



Uncharted Worlds

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Dedicated to my wife Julie and my son Leo, the binary star
system that brightens and warms my world.

Special thanks:

To D. Vincent Baker, for creating the Apocalypse engine
and inspiring the creation of this game.

To my weekly playtest group: Josh, Michael, Chad, Jon and Eugene, for
letting me ramble about design. And for getting attached to characters
that would be obsolete with the rules update the following week. Sorry.

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SECTOR 01 - ARRIVALS

Introduction

The Arrivals chapter deals with the basics of the Uncharted Worlds game:

What is Uncharted Worlds? - A synopsis of the game and the inspirations behind it.

Player Roles - How the players interact with the game.

Player Principles - How the player is expected to act within the game and towards the other players.

Anatomy of a Character - How to interpret the elements that make up a character.

How to use Moves - An overview of Moves, the core mechanic of Uncharted Worlds.

Sequence of Play - The gameplay loop of an Uncharted Worlds session.

“A bass note sounds. It is a deep, vibrating chord that hints that the brass section may break in at any moment with a fanfare for the cosmos.”

– Sir Terry Pratchett, Equal Rites

What is Uncharted Worlds?

Uncharted Worlds is a space opera of discovery and adventure, which explores a universe full of deadly beauty, hostile frontiers, rapacious organisations, and crippling debt. It's a story-building game where dramatic encounters drive the narrative ever onward, building a solid, memorable universe that's unique to each group. If you want to pilot your ship across the reaches of space, be the first human to make landfall on alien shores, bring back hard-won exotic cargo, deal with galactic corporations, go toe-to-toe corrupt empires and rebel scum, face down ruthless pirates (or perhaps engage in a bit of interstellar piracy yourself)... then strap yourself in, disengage your mooring clamps and prepare for one hell of a Wild Jump.

Uncharted Worlds is at its heart a space opera. It's a humanocentric, stylized, operatic vision of the future, full of starships and explosions and lasers and Wild Jumps and space pirates and more explosions. The Rule of Cool is always in effect (if everyone thinks it's cool, roll with it). Don't get caught up in the details, be big, bold, larger-than-life, with an epic orchestral soundtrack in the background. One of the principals of Uncharted Worlds is 'paint in primary colors': Not black-and-white, but keeping things vibrant and bold.

Uncharted Worlds favors cooperative fiction- and narrative- building, with a conversational gameplay flow. This may be a bit unfamiliar to players more used to the stricter mechanical, number-driven, turn-based systems of more structured games. Here, the Game Master ("GM") and the players are co-creators of the universe, driving the story forward, rather than oppositional forces. While there are certainly mechanics such as rolling dice and stat bonuses, these are used lightly, to resolve key events and shape the flow of the narrative. Those who are versed in the other games powered by the Apocalypse Engine (the excellent Apocalypse World, Monstehearts, Dungeon World, *et al*) will find many mechanics and methods in this book quite familiar.

Uncharted Worlds has a number of inspirations, various popular space operas and other sci-fi epics such as Mass Effect, Farscape, Firefly, 5th Element, and Star Trek, with bits of Starcraft, Warhammer 40k and Galaxy Trucker thrown in for good measure. Special mentions go to Lois McMaster Bujold's Vorkosigan series, and to Mongoose's Traveller, the game that inspired me to make Uncharted Worlds in the first place.



An Uncharted Worlds game needs the following:

A Game Master: Preferably someone who has read the rules and is comfortable arbitrating.

Players: 3-5 players are recommended.

Dice: At least one pair of six-sided dice. For best results, each player should have their own set.

Blank Character Sheets or Premade Character Sheets: These can be found at www.uncharted-worlds.com/downloads.

Campaign Sheet (for the GM) and Ship Sheet (for the players): These can also be found at www.uncharted-worlds.com/downloads.

Pencils, Eraser, Blank Papers/Cue Cards: To take notes.

Player Roles

There are two roles in Uncharted Worlds: One person as Game Master, and the rest as characters.

The Game Master (referred to as “GM”) is the arbiter of the game, whose role is covered in detail in Sector 03 – Administration (page 33).

Every other player controls a single character, each with its own character sheet. Almost everything a player experiences in Uncharted Worlds is through the lens of their character’s knowledge, biases and past experiences. The characters are the focal point of the narrative. If they are not always the heroes of the story, then they are at least the protagonists.

