

FLAWED

A Tabletop Roleplaying Game

System Reference Document

Version 0.1 — Playtest Draft

Every great character wants something. Every great character gets in their own way.

Chapter 1: The Core Idea

FLAWED is a tabletop roleplaying game about characters who want something and have a personality flaw that gets in the way. That's it. That's the engine.

Every session, your character will chase their Goal. They'll also be tempted to act on their Personality. When they act on their personality, they risk triggering their Flaw. The push and pull between ambition and self-sabotage is the heart of the game.

The Core Principle

Your character wants something. Your character is someone. Those two things are in tension. That tension is the game.

What You Need to Play

- 1–5 players and one Game Master (GM)
- A twenty-sided die (d20) for each player
- A character sheet (provided at the end of this document)
- A way to track Stress (a six-segment track works well)

Key Terms

Term	Meaning
Goal	What your character wants more than anything
Personality Trait	A defining aspect of who your character is
Flaw	A weakness that gets in the way of your Goal
Goal Action	An action that pushes you toward your Goal
In-Character Action	An action driven by your Personality Trait
Edge	A short-term advantage gained from a successful in-character roll
Crack	A short-term disadvantage caused by a failed in-character roll
Stress	Psychological pressure from suppressing your true nature
Breakpoint	The moment Stress hits maximum and your Flaw erupts
Arc XP	Long-term growth earned from Goal Actions

Chapter 2: Creating Your Character

Character creation in FLAWED is about defining three things: what your character **wants**, who your character **is**, and how your character is **broken**. Stats and abilities matter, but these three pillars come first.

Step 1: Define Your Goal

Your Goal is the thing your character wants more than anything. It should be specific enough to act on, but big enough that it can't be achieved in a single session. Good goals create a clear direction for play. They tell the GM what kind of situations to put you in and they tell you what your character would do in any given scene.

Examples: “Become the rightful ruler of Ashenmoor,” “Find and destroy the artifact that cursed my family,” “Earn enough gold to buy back my childhood home.”

Step 2: Define Your Personality Traits

Choose two Personality Traits. These describe how your character moves through the world. Traits are not good or bad. They are simply true. Each Trait belongs to a category. The category determines what kind of Edge you gain when you act on that Trait successfully.

Category	Example Traits	Edge Type
Aggressive	Bold, Wrathful, Reckless, Fierce	Strike Edge — combat advantage
Social	Charming, Gregarious, Seductive, Diplomatic	Intel Edge — hidden information revealed
Cunning	Deceptive, Calculating, Paranoid, Scheming	Setup Edge — reposition or rearrange the situation
Empathic	Compassionate, Loyal, Self-Sacrificing, Trusting	Ally Edge — an NPC or companion intervenes to help

You may choose two Traits from the same category or from different categories. Two Traits from different categories give you more flexibility. Two from the same category make you a specialist.

Step 3: Define Your Flaw

Your Flaw is the part of your personality that works against your Goal. It must be connected to at least one of your Personality Traits. A bold character might have the flaw of recklessness. A charming character might be manipulative. A loyal character might be blind to betrayal.

Your Flaw has a category, just like your Traits. The category determines what kind of Crack you suffer when your Flaw activates.

Flaw Category	Example Flaws	Crack Type
Volatile	Wrathful, Impulsive, Vindictive	Provoked — your next social encounter auto-fails, or an enemy gets a free action
Fearful	Cowardly, Anxious, Paranoid	Hesitation — you lose your next turn or cannot act first
Greedy	Avaricious, Envious, Vain	Exposed — you are caught out of position or red-handed
Naive	Gullible, Trusting, Idealistic	Blindsided — an NPC or ally acts against your interests without your knowledge

The Golden Rule of Flaws

Your Flaw must be something that could realistically stop your character from reaching their Goal. If your Goal is to become king and your Flaw is that you're afraid of spiders, that's not a Flaw — that's a quirk. Your Flaw is that you're wrathful, and your wrath makes enemies of the very people you need as allies.

Step 4: Assign Attributes

FLAWED uses four attributes. Distribute the following array among them: +3, +2, +1, +0. These modifiers are added to all d20 rolls involving that attribute.

Attribute	Governs
Might	Physical force, endurance, intimidation
Finesse	Agility, stealth, precision, sleight of hand
Insight	Perception, intuition, knowledge, investigation
Presence	Persuasion, deception, performance, leadership

Step 5: Calculate Derived Values

- Hit Points: 10 + Might modifier. HP recalculates immediately whenever Might increases.
- Stress Threshold: 6 segments (always 6)
- Starting Arc XP: 0

Chapter 3: How to Play

Each session of FLAWED follows a loop. The GM presents situations. You respond. Your responses fall into one of two categories: Goal Actions and In-Character Actions. Understanding the difference is the most important thing in this game.

Goal Actions

A Goal Action is anything your character does that directly pushes them toward their Goal. Negotiating an alliance if your goal is to become king. Tracking a monster if your goal is to slay it. Earning money if your goal is to buy back your home.

Goal Actions are resolved normally. Roll a d20, add the relevant attribute modifier, and compare against the Difficulty Class (DC) set by the GM. On a success, you accomplish what you set out to do. On a failure, you don't.

Regardless of success or failure, every Goal Action earns you 1 Arc XP. Arc XP represents long-term growth. It accumulates slowly and pays off later. Think of it as a savings account. More on Arc XP in Chapter 6.

In-Character Actions

An In-Character Action is a moment where your Personality Trait urges you to do something. The GM will present these as opportunities during play. They sound like this:

“The duke insults your honor in front of the court. Your bold nature urges you to challenge him publicly. Do you act on it?”

You always have a choice. You can take the In-Character Action, or you can suppress it and do something safe instead. But both options have consequences.

If You Take the In-Character Action

Roll a d20 and add the relevant attribute modifier against the DC set by the GM.

- **Success:** You pull it off and gain an Edge. The type of Edge matches your Trait's category. Edges persist until you choose to spend them — they do not expire between encounters. You may only ever hold one Edge at a time. If you already hold an Edge when you earn a new one, you must immediately choose which to keep. The other is lost. Your Stress also decreases by 2 segments.
- **Failure:** Your Flaw takes over. You suffer a Crack. The type of Crack matches your Flaw's category. Cracks are immediate disadvantages that expire at the end of the current encounter. Your Stress still decreases by 1 segment, because you tried.

The Gamble

In-Character Actions are a bet. You're gambling for a short-term advantage right now. If you win, you get an Edge that helps you immediately. If you lose, you eat a Crack that hurts you immediately. Either way, the consequences are temporary. Either way, your Stress goes down.

If You Suppress It

You ignore your Personality Trait and choose a safe or neutral option. No roll. No Edge. No Crack. But your Stress increases by 1 segment.

Suppressing your nature takes a toll. Every time you push down who you really are, the pressure builds. This is not free. This is not the safe option. It only feels safe in the short term.

Chapter 4: Edges and Cracks

Edges and Cracks are two sides of the same coin. Edges persist until spent — they do not expire between encounters and can be carried into future fights. Cracks are temporary, expiring at the end of the current encounter. Edges are the banked reward of acting on your personality. Cracks are the immediate cost.

Edges

When you succeed on an In-Character Action, you gain an Edge. The type of Edge depends on the category of the Personality Trait you acted on.

Edge Type	Effect
Strike Edge	Your next attack automatically hits, or you deal double damage on your next successful hit. Your choice.
Intel Edge	The GM must reveal one hidden piece of information relevant to the current scene: a secret door, a guard's schedule, a character's true motive.
Setup Edge	You may rearrange the tactical situation: reposition one enemy or ally, create or remove cover, change the terms of a negotiation, or introduce a complication for an opponent.
Ally Edge	An NPC, bystander, or companion takes a helpful action on your behalf: intervenes in a fight, vouches for you, provides a resource, or creates a

	distraction.
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You can only hold one Edge at a time. If you earn a second Edge while already holding one, you must immediately choose which to keep. The unchosen Edge is lost with no benefit. There is no banking, no stockpiling, no exceptions. Every In-Character Action is a real decision: do you need the Edge you already have, or are you gambling it away for a better one?

Cracks

When you fail an In-Character Action, your Flaw activates and you suffer a Crack. The type of Crack depends on the category of your Flaw.

Crack Type	Effect
Provoked	Your outburst creates an enemy or worsens a relationship. Your next social check in this encounter automatically fails, or an enemy gets a bonus action against you. GM's choice.
Hesitation	You freeze, flinch, or second-guess yourself. You lose your next turn, or you act last in the next round of combat. GM's choice.
Exposed	Your greed or vanity has put you in a bad position. You are out of cover, caught in a lie, or holding something you shouldn't be. The GM introduces an immediate complication.
Blindsided	Your trust was misplaced. An NPC who seemed friendly acts against you, information you relied on turns out to be wrong, or a plan falls apart because you didn't see the betrayal coming.

Edges and Cracks Are Mirrors

Notice the asymmetry. Edges persist until spent — you hold one and spend it when the moment is right. Cracks bite immediately and then vanish. But you can only ever hold one Edge. Earning a new one while holding another forces an immediate choice: keep what you have or gamble it away. Every In-Character Action is a real decision. The stakes are always the same shape: risk a temporary setback right now for a banked advantage you may have to sacrifice later.

Chapter 5: The Stress Meter

Stress is the price you pay for suppressing your true nature. Every time you choose not to act on your Personality Trait, your Stress increases. Every time you do act on it, your Stress decreases. Stress is tracked on a 6-segment meter on your character sheet.

How Stress Changes

Event	Stress Change
You suppress an In-Character Action	+1 segment
You take an In-Character Action and succeed	–2 segments
You take an In-Character Action and fail	–1 segment
Breakpoint triggers (see below)	Reset to 0

Stress can never go below 0. It can never go above 6. At 6, you hit the Breakpoint.

Passive Stress

Stress does not only come from suppressing your Personality. The world applies pressure too. Entering a dangerous new area, pushing through without rest, or spending too long in hostile territory all cost Stress automatically – no choice required.

This means Stress is always climbing. The only question is how fast.

Trigger	Stress Change
Enter a new dangerous area (dungeon floor, enemy territory, hostile wilderness)	+1 segment
Significant time passes under sustained pressure without rest	+1 segment
The party takes a safe rest (no enemies, no pressure)	–1 segment

Rest is not free. Choosing to rest means choosing not to push forward. That is a real decision with real costs. The GM controls when rest is available and should never make it trivial.

The Breakpoint

When your Stress reaches 6, your character snaps. The next time the GM presents an In-Character Action opportunity, you do not get to choose whether to take it. You do not get to roll. Your character automatically takes the action, automatically fails, and the Flaw manifests in its worst possible form.

This is not a normal Crack. A Breakpoint Crack is severe. The GM should make it dramatic, consequential, and tied to the character’s arc. The wrathful knight doesn’t just insult someone.

He draws his sword on the king. The cowardly thief doesn't just hesitate. She abandons her friends in the middle of a fight. The vain diplomat doesn't just get caught preening. He torpedoed the peace talks because someone mocked his clothes.

The Breakpoint Is a Story Beat

The Breakpoint is not a punishment. It is a dramatic climax. It is the moment the audience gasps. It is the scene everyone will remember. Good GMs should telegraph when a player is approaching 10 Stress and should design Breakpoint moments that feel like turning points in the character's story, not arbitrary gotchas.

After the Breakpoint triggers, Stress resets to 0. The cycle begins again. Over the course of a campaign, each character will have multiple Breakpoint moments. These become the defining arcs of the story.

GM Guidance: Presenting In-Character Moments

The GM controls how often In-Character Action opportunities appear. This is a powerful lever. Present them too often and the player feels badgered. Present them too rarely and Stress never builds. A good pace is roughly one In-Character opportunity per scene, or two to three per session.

In-Character opportunities should arise naturally from the fiction. If a bold character is in a situation where boldness would be tempting, offer it. Don't force moments that don't fit. The system works best when the temptation feels organic.

Chapter 6: Arc XP and Advancement

Arc XP is the slow burn. It represents your character's progress toward their Goal and their overall growth as a person. Unlike Edges and Cracks, which are immediate and temporary, Arc XP accumulates over sessions and produces permanent improvements.

Earning Arc XP

- **Goal Actions:** Every Goal Action earns 1 Arc XP, regardless of whether the action succeeds or fails. Trying counts.
- **Session End Bonus:** At the end of each session, the GM awards 1–3 bonus Arc XP based on how actively the player pursued their Goal during the session.

Spending Arc XP

Cost	Advancement
5 Arc XP	Increase one Attribute modifier by +1 (maximum +5)
5 Arc XP	Gain a new Personality Trait (maximum 3 total)
10 Arc XP	Goal Milestone – the GM introduces a major narrative advancement toward your Goal
10 Arc XP	Flaw Evolution – your Flaw changes to reflect character growth (see below)
15 Arc XP	Goal Achieved – your character achieves their current Goal and must define a new one

Flaw Evolution

At 10 Arc XP, you can choose to evolve your Flaw. This doesn't remove it. It transforms it. A wrathful character might evolve into a character who is intensely passionate but channeled. The Flaw category stays the same, but the fiction changes, and the GM should adjust the severity and flavor of future Cracks accordingly.

This is the character arc made mechanical. Your character started with a Flaw that hurt them. Over time, through struggle and growth, that Flaw shifts. It never disappears. People don't stop being who they are. But they learn to carry it differently.

Chapter 7: Rolling Dice

All rolls in FLAWED use a single d20 plus the relevant Attribute modifier. Compare the result to the Difficulty Class (DC) set by the GM.

Difficulty	DC
Easy	8
Moderate	12
Hard	16
Very Hard	20
Nearly Impossible	24

In-Character Action DCs

The DC for an In-Character Action should reflect how hard it is to express your personality without it backfiring. A bold character challenging a weak opponent? Easy (DC 8). A bold character challenging the king in his own throne room? Hard (DC 16). The DC is not about whether you can do the action. It's about whether you can do it without your Flaw taking over.

Critical Results

- **Natural 20:** On a Goal Action, earn 2 Arc XP instead of 1. On an In-Character Action, gain the Edge and reduce Stress by 3 instead of 2.
- **Natural 1:** On a Goal Action, earn 0 Arc XP. On an In-Character Action, suffer the Crack and Stress does not decrease at all.

Chapter 8: Example of Play

The characters:

Seren is a diplomat. Her Goal is to broker peace between two warring kingdoms. Her Traits are Charming (Social) and Calculating (Cunning). Her Flaw is Vanity (Greedy category). Her Stress is at 6.

The GM describes the scene: Seren arrives at the war council. Lord Harren, commander of the northern army, is mid-speech, mocking the southern delegation. The room is tense. Two guards flank the door.

GM: Lord Harren finishes his rant with a direct insult at you: “Why should we listen to some preening court flower who’s never held a sword?” The room goes quiet. Your charming nature urges you to turn this around with a devastating, witty reply that wins the room. Do you act on it?

Seren’s player: My Stress is at 6. If I suppress this, I go to 7. That’s getting dangerous. And I could really use an Intel Edge right now to figure out who in this room is secretly sympathetic to peace. Yeah, I’ll go for it.

GM: Roll Presence. This is a hostile room, so the DC is 14.

Seren’s player: I rolled a 9, plus my Presence of +3. That’s 12. I fail.

GM: Your Vanity takes over. You don't deliver a clever riposte. Instead, you launch into a furious, self-aggrandizing speech about your lineage, your accomplishments, and how Lord Harren is a provincial fool who couldn't negotiate a trade deal with a fishmonger. It's eloquent but dripping with contempt. The room goes cold. Lord Harren's allies close ranks. You take an Exposed Crack — the southern delegation now sees you as a liability, not an asset. Your next social check in this scene automatically fails.

Seren's player: Ouch. But my Stress drops by 1, so I'm at 5 now. At least I let the pressure out.

GM: Exactly. And you've just created a complication that will take real effort to undo. That's the game.

Chapter 9: Quick Reference for the GM

Pacing Stress

Stress is your most important pacing tool. If a player's Stress is low, ease off. Let them pursue their Goal. If their Stress is climbing above 4, present more tempting In-Character moments. You want Breakpoints to happen roughly once per session per character. That keeps the pressure alive and the drama frequent.

Designing Breakpoint Moments

When a character is at 9 or 10 Stress, the next In-Character moment should be set up to matter. Don't waste a Breakpoint on a random tavern scene. Set it during the peace negotiation. The heist. The trial. The moment where the Flaw erupting will shake the foundations of the story.

Tuning Difficulty

For In-Character rolls, consider the DC as "how hard is it to be yourself without it backfiring?" Low-stakes situations should be easy (DC 8–10). High-stakes situations where the Flaw has a lot of room to cause damage should be hard (DC 16–20). The harder the DC, the more likely the Flaw activates, so reserve high DCs for dramatically important moments.

Session Zero Checklist

- Every character's Goal should be achievable within the scope of the campaign.
- Every character's Flaw should create problems that affect the group, not just the individual.

- At least two characters should have Goals that can intersect, creating opportunities for cooperation or friction.
- Discuss tone. FLAWED works for gritty drama, heroic fantasy, political intrigue, and dark comedy. It does not work well for power fantasies where characters are never supposed to fail.

Chapter 10: End of Encounter

When an encounter ends — combat, negotiation, chase, or confrontation — the GM runs through a short checklist before the next scene begins. Think of it like the screen going dark between JRPG battles. A brief pause where the world takes stock before moving on.

The checklist has four steps. Run them in order.

Step 1: Resolve Enemies

Every defeated enemy falls into one of three states. The GM declares which applies before moving on.

State	What It Means
Defeated	Dead, unconscious, or surrendered. No further consequence. The GM should say this explicitly so the player knows the threat is gone.
Fled	Still alive and in the world. The GM notes this. Fled enemies may return in a future scene, better prepared. They do not disappear.
Lingering	Defeated but not gone. A boss who falls but survives. A villain who yields. Their arc continues. The GM should make clear what unresolved thread they leave behind.

Step 2: Check for a Goal Milestone

The GM asks one question: did this encounter meaningfully advance the player's Goal? Not just any Goal Action — a turning point. A door that was closed and is now open. A person who was an enemy and is now an ally. A thing the player needed and now has.

If yes, this encounter counts as a Goal Milestone. The player does not need to spend 10 Arc XP to trigger it — the GM simply declares it and narrates what changes in the world as a result. The 10 Arc XP cost in Chapter 6 is for player-initiated Milestones. GM-declared Milestones are free and story-driven.

Example: The party defeats Garland and frees Princess Sara. The player's Goal is to become the world's strongest warrior. Defeating Cornelia's greatest fallen knight is a clear turning point. The GM declares a Goal Milestone: Jack's name is now known in Cornelia. That reputation will open doors — and create new problems.

Step 3: Decide on Rest

The GM decides whether a safe rest is available. Not the player. This is a pacing tool, not a player right. A safe rest means no enemies, no pressure, no ticking clock. It restores HP and reduces Stress by 1.

The GM should offer rest roughly once per session. More than that and Stress never builds. Less than that and the player burns out. Rest should feel earned, not assumed.

Safe Rest Effects

Player HP restores to full. Player Stress –1. Each party member’s Stress –1. Cracks from the previous encounter expire if they somehow lingered. Edges are unaffected – banked advantages carry through rest.

Step 4: Open the Next Scene

The GM establishes what has changed. What does the world look like now that this encounter is over? Who knows what happened? What door just opened? What new threat just appeared on the horizon?

The GM should always open the next scene with a clear image and a clear pressure. Not “what do you do?” cold. Something like: “Three days later. You’re in Pravoka. The harbor smells like salt and something worse. A man at the dock is watching your party.” Give the player something to react to. The world does not pause between scenes.

Chapter 11: The Party

In a single-player game of FLAWED, the other party members are not background decoration. They are characters with Goals, Traits, and Flaws of their own. Their pressure is real. Their breaking points matter. And when they crack, the player feels it.

Party Stress Tracks

Each party member has a 3-segment Stress track. Think of it as a warning gauge – smaller than the player’s track, but just as dangerous. The GM advances a party member’s Stress when any of the following occur.

Trigger	Party Stress Change
Their personal Goal is directly threatened or set back	+1 segment
They are dismissed, undermined, or forced to act against their Personality Trait	+1 segment
The player spends an Ally Edge on them	–2 segments

Party Breakpoints

When a party member hits 3 Stress, their Flaw erupts. No roll. No warning. It just happens at the worst possible moment – the GM decides when. Their Stress resets to 0 afterward.

The fallout lands on the player as a direct complication. Their Breakpoint becomes your problem. You are the leader. Their failures are your failures.

Examples: A paranoid ally freezes mid-fight – you lose their action this round. A gullible ally is deceived – an enemy now knows your position. A vain ally derails a negotiation you were winning.

The Leadership Mechanic: Ally Edge

The player can spend an Ally Edge to reduce one party member's Stress by 2. That's it. That's the leadership mechanic.

Ally Edges are earned through Empathic Traits. You earn them by acting compassionately. You spend them to keep the team stable. Being compassionate keeps your party together. That is not flavor. That is the engine.

Every Ally Edge decision has the same shape: spend it on a party member now to prevent their Breakpoint, or hold it for when you need backup yourself. Both are valid. Neither is free.

The Full Loop

World pressure builds the player's Stress. Suppression builds it faster. Party members build their own Stress separately. The player can bleed off party Stress by spending Ally Edges – but that costs their own best resource. Everything is connected.

Building Party Members

Party members are built like player characters, with one exception: they use a simplified attribute array of +2, +1, +0, -1. The GM controls them, but their Goals and Flaws should be visible to the player. There are no hidden agendas. The tension comes from watching someone you care about approach their limit – and deciding whether to spend your resources to help them.

During Session Zero, ensure at least one party member's personal Goal intersects with the player's Goal. This creates natural cooperation – and natural friction when those Goals pull in different directions.