

# equinox



## MATCH SYSTEM GUIDE

equinox

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# INTRODUCTION

*Good-day Sir, my name is Vincent Cherraine, Captain of the Swift Hawk, and I will be boarding your ship and taking your cargo today. What? No, I know my reputation usually precedes me and I am not in need of any introduction, but it is the polite thing to do. Also, it may appear a peculiar tradition of sorts in my line of business. But better to say too much than to leave some poor old fellow clueless as to who took his things. So, to the cargo hold, shall we?*

*—Captain Vincent Cherraine*



*Captain Vincent Cherraine on a business trip.*

Welcome to **equinox**, a future fantasy game of stunning action, frightening intrigue, and mystical powers! In this game, you ride hybrid ships through the astral space connecting planets and galaxies and wield awesome mystic powers and nethertech artifacts! Take on the role of a restless wanderer—someone living on the fringes of galactic society, scraping by in a war-torn universe, maybe even stealing other people’s stuff. Whether a misfit, scoundrel, mercenary, pirate, idealist, explorer, or just someone who walked away from his home in search of adventure: you are part of the galactic underground. Fight the nightmares that invaded the universe, start a revolution against the fascistic and corrupt Consortium government, and explore space beyond the Veil...

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The rules in this book are tailored to the Equinox Universe, as described in the **Equinox Setting Guide**. It is possible to adapt these rules for other settings, and you are welcome to do so. We will probably release the **Match System** in a more universal format at some point in the future as well.

Beyond this Introduction, the **Equinox Match System Guide** contains the following chapters:

**Playing Equinox** contains advice on what to do during an **equinox** game session and offers advice on how to make it more exciting for everyone in your group.

The **Core Game Mechanics** chapter explains the basic principles of the Match System, which mainly concerns the use of dice and how to read and interpret them.

The **Traits** used by almost all characters and creatures in the game are defined and described in this chapter: Attributes, Characteristics, Tags, Abilities, and Resources.

The **Character Creation** process is found in the next chapter, which ties into the **People & Places** process

described on p.189 of the **Equinox Setting Guide**. This chapter also references a few of the chapters to come, so you might want to cross-reference.

Character Creation is followed by three chapters describing all **Skills, Powers, and Spells** available in the game, as well as the rules for using them.

The **Gear** chapter provides game statistics for the sample items described in the **Equinox Setting Guide**, and adds many more for use in the game.

**Conflicts** describes the systems used to resolve conflicts of all kinds: from the split-second action of firefights or brawls to negotiations and other social interactions.

The **Experience & Advancement** chapter details how players can improve their characters by spending the Character Points gained after each session.

**Vehicles & Ships** details the core traits used by all vehicles in the game and how these are used during conflicts, chases, and dogfights. This chapter also provides a list of sample vehicles found in the Equinox Universe.

**Running Equinox** is mainly addressed to the gamemaster, containing advice on how to prepare an equinox game session and how to run and adapt a running session to changing circumstances. It is followed by the **Plots & Stories** chapter, which explains how to create adventures for your **equinox** games.

The **Creatures & Adversaries** chapter details the sample creatures described in the **Equinox Setting Guide**, along with guidelines on how to customize them.

Finally, the book closes with two chapters—one containing a set of **Sample Characters** and one with an introductory adventure titled **Hidden Treasures**—for starting your **equinox** game.

The **Appendix** holds the record sheets for the game, rules summaries and tables, as well as an index.

## THE LICENSE

The **Match System** provides a rules framework you can use for many other roleplaying game settings. We want you to be creative with it, and encourage you to use and expand the ideas you find in here. For this reason, the **text content** of this book is released under a Creative Commons license ([creativecommons.org](http://creativecommons.org)), specifically an Attribution-ShareAlike license:



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To summarize: you may alter and transform the text found in this work. This means that you can re-release the text in this book in a different context, or even use it as a building block for your own setting. We encourage creativity and will even support your work if possible. Again, let us know!

## HOW EQUINOX WORKS

**E**quinox uses your collective imagination to power the game—if everyone gets it right, no TV show, gaming console, or computer game can top this experience. You better have imagination in spades, because one thing will become quickly apparent: your gamemaster will not be the only one to give descriptions of what’s happening, how a gamemaster character reacts, how bad that drink tastes, and so on—you and the other players will provide descriptions of your own. That said, **equinox** works through interaction between the players as a group and between the player group and the gamemaster.

*“Spending an evening among friends is much more worthwhile than alone at your gaming console anyways. Even with networked games, nothing beats real company.”*

—Dammi

Most **equinox** games aren’t supposed to be over when everyone stops playing for the night and heads home: the game is played in sessions, and it can take several of them to complete a single story. Unless the last session was really lame, people will want to come back and continue to play. There’s no winner or loser either. The point of this game is that it’s not about winning; it’s about telling a story and having fun along the way. With most people, it works.

You should already be aware of the two types of participants in **equinox**—the **players** and the **gamemaster**. Here are some more details:

## THE PLAYERS

That’s you and your friends. You control fictionalized characters that exist in the game world described by the gamemaster. A character may just seem to consist of a lot of numbers and buzzwords when seen on paper, but you are supposed to bring him to life by verbally acting out his role and making him take action over the course of the game. Together in the group, you resolve the situations that arise during the game. In a sense, your characters are much like those in a computer game—except that you have absolute

control over their actions and infinite options in the game world created in your heads.

*“Don’t get this wrong, many computer games nowadays come with open worlds to explore as you wish. This goes much further, however, because you can expand the world yourself as needed on the spot—no programmers required!”*

—Grool

Ultimately, the game is about your characters—they are supposed to be the heroes of the story developing during the game. If the game was a modern-day TV series, they would be the main cast of the show, and the story would be about them, their motivations, goals, faults, and successes. Because of this, both the gamemaster and the players must work together to make those characters shine.

*“If the gamemaster characters keep outshining you and your pals no matter what you do, someone at the table is doing it wrong.”*

—Grinder

*“On the other hand, player characters should not be immune to setbacks and failure. They cannot shine all the time; that’d be boring.”*

—Raven

Sometimes, it will seem like your sole purpose is to completely wreck the game by foiling the gamemaster’s plans. Don’t worry, it’s your job to keep him on his toes. The tension that arises between the “main cast” of the story taking action and the limited ability of the gamemaster to foresee what choices will be made is where the real excitement of **equinox** lives!

*“If you’re really good, you can give him an aneurysm. Don’t push it though, that may end your character’s adventures quickly and in unexpected ways.”*

—Arma

## THE GAMEMASTER

The Equinox Universe is packed with opportunities to create new and interesting stories. The person creating the situations, story elements, and characters the players face is

## WHY THE MATCH SYSTEM?



The **Equinox Setting Guide** is system-agnostic, so that experienced gamers can adapt the setting with their favorite roleplaying game engine. Yet we designed our own: the Match System you’ll find in this book. With so many great RPG systems out there, this naturally begs the question of why you should bother to use it.

Overall, the Match System is designed for larger-than-life characters with special and extremely powerful abilities. Perhaps not as extreme as your average superheroes game, but somewhere between that and your average magical fantasy game. There are a few game engines out there to handle these kinds of characters, but most of them are tailored to their own specific game worlds. Because the **equinox** setting has a few unique features (varying levels of magic energy, for example) adapting the setting might prove more work than you’re willing to invest.

One of our goals was to support casual players and give them lots of options to choose from instead of having them build everything themselves. More interested and active players and gamemasters still get the tools needed to expand the game as they wish. The result is that you can get into the game rather fast: simply pick a few options at the beginning, and then slowly learn and expand while playing.

the gamemaster. He’s a moderator, serving as a referee and final judge on what can and can’t be done within the scope of the game mechanics. It’s the gamemaster’s job to control everything in the game world except the player characters and how the story is resolved.

*“The story is created by the actions of the player characters, not by the gamemaster. There’s a fine line between plot and the story resulting from it.”*

—Penagain

The rules in **equinox** leave much room for interpretation; hard rules are only found where they are absolutely needed. This is the big advantage a game like **equinox** has over a hard-coded computer game: humans can bend the rules and interpret them one way or another to suit their personal tastes. The gamemaster is in charge of doing that, which often puts him at the center of attention. It takes a lot of effort and planning to be a good gamemaster, but the prestige that comes from doing it well can be awesome.

*“In other words: As gamemaster, you’ll get to create situations and story elements the player characters face, in hopes that they will like you. Don’t kid yourself. They tolerate you at best because the one thing you’re not allowed to control is how the story is resolved. This lies entirely in the hands of the player characters, so get over yourself. That said, they get to stomp around in your universe and make a right mess of things.*

*It’s up to you to be a halfway decent moderator and not let the game erupt into chaos.*

*Players usually go on and on about how their characters are unique snowflakes with special motivations, faults, and all that blah, blah, blah. Hey, they’re your friends, it’s not my fault. Sometimes you will want to obliterate them in the most painful and agonizing manner—but the deal is simple:*

*without players there is no game.  
Without them it’s just you by yourself,  
talking out loud to no one.  
And that’d be just sad.”*

—Penagain

## WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

This game doesn’t require hand-eye coordination, the latest hardware, or anything like that. What it does require are those archaic devices called pencil and paper. You’ll also need a bunch of six-sided dice to throw around (preferably not at people). Copies of the character sheets on p.265 will also be useful. You can also download form-fillable and printable copies at [equinox-rpg.com](http://equinox-rpg.com).

*“You’ll need friends, too. Or at least a bunch of people willing to play with you.”*

—Arma

It is a good idea to read through this book before starting to play—to get familiar with both the game mechanics and the setting (see the **Equinox Setting Guide**). Only the gamemaster is actually required to do this, but the game works better if the players know their way around the rules too.

*“This means you, of course—don’t be that one person sitting around the table who has absolutely no clue what everyone else is talking about!”*

—Penagain

There is an introductory adventure included in this book (see the **Hidden Treasures** chapter on p.253), which can be used to start your game.

Beyond this, open-mindedness, social skills, and a vivid imagination are the basic requirements. The rules in **equinox** are designed to help you tell a story and develop your characters. Sometimes, hard and fast rules get in the way of telling an exciting story, however, so **equinox** provides as much room for interpretation as possible to avoid that. Hard rules are only found where they are absolutely needed. To reiterate, this is the big advantage a roleplaying game like **equinox** has over a computer game: you can bend the rules and interpret them one way or another to suit your group’s personal tastes. The stories that develop out of this will take unexpected turns quite often—that’s intentional and the essence of what makes the game exciting!

*“This may lead to frustration if you’re used to more simulationist roleplaying games. For example, the rules in this book won’t tell you how far your character can jump, or how much damage he takes when falling a certain distance. You and the gamemaster will be the judges of how difficult it is to jump that chasm, and how deadly that fall would be. There’s usually no need to break that down any further.”*

—Dammi

The game works by everyone trying to be civil and interact with one another. Rules decisions are usually the result of a group consensus, but you get to make judgment calls when necessary. While this might lead to discussions in your gaming group, it ultimately allows customizing the game to the group and should help everyone enjoy the gaming experience even more.

*“The rules often refer to the gamemaster as the ‘final arbiter’ or to the ‘gamemaster’s discretion’ when it comes to making such decisions. What this means is that he is the final authority when the group cannot agree easily, to make sure the game doesn’t get bogged down. The rules assume your group can come to a consensus fast and easy—if that is not the case, then more power to the gamemaster! The trick is to find the right balance where everyone is comfortable with the play speed and the decisions made.”*

—Raven

There are only two things to keep in mind about making decisions. The first one is to keep discussions at the start or at the end of a game session, to avoid stalling the story and bogging down the flow of the game. The second is to be consistent: you should avoid making different interpretations every time the rule in question comes up again. Keeping track of that is the gamemaster’s responsibility.

*“Rules discussions sometimes get an overly bad rep among roleplaying gamers. Keep this in mind: you all want to play the same game. You’ll need to get clear about what that actually is, and that’s what the discussion is for. Problems with rule discussions are usually not a problem of having rules (good or bad, light or crunchy, etc.) but of lacking a consensus.”*

—Arma

## INSPIRATION

The **Match System** mechanics were influenced by a plethora of other games, and weren’t developed in total oblivion of the rest of the roleplaying game industry. Our design goals were to give players and gamemasters alike a lot of leeway to tailor the system to their own needs, without

having to bend the rules. As a result, the Match System has a strong storytelling focus, with only a few hard rules and a lot of soft ones to make the game flexible enough for a wide range of different tastes.

With the **Match System**, we wanted to design a dice mechanic that fits a cinematic and story-based play style with a solid set of mechanics—not too rules-light, but not too rules-heavy. It took us many iterations and much tinkering to finally arrive at the system presented in this book, of which we are quite proud and fond. In honor of our sources of inspiration, here’s where the roots of all this came from:

With our history with **Earthdawn**, we initially started off using a variant of the Step System, originally designed by Greg Gorden. This worked well enough to get us through an initial playtesting round, but showed that some of the tweaks we wanted specifically for **equinox** didn’t quite work out. One of the solutions was dropping the idea of using the full range of die types, which eventually led us to a simpler system using only good ol’ six-sided dice. We designed that one from scratch, focusing on the elements we wanted in the game. (However, some of the stuff we developed at this early stage made it back into the **Earthdawn Third Edition** ruleset we had in development at that time.) Advancement-wise, we’ve always liked a mix of point-buy and leveling, which was also inspired by **Earthdawn** and is reflected in the Orders of Mastery (see p.143). The players have more control and a heap of options, which really shines in long campaign play.

When Jay Little’s **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay Third Edition** came out, we were thrilled by the idea of having both positive and negative side-effects in addition to reading the various facets of the result out of the dice thrown in a single roll.

*“No, you’re not required to buy custom dice for this game, promise.”*

—Dammi

Some of the inspiration also came from Greg Stolze’s **One Roll Engine** (ORE), where we looked for dealing with matching results on the dice thrown (except we are using D6’s instead of D10’s). However, the combination of our

original version of a D6-only system and looking for matches proved too clunky and all our statistical analysis showed us all the desired results of differing degrees of success and independent consequences weren't coming up as often as we wanted (i.e., were too rare), as well as other problems with the distributions of results.

This led us to try a lot of different variations of combining D6s with matching their individual results, some a lot closer and some a lot further from being ORE-like. The final two design candidates that had reasonable statistical performance and a good, straightforward feel were both dice pool systems of D6's and both utilized matches as this somewhat independent gauge of ancillary effects. One was a success-type system, like the one used in Luke Crane's **The Burning Wheel**, White Wolf's **World of Darkness**, or Catalyst Game's **Shadowrun**, while the other determined totals like West End Games' **D6 System**.

The latter won out as we wanted to maintain a greater degree of granularity, allowing for more diverse bonuses and penalties, and effects. This final version was subjected to even more tweaking and fine-tuning and is now what we (affectionately) call the **Match System**.

*"Some people don't like tallying up totals, as it slows the mechanics down a bit. We believe that such simple math is good exercise for the brain, and also allows for some more depth in the mechanics."*

—Dammi

Evil Hat's **Fate** and Luke Crane's **Burning Wheel** served as sources of inspiration for the creation of a customized background and locations before play (found both in this book as well as in the **People and Places** chapter of the **Equinox Setting Guide**) and Tags as a basic mechanic driving character-based and story-oriented play (known as Aspects in **Fate**, and Beliefs/Instincts in **Burning Wheel**).

The implementation of these ideas in the **Match System** is closer to **Fate**, but much less sophisticated. It is a crucial component for turning character motivations, goals, and personality traits into tangible mechanics. We had a mix of different approaches for these before, but none of them really cut it. Also, Tags can be applied to virtually anything—a fact that went very well with our approach of a versatile Advantage/Disadvantage mechanic. Combined, it becomes quite easy to tie any situation into the rules framework without any real effort.

*"All that said, the system in this book won't please everyone, and we don't regard it as the ultimate solution to everyone's gaming needs. The Match System is a sturdy ruleset doing exactly what it was designed for. We hope it works for you just as well as it does for us."*

—Dammi