

# NAMELESS

## What Is Nameless?

**Short Answer** - A ridiculously rules-lite action RPG design for the fastest gameplay possible.

### What's in this Site?

- *Mechanics* - Actions, bonus & penalty cards, and the Karma systems.
- *Action* - Special rules for attack and defense, injury, weapons & armor, and counter-attacks.
- *Magic* - Rules for spells, psionics, chi powers, or pretty much any other strangeness.
- *Char-Gen* - How to generate character Abilities, Skills, Talents, Flaws, and other stats.
- *Miscellany* - This is a grab bag for stuff that doesn't fit in the other sections.
- *Adventures* - Links to self-contained, web-based intro scenarios for Nameless.
- *Settings* - Links to ImEG projects that feature tons of Nameless RPG material.

**Long Answer** - A role-playing game I wrote to pander to my preferred style of play. I like fast-paced action. I like simple rules that don't require charts or equations. I like over-the-top stunts, unbelievable kung-fu moves, and gun fights straight out of a John Woo movie. If you're looking for a game that models reality or packs in the tactical details, you'll have to look elsewhere. If you like action movies, this is your game!

Nameless draws some important design philosophies from fine [Atlas](#) games like Feng Shui, Over the Edge, and Unknown Armies. For example, Nameless keeps modifiers to a minimum to speed up play and avoid penalizing complex, creative stunts. It also gives players out-of-character reasons to role-play their characters' Flaws and Motivations. It keeps character sheets simple (and character generation fast) by using broadly-defined Skills, Talents, and Flaws. If you like any of those games, you might like Nameless.

We're presenting Nameless as a website because it lets us include reliable cross-referencing (which, you guessed it, speeds up gameplay), allows us to make and disseminate changes easily, and because we can make it look fairly nice at low bandwidth. Plus, it requires no download. If you absolutely *need* a paper copy, the pages should print out just fine, and you can print only the pages you need (probably not this one, for example).

Finally, Nameless is the house RPG system for all of the Immersive Entertainment Group's online game settings. Each includes unique magic systems, NPCs, organizations, gear, and even full-featured adventure scenarios. For descriptions of, and links to, those projects, visit the [ImEG website](#) or check out the "[Settings](#)" section of this site.

Welcome to the Nameless RPG!

# Core Mechanics

The entire Nameless system hangs on a single mechanic: Every action has a Target Number (1-10) which is determined by a character's Skills and Abilities. Players draw a card (or roll a 10-sided die) and try to get the highest possible result without going over their Target Number. It's just like "The Price is Right," only without Bob Barker. (We tried to get him, but we couldn't match his price. Sorry.)

## Target Numbers

All characters have a set of Abilities (mental and physical attributes) and Skills (things they've learned or trained to do). To find your **Target Number** for an action, just add a relevant Ability to an appropriate Skill. If you don't have an appropriate Skill, use your Ability score alone. (This reduces your chance of success, but it also means there's always *some* chance of success.) If your action doesn't require a Skill, add two of your Abilities together or add one Ability to itself (aka. an **unskilled action**). If a player can make a good case for why one of their Skills or Abilities is relevant, let them use it. Creativity is your friend.

### Always remember the cardinal rule!

Only draw cards when the result of the action is:

1. In doubt, and
2. Important to the story.

Otherwise, it's just a waste of time. This also applies to unstressful situations where a character has plenty of time and resources to work with. If they have a reasonable level of skill or natural ability in whatever they're doing, don't make them draw a card at all.

## Using Cards

I find that cards work much better than dice for Nameless. They're faster (no waiting for the damn things to stop rolling), easier to see (bigger numbers), and no one spends half an hour shaking the deck before drawing their card (you know who you are). Some players might be attached to their dice, and there's no reason you couldn't use 10-sided dice, but I've never had a player regret giving the cards a try!

Plus, far more people have normal decks of playing cards lying around than have 10-sided dice laying around. Just take the face cards out and you're ready to go! (Aces count as "1," of course.) Oh, and you can use the face cards for Karma points, too. See how it all comes together?

