Yin elements for later scenes to succeed your roll.

## 8. *Creating the dice pool:*

Based on the situation, personal profession and circumstances, the Yin and Yang dice pool consist of 1 (basic), 2 (advanced) or 3 (proficient) dice. To determine the number of dice, the players examine the situation and agree on the difficulty of the roll.

*Let's say Peter wants to pickpocket a young couple with only eyes for themselves. His mischievous character is a skilled pickpocket, and the couple is not paying attention: Peter rolls **1 Yin die** for the distracted lovebirds vs. **3 Yang dice** for his skills as thief (1vs3).*

*If Ryan's character would attempt the same check, he would roll **1 Yin die** against only **1 Yang die** (1vs1), because, even though the lovebirds are still inattentive, his character is not a skilled thief.*

*An attentive target or a situation with many people that might watch the thief would increase the difficulty and add Yin dice into the roll.*

## 9. *Additional Dice Rolls*

During the game, you might encounter situations that call for a roll of dice other than players actions. You might want to expand on your scene, your scenario, want certain elements in your story being decided by luck or fate or you just ran into a dead-end. In these situations, the player that wants to expand the scene or asks for more details within the scene can roll the dice.

Usually, the player asking for more details has some motive when asking. This motive can be used to determine the outcome where Yang elements would mark a favorable outcome, whereas Yin elements represent an unfavorable outcome like an obstacle or maybe even a threat.

*Going back to the pickpocket example, Peter would have checked for more details in their current situation to see if there is an easy target for his vice. The scene established, that they are in a local dumpling shop, a small, cozy place, famous among locals and adventurous foreigners. It's not a busy time which means Peter won't get an advantage for being better concealed or having more possible targets available. On the other hand, he also wouldn't suffer a disadvantage for more eyes on the situation. Peter points out, that this is not his first time locking for an easy target and that he is quite skilled, which earns him two extra dice.*

*He rolls 1 Yin die against 3 Yang dice (1vs3). After balancing and eliminating dice from the roll he is left with a Yang Qi 气 and the Yang Element Fire 火. The Yang-气 defines a clear success and the Yang Fire stands for honor, awe and joy. The characteristics of the Fire element also mention passion and intensity. Combining these aspects with the situation, the group decided that there is a couple of young tourists at the dumpling place which has only eyes for each other.*

### ***10. Using unresolved elements to set up the next scene***

To help moving the story along, the pool of unresolved effects (usually Yin elements) from previous rolls comes into play. When your pool of unresolved elements reaches a certain threshold, a new scene in your story starts. You should agree on a number of dice before you start your game. A reasonable number would be 3, but don't wait to reach this number to move your story along.

Try for natural transitions that make sense in your story and don't force a new scene. Reaching the threshold should be seen as a signal to wrap up the current scene or to introduce a new aspect into the scene that gives the scene a new dynamic, after all, these unresolved elements have created a situation that is chaotic and unbalanced and looks for a resolution.

## *11. The Role of the Game Master*

As mentioned before, Wu De is designed for role-playing without a designated Game Master (GM), but it acknowledges novice players and the wish for additional guidance.

In a game with a GM, the role of the GM could be described as a mediator rather than the creator of the story. The GM should only provide a rough construct of a story and not a fully fleshed out narrative to allow the players to create a shared experience.

This means, the GM:

- asks open questions about the characters during the process of creation to help the players to understand their character's role in the story better.
- presents or suggests the crude outline of each scene without setting it in stone.
- provides more details or calls for additional dice rolls.
- asks the players questions about the possible outcome of their rolls.
- gives suggestions about possible outcomes of rolls.
- suggests transitions into new scenes.

In other words, the GM plays the **Devil's Advocate**. Questions the GM asks should push the development of the story rather than oppose the players. The GM is on the side of the players but should call out vague descriptions that leave too much to the imagination. Scenes, player actions and their outcome need to be described in detail to enrich the story told.

When it comes to NPCs (Non-Player-Characters) or opponents, the GM should ask the players how they envision them. To gain more details, the players can always roll the dice. After all, it is their story, the GM just helps to find their way through it.

To play out these characters, the GM could either have one of the players whose character is not front and center in this scene take over an NPC or role-play them herself. The actions of NPCs are set on the narrative described by the players or are based on unresolved elements.

Since the GM in Wu De is not playing the opposing side, the GM could also take actively part in the game as one of the players. This situation would apply if an experienced player introduces the game to novice players and gives the GM the opportunity to active model good roleplaying to new players.

## 12. Conflicts

Even though, the rules of Wu De are not built for conflicts or even combat these might be story elements in your narrative. To resolve these conflicts, create one dice pool that represents both sides and resolve each individual element in your narrative of the conflict. Balancing out or eliminating elements will be part of the narrative and will shape your story first. 气-elements will show definite outcomes of the conflict. Elements from a conflict roll cannot be stored for later scenes.

*To make an example from a setting more prone to conflict, let's assume you are in ancient China and received orders to rescue the kidnapped queen. You are elite soldiers and face a group of equally skilled soldiers in a stand-off. You would roll 3 dice for each side (3vs3) and resolve each element in your story.*

If you feel one roll would not sufficiently cover the conflict you are in, you could break the conflict into multiple phases in which the outcome of each phase influences the dice pool of the next phase.

You can also roll the initial round of conflict individually and base your dice pool for the rest of the conflict on the initial outcome.

## RULE OVERVIEW

Elements			Yin	Yang/Virtues	Characteristic
1	木	Wood	anger	kindness, benevolence	idealism, spontaneity, curiosity; growth & vitality
2	火	Fire	hate, shame	honor, awe, joy, wisdom	passion, intensity; swelling & brimming with energy
3	土	Earth	worry, anxiety	faith, integrity	agreeableness, honesty; levelling, fruition, moderation
4	金	Metal	sadness grief	bravery, righteousness	intuition, rationality, mind; harvesting & collecting
5	水	Water	fear	passion, propriety	erudition, resourcefulness, wit; retreat & stillness
6	气	Qi	The omnipotent energy in everything.		

- Balance Yin & Yang
- Eliminate first Yin then Yang elements (➔)
- Yang-气: balance out a Yin element or create your Yang element
- Yin-气 left: automatic failure.
- Rolling own element enhances effect
- resolve consequences (refer to the table) or store for setting the next scene
- **Success:** equal elements of Yin & Yang are left, or Yang dominates Yin