When starting a game, a player either picks a premade character they wish to play, or create their own character. Character creation rules are found in Sector 07 – Habitation (page 73).

Player Principles

These are the guidelines that players should keep in mind while playing Uncharted Worlds. They are directions about how to approach the game, how to treat the GM and the other players, and how to get the most out of the experience.

Act with conviction: When a character wants to do something, simply make the attempt. Asking the GM, “Can I do X?” is not a fair question. The GM doesn’t know what your character can do. At best, the GM will flat out say no because it’s not physically possible, but that’s just logic. Otherwise, it is up to the player to determine what their character attempts within the current situation. By deciding to act, the player implicitly accepts the costs and consequences.

Act through the lens of your character: When choosing how to act, consider the character first and foremost. Consider what they can do, physically and mentally. Consider what they would do, emotionally and ethically. Don’t always take the most optimal action, don’t always try to use their highest stat. Take the action that the character would take, considering their background, their careers, their goals, aspirations, fears, and so on. Act with the information the character has, not the player. Once in a while, let weakness, shame, pain, fear or vulnerability inform your character’s decisions.

Weave an awesome narrative: Always consider how to make the story better and more entertaining for everyone. When the GM prompts for something, resist the urge to “outsmart” the GM and say something exploitable or silly. The GM and the players are working together to create a narrative, and the GM prompts allow the players to shape the universe. Similarly, acting in a way that is not in keeping with the tone and the setting will just break the immersion and the narrative. Strive to make an epic worth retelling.

Respect player boundaries: There may be animosity between characters, but do not bring that into the real world. Be respectful of the other players and their things. This includes being respectful of their characters. Don’t take over other characters or speak for them. Don’t do bad things to other characters without their player’s consent, and only if it makes for an interesting story (Weave an awesome narrative). When in doubt, ask the player, “Is it ok if my character undermines/countermands/backstabs yours here? It’s what he would do, story-wise.”

Respect the GM’s role: The GM is there to keep the game flowing smoothly. They are not an opponent to defeat. They are not an enemy to outwit. They are there to keep the universe running so the players can be the protagonists. The GM has the right (and duty) to reign in behavior that they feel is disruptive or goes against the tone and narrative of the game. Unless the GM specifically prompts them, the players should refrain from altering or inventing facts about the universe.



Anatomy of a Character

Every aspect of a character is contained on their character sheet. A character is composed of three core elements: Their stats, their archetype and their skills. Additionally, characters have secondary elements which can change frequently during play: Assets, data points, injuries and debt.

Stats

The 5 Stats outline a character's physical, mental and social aptitudes: Mettle, Physique, Influence, Expertise, and Interface. Stats usually range from +2 to -1, granting that bonus or penalty when rolling dice to determine the outcome of an action.

Mettle is courage, calm, discipline and precision. When the situation calls for reflexes, bravery, tactics, stealth or accuracy, it is a test of one's Mettle.

Physique is strength, beauty, athleticism and physical fitness. When success relies on acts of might, overcoming pain and fatigue, or pushing one's body to the limit, it is a test of one's Physique.

Influence is personality, presence, leadership and political clout. When people need to be commanded, convinced, inspired or cowed, it is a test of one's Influence.

Expertise is education, cleverness, creativity and skill. When something needs to be examined, built, fixed, invented, concocted or created, it is a test of one's Expertise.

Interface is technology, programming and logic. When systems need to be bypassed, hacked, reprogrammed, protected or shut down, it is a test of one's Interface.

Archetype

Uncharted Worlds does not have a rigid concept of ‘character class’ common to other roleplaying games. Instead, each character is a composite of their Origin and two Careers, which creates one of hundreds of possible Archetypes. In addition to the naming convention of “Origin Career Career”, an Archetype usually has a descriptive code-name, a word or phrase chosen by the player to hint at the character’s theme. For example:

A character with a Brutal Origin, who has chosen a combination of Military Career and Commercial Career would be a ‘Brutal Commercial Military’. The short-hand for ‘Brutal Commercial Military’ character could be described as “Space Pirate” or “Mercenary”, depending on the player’s preference and the way they want to portray the character. A ‘Regimented Clandestine Academic’ could easily be called an “Investigator”, “Inquisitor” or “Torturer”, etc.

A character’s origin and career will never change during play. They represent the character’s past; their youth, education and experiences that led them to this point. However, the Archetype, the name or term chosen to represent the character’s role, methods or style, might change to reflect changes in the character’s rank, social standing, beliefs or methods. These changes don’t happen at any fixed milestone, and they don’t need to happen at all if the player always feels the Archetype’s name still fits.

The Investigator performs admirably for their government, and is granted the rank of Inquisitor. They are still a Regimented Clandestine Academic, but their Archetype has a new name to represent their new role and responsibility.

Skills

Skills represent the character’s past education, experience, specialization and natural aptitudes, which allows them to perform certain actions better than the average person. Skills can change the way a Move works, alter a basic rule of the game for that character, or give the character a special Move that only they can perform.

Characters start with four skills; one granted by their Origin and three granted by their Careers. During character creation, it’s possible the character’s Origin gives access to a skill that is also available through one of their Careers. A character can never choose the same skill twice, even if it comes from two different sources.



Data Points

Data Points are small but critically useful bits of information about a particular subject, which can be leveraged to tip the scales during a tense moment.

Each Data Point concerns a specific topic or subject, and can be spent to grant a +1 to any roll that directly involves or leverages the information in that Data Point. Only one Data Point can be spent per roll, no matter how many would apply.

Data Points are rewards for successfully completing certain activities, like research or investigation. There are no limits to how many Data Points a character can have, or how many they can have about the same or similar subject, but the freshness and validity of the information must be maintained; Data Points quickly expire if they are no longer pertinent or are rendered obsolete/out-of-date.

Injuries

The minor, major, severe and critical harm the character has suffered. Characters can only suffer one of each type of injury; further injuries of that severity become worse. Fatal injuries, the fifth severity of injury, are not tracked; fatal injuries mean the end of the line for that character. Injuries are often the consequences of failed or partially successful Moves in dangerous situations, especially combat, and can be mitigated by the 'Brace for Impact' Move. The rules for injuries and medical treatment can be found in Sector 05 – Medbay, on page 54.

Debt

Debt represents how much a character owes to the Factions that control most of civilized space. Debts accrue from loans for major purchases, services rendered, political oaths of loyalty, or interest from previous debts. Factions will call upon indebted characters to perform missions or favors for that faction. If the characters succeed, the debt is repaid. If they fail, or refuse, the debt increases until eventually the faction becomes actively hostile.

All characters start with debt, and most will spend their time seeking to repay or outrun their creditors. The personal wealth and lifestyle expenses of a character (food, lodging, etc) are not recorded in a game of Uncharted Worlds. The rules for Factions and debts can be found in Sector 09 – Embassy, on page 129.

How to use Moves

Moves are the main resolution mechanic of Uncharted Worlds. During the course of play, a character's stated action might trigger a Move, and the GM will call upon them to roll. The success or failure of that action, and the consequences, costs and choices that it will create, all hinge on the result of the Move. The back of each character sheet has a synopsis of the most common Moves, and Sector 02 – Ops (page 17) describes all the Moves in detail.

EXAMPLE MOVE (+Stat)

When you perform an action that would trigger this Move, Roll+Stat.

On a 10+, you succeed, and accomplish what you intended to do.

On a 7-9, as above, but you suffer a cost or consequence too.

When performing a Move, the player rolls 2 six sided dice (referred to as 2d6) and adds the appropriate Stat to that number. The text of the Move indicates which Stat to use, either referring to the character's physical and mental stats (Mettle, Physique, Influence, Expertise or Interface) or external stats, like the Armor value of the gear the character is wearing, or the value of a piece of cargo.



Epoch RedPattern Laser Sniper Rifle

Class 2 Firearm - Rifle - Laser, Scope
2 handed, Range: Far, Distant

Laser (Projects focused beams of energy that can cut or melt materials.)
Scope (Can fire at distant objects. Optimal Ranges: Far, Distant.)



To make a Move, Roll 2d6 + the appropriate Stat:

If the roll is 10 or more (“On a 10+”), the Move is a success. The text of the Move will describe the effect of that success, or will give a choice of results.

If the roll is 7, 8 or 9 (“On a 7-9”), the Move is a partial success. This means the Move is successful, but will be accompanied by a cost, a choice or a consequence. Some Moves have specific consequences for a partial success, but most leave the details up to the GM, who will come up with something appropriate for the situation. Often, one of the choices is to purposefully abandon/fail the action in order to avoid the consequence. GMs and players should always remember that a partial success is still, fundamentally a success, though with a side-effect.

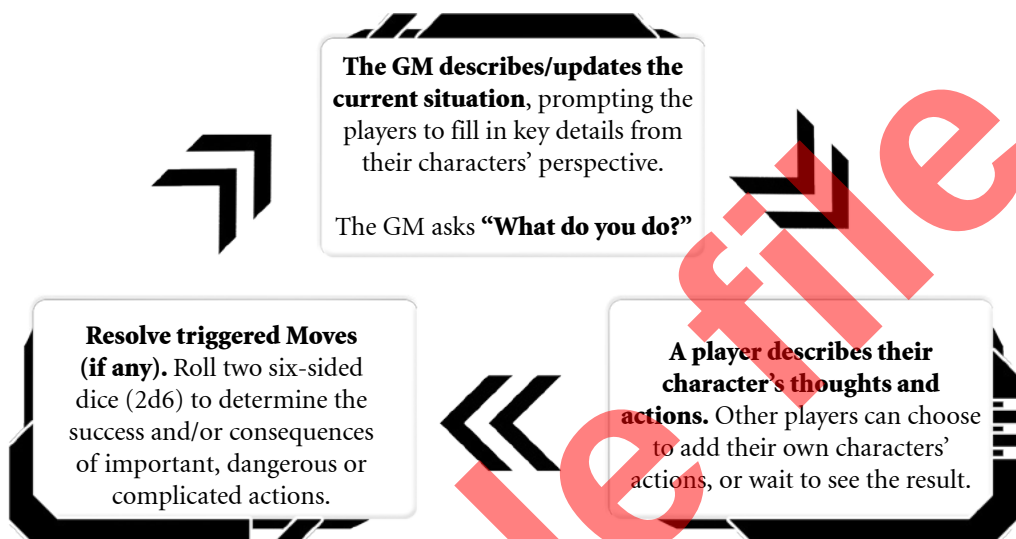
If the roll is 6 or less (“On a 6-”), the Move is a failure. This does not mean that nothing happens, however. On the contrary, a failed Move creates just as much if not more effect on the situation as a success or a partial success. A failure is the GM’s chance to add new threats, complications and calamities to the narrative. Very few Moves outline what happens on a failure and most are left blank; it is entirely up to the GM to decide just how badly things go, pulling from their list of GM Moves. Some “failures” may not even seem like failures at all; they are actions that “succeed” at revealing or creating an unfortunate, difficult, dangerous or disastrous situation.

Move Duration: The duration of a Move in Uncharted Worlds is very malleable, and in a single roll they can describe the actions of a few seconds or a few hours. Or even a few days. As long as the action takes a reasonable amount of time within the fiction, the timeframe is entirely up to the GM and the players, whatever feels right within the narrative. To paraphrase J. Michael Straczynski, the Moves happen at the speed of Plot.

Move Chains: It’s quite likely that using a Move will create a situation where another Move is immediately required, either from the person who just acted or another character. This is especially true for partial successes and failures in violent or action-oriented situations; characters will invariably need to overcome the cascade of unforeseen consequences.

Sequence of Play

Play is a conversation between the Game Master and the characters. Usually the GM starts things off, prompting the players to act or at least react. If things become confused, or the players don't know how to proceed, the GM steps in to reiterate or reframe the situation.



The GM describes/updates the current situation: One of the GM's primary roles in the sequence of play is to present opportunities to the characters. They paint a description of the current situation, of possibilities and perils, and most importantly, they will prompt the characters to fill in key details that will greatly affect the overall situation. With the stage set, the GM will then always ask "What do you do?" to one or more of the characters. The GM should always address the characters' names, remaining within the narrative.

A player describes their character's actions: A player responds to the GM's question of "What do you do?" through the lens of their character. This is the character's chance to affect the situation, to gain something from it (fame, wealth, revenge, joy, etc.), or to simply express their character's opinion, thoughts or emotions. Other characters can add their own actions or opinions, helping, opposing, expressing or just taking advantage of the situation to do something else simultaneously. There is no concept of "turns" as such; characters act as the narrative allows and as opportunities arise, and it's the responsibility of everyone at the table to give each character the chance to shine.

Resolve triggered Moves (if any): If the stated actions would trigger a Move, the triggering character rolls to resolve their action. Moves are usually triggered by actions that are important, dangerous or complex. The result of the roll will reveal whether the attempt succeeds and whether there are any interesting consequences or complications that arise. The GM then updates the scene, incorporating the effects of the characters' actions and the fallout thereof.