## Bonus & Penalty Cards

Nothing discourages creative stunts and rash decisions better than modifiers. Therefore, Nameless doesn't use very many of them. If you think the odds are in a character's favor (they have a nifty laser sight on their gun, they just cast a spell that makes them irresistible, etc.) let them draw a

**bonus card** in addition to their normal card and keep the best result. You should figure these things out in terms of the action as a whole; don't count up all the special circumstances and add them together. It slows things down, and Nameless is all about speed!

On the other hand, if the odds aren't looking so good for a character (bad weather, crippling injury, etc), have them draw a **penalty card** in addition to their normal card and keep the worst result. Again, think in terms of the action as a whole. If the character is already getting a bonus card, the two cancel each other out. Just have them draw one card and be done with it.

In either case, you should never give out more than 2-3 extra cards, if things are going really, really good... or really, really bad. With any more than that, you can probably figure out what's going to happen on your own. This is called an **auto success** (or an **auto failure**). If two characters with auto successes go up against each other, just have them draw normally. Characters with Bonus Cards can "trade them in" to turn an opponent's auto success into a bonus card, then they both draw normally.

## Karma

As you may have noticed, there are no "critical hits" in Nameless. (There's simply not enough room on a ten-point scale.) Instead, we put characters' fates in the players' hands. After a card is drawn, players can spend a point of **Karma** to automatically succeed in their action. If this has a direct, negative effect on another character, that character's player (or the GM) can spend a point of Karma to cancel it. If you want to let this turn into a bidding war, go right ahead! Karma helps ensure that fortune smiles upon the characters when they need it... and only when it's relevant to the game.

Karma can also be used to get **lucky breaks**. For example, say your character gets carjacked and you think s/he's the kind of person who would keep a handgun taped under the dash board. Tell your GM, "Hey, I think I'm the kinda person who'd keep a piece under the dash" and if your GM buys it, she will ask for 1-3 points of Karma. Turn them in and... walla! There's your gun, right where you knew it'd be.

## Earning Karma

"That's all fine and good, but how do I *get* Karma points?" you might ask. Well, there are two ways. First, players can **earn Karma** when they role-play their Flaws. If it causes their character significant inconvenience, the GM may toss them a Karma point. This gives players a concrete reason to get into character, and get their characters into trouble.

The second way is called **Karmic Kredit**; at the beginning of a game session, each player can "buy" a few Karma points. (The limit is up to the GM, but we recommend 1-3.) The catch is that, for each point they buy, they also get one point of Bad Karma (see below). This also means that players don't have to keep track of their Karma from one session to the next. Convenient.

Of course, the GM can also give out Karma for anything else that deserves a reward.

## **Bad Karma**

**Bad Karma** is used just like regular (good) Karma... but by the GM and for the NPCs. However, NPCs don't actually earn or have Bad Karma; the *players* generate it from Karmic Kredit, by activating their Talents, or for doing anything the GM thinks deserves an out-of-character punishment (like ignoring their character's Philosophy). The GM just keeps it all in a single pool to use as they see fit. Bad Karma is a *great* way to protect important characters, ensure successful ambushes, or to justify any other wickedness GMs tend to perpetrate on their players!

## **Fun with Failure**

In most RPGs, a failed check means that an action just falls flat. That's not too entertaining. Instead, "failed" actions should complicate things for the PCs; they won't get the game effect they were looking for, but they won't trip over their own feet, either.

For example, Indiana Jones rarely whiffs anything outright. His wide punches and missed shots always end up alerting more enemies, destroying valuable artifacts, annoying an ally, etc.

It takes a bit more work, but it's a lot more fun!

# Action & Combat

Action is what Nameless does best, but the rules are only half of the equation. To get the most out of Nameless, players and GMs have to give vivid, inventive descriptions of their characters' actions. Stop thinking in terms of rounds and initiative and start thinking like a movie stunt coordinator! Instead of firing off a bullet each round, unload a full clip in a single action. Don't just take a swing at your opponent, sweep their legs out from beneath them and wrest their weapon away. Realistic timekeeping has no place in a Nameless game!

In fact, Nameless doesn't even have an initiative system. It's up to the GM to switch between different parts of a fight as the needs of the story dictate. This is a game of drama, not realism. Fights are far more engrossing when players and NPCs can trade a series of blows before focus switches to another character, rather than limiting each person to one action every ten minutes.

If the order in which characters do things ever becomes important (quick draw contests, interrupting actions, etc), have everyone involved draw a card against their Reflex plus the skill being used. Characters who succeed act in descending order of their draws, with ties happening simultaneously. Everyone who fails acts last, in descending order.

## The Basics

To make an **attack**, add your character's Brawn or Agility to a combat Skill. The target gets a chance to **defend** themselves with an Unskilled action (aka. Dodge) or Skilled action (AKA Block). Whoever gets the higher, successful result wins. Unskilled defenses just get you out of danger, while Skilled defenses can result in counter-attacks (see sidebar). This pattern can be applied to magical and psychic contests as well as car chases, gunfights, and good old fashioned fisticuffs.

- Unskilled Defense (Dodge) - Double Reflex.
- Skilled Defense (Block) - Reflex plus a combat Skill.

All attacks should be phrased in terms of the desired end result ("Knock him out," "Kill 'em," "disarm," etc). Since Nameless doesn't use traditional hit points, health levels, or damage modifiers, "I try to hit him" is rarely sufficient for determining what *actually happens* when an attack succeeds. Plus, this game is all about *style*, so be creative!

If an attacker puts their victim in a **lock or hold**, they should give the card they drew to the victim's player. Whenever that character attempts something that would be hampered by the hold, their card has to beat that card to be considered successful. This system can also be used for any kind of magic or other strangeness that prevents characters from doing things. Quick and easy.

## Getting Hit

Every successful attack in a Nameless game can take a character out of a fight. Shot with an uzi, hit over the head with a barstool, elbow smashed in the face... it's all the same in Nameless. Again, this

isn't meant to be realistic. It's meant to be fast, simple, and to encourage creative stunts over bigger, badder weapons. In fact, the only real reason to use a gun instead of your fists should be the ability to attack from a distance.

Nameless includes three different methods for handling injury. Try each of them out and go with whatever works best for you.

**The Stamina System:** Each character gets a number of Stamina Points equal to their Stamina Ability score (big surprise). When they get hit, they mark off a point and "work through the pain." When they're out of Stamina, they're still in the fight, but the next hit will take them down for good. Stamina refreshes whenever the GM thinks it should; it's like when an action movie hero gets his "second wind" after wading through a dozen goons to reach the main villain. Speaking of mooks, minor characters shouldn't even get Stamina points. When they get hit, they stay down.

**The Wounds System:** When a character gets hit, they have to make an unskilled Stamina check to remain conscious. Even if they succeed, they take one Wound (poker chips work well for these). Wounds make future Stamina checks harder: if the card doesn't beat the number of wounds a character has, it counts as a failure. Severe wounds, like stab wounds or gunshot wounds, take longer to heal and probably require quick medical attention, but they count the same as any other wounds for Stamina checks. Again, minor characters always fail their Stamina checks. (For more grit, make *all* actions have to beat a character's wounds to succeed!)

**The Recovery System:** When a character gets hit, they're knocked down and out... at least temporarily. Getting back up requires an unskilled Stamina check... and a dramatically appropriate amount of time. GMs can hand out penalty cards for heavily injured characters, or use the Wounds system (above) to create a steady build-up of injuries. This system encourages good defense and allows a successful attacker to press their advantage: their victims have to recover before they can defend themselves further. As usual, minor characters always fail their Stamina checks.

## Weapons & Armor

Nameless does not give damage modifiers for **weapons**. The reasons for this are: 1) it means less number crunching during the game, and 2) it encourages players to select weapons that fit their characters, rather than just grabbing whatever does the most damage. That's not to say that all weapons are the same, though. Most obviously, some let you make attacks from a distance while others are limited to personal reach. More exotic items might even grant Bonus Cards to certain kinds of actions, like using a whip to disarm an opponent.

However, if the fact that fists are just as dangerous as bullets doesn't fit your style of play, there are ways to make severe injuries more deadly. (Red and blue poker chips work great for keeping track of different wound types, by the way.)

1. Turn Stamina checks against severe injuries into skilled actions, OR
2. Impose a penalty card on Stamina checks against severe injuries, OR
3. Don't let severe wounds heal as quickly, or without medical attention.

If a character is wearing **armor**, give them a bonus card on their Stamina checks OR don't charge Stamina points for attacks the armor can absorb. If a character is using a **shield**, give them a bonus card to their blocks and/or dodges. End of story.

### **Optional Rule: Counter-Attacks**

If the attacker fails their check, but the defender makes a successful Skilled defense (ie. Block), the defender can immediately draw another card using their defense result as the new Target Number. This is called a counter-attack and cannot be defended against.

The player chooses the exact result, which can be pretty much anything: a hit for damage, a lock or hold, a disarm, or even a Jedi-style missile deflection stunt. (That's why Dodges don't count: it takes *skill* to counterattack!)

This rule adds a tactical element to combat and can be used to create interesting combination moves.

### **Optional Rule: Deadlier Combat**

If the generous defense rules are turning your combats into drawn out whiff fests, try this!

If the attack succeeds, but the defense succeeds with a higher card, the attack is negated.

If the attack succeeds *and* the defense succeeds, but it's not higher than the attacker's card, the defender takes a wound. (See "The Wounds System" at left.)

If the attacker succeeds and the defense fails, the attacker has scored a "kill shot" and fully achieves the desired result (incapacitation, disarm, lock, etc).

This system will make combat deadlier for everyone, but especially for characters who can't fight well. It makes an excellent complement to the "Counter-Attacks" rule in the sidebar above.

# Magic & Other Strangeness

All right, fine! Here are some example magic skills. Are you happy, now?

**Shamanism** - The power to see, communicate with, and command the spirits that inhabit every person, place, and thing in nature. However, the more powerful the spirit, the bigger the favor they'll ask in return. Spirits could want just about anything, from food offerings to vows of loyalty.

**Telekinesis** - The ability to create force by thought. The psychic can levitate, push, crush, or shatter anything they can see. (The GM should determine how much force an average telekinetic can produce, but limiting it to normal human strength is usually pretty balanced.)

**Occult Lore** - A broad knowledge of mythology, rituals, and the Black Arts in general. Occultists know ritual spells for any occasion (though they can take hours to complete), have a command of occult history, and can identify magical creatures, objects, and phenomena. Skills in Nameless are meant to be broad in scope, and the mystical arts are no exception. If you want a character with magic powers, you should talk to your GM about what you want your magic to do. You'll have to determine the limits of the new magical skill, what the character sacrifices to use it, and get your GM's approval. Elementalism, Kaballah, and Shamanism would all make great magical Skills.

Alternatively, more focused paranormal abilities can be created as Talents or Tricks. Astral Sight, Levitation, and Tarot Divination are all good possibilities. Magical flaws like "Apocalyptic Visions," "Missing Time," or "Sees the Dead" can add a lot of depth and detail to a character.

In most games, Magic will work best if it follows some kind of internal logic. "Because its MAGIC!" is rarely an adequate explanation. Manipulating astral energies, making deals with supernatural beings, self-sacrifice, and complex symbolic or numerological systems are all valid magical techniques found in the real world. Feel free to use them... at least as inspiration.

The key is to treat magical actions like any other actions. Magical attacks can work using the basic rules for action & combat: just substitute Magic skills for Combat skills, and swap Will or Intellect for Brawn and Agility. Characters defending themselves from magic can use Skilled or Unskilled actions, with the optional rules for Counter-Attacks. Handle injuries and locks/holds as normal.

At this point, you might be saying to yourself, "They think this is a magic system? They didn't even give me any magical skills or spells or anything. What a rip-off!" If so... you've got some attitude, mister! Besides, we feel that leaving the magic system wide open like this makes it easier for players and GMs to customize magic to any campaign. Whether you're running modern magic, high fantasy, or psionics, the same basic rules can always be applied.

# Character Generation

Like everything else in Nameless, creating characters should be a fast and fluid process. Most RPGs tell you to start with a "character concept" in mind, and that's a perfectly reasonable way to do things. However, going into this process with only vague ideas like your character's profession, back story, or function within the group is also perfectly acceptable. Do whatever works best for you... and only what you have time for. (That goes double for GMs creating NPCs!)

## Philosophy

This is a statement of how the character views the world; it serves as a personality-in-a-can for NPCs and helps players decide how to approach problems and moral choices. It can be as long and detailed as a list of religious commandments or as short and vague as "Always look out for number one." It has no real game effects, though a GM can certainly give out Bad Karma for acting against your character's philosophy (without a good excuse).

## Motivation

Simply put, this is the reason your character does what they do. Personal quests, revenge, duty, and honor are all good places to start. Discuss with the GM whether it would be better to have a long-term goal that would last many adventures or a more focused, specific goal that might have to change as the game goes on. Needless to say, the best motivations are tied into the plot and setting.

Whenever your character is confronted with a situation that's directly related to their Motivation, they automatically get a bonus card for all their actions. (Note: Don't let players take things like "Obsessed with Death" just because they want a bonus card during combat. If they really wanna be serial killers, make them act like serial killers!) This means that motivations need to be narrow, too. A good Motivation gives a character focus and gets them *into* more trouble than it solves.

## Flaws & Talents

Every character should have at least one **Flaw** because that's how you earn Karma during play. Things like Oblivious (never notices anything that's not in her face), Honorable (refuses to fight dirty or set traps), Paranoid (thinks X is pursuing/watching him), and Curious (can't leave any stone unturned... even when there's probably a snake under it) are good examples. Flaws should be things that can be easily role-played without resorting to cards.

Any time a player acts out one of their character's flaws *and it makes things difficult for them*, the GM should give them a point of Karma.

Characters can also have **Talents**, and GMs should encourage their players to use them, because they generate Bad Karma during play. Talents are special advantages a character can call upon without using cards. Good examples include Ridiculously Wealthy (has access to lot of toys and cash), Contacts (knows people in high places), and Regeneration (ignores acute and minor injuries like punches and gunshots).

When a player uses one of their character's talents to gain a special benefit, the GM puts a point of Bad Karma into the pool. (Note: Since there are no special weapon modifiers in Nameless, Talents used in combat way not merit any Bad Karma. Only hand it out when there are *special* benefits.)

## Abilities

Nameless uses Abilities to represent a character's basic physical and mental attributes. Each is rated from 1-5 with 1 being virtually crippled, 3 being good, and 5 being peak condition. Players should get 18 points to split between:

1. **B**rawn - Strength, endurance, and general physical condition.
2. **A**gility - Balance, coordination, and manual dexterity.
3. **P**erception - The physical (and magical and psychic) senses.
4. **I**ntellect - Memory, command of information, and reasoning ability.
5. **W**ill - Mental fortitude. (Often used with psychic and magical skills.)
6. **C**harisma - Social skills. (Use with any skill to find contacts in that field.)

In addition, there are two Derived Abilities:

- **R**eflex - Used for defensive actions; average of Agility and Perception, rounded up.
- **S**tamina - Used to resist injury; average of Brawn and Will, rounded up.

You can also create unique abilities that are tailored to your game. Common examples are:

**Honor:** Increases and decreases based on the character's actions; used to command respect, resist temptations or coersions, etc.

**(In)Sanity:** Increases and decreases based on mind-bending experiences; used to resist madness, peer into the unknown, use twisted psychic/magical powers, etc.

## Skills & Tricks

**Skills** are things a character has learned through study or training. They should be broad, more like professions than individual tasks. (For example, a thief should use "Cat Burglar" instead of "Pick Pockets," "Sneak Around," and "Crack Safes.") Like abilities, they're rated from 1-5. Talk to your GM about how many total skill points your character should have: 8-10 is usually good for a professional charater, while 10-12 is more like an expert or highly-trained special operative.

If you'd like a skill that's narrower than recommended, turn it into a Trick. **Tricks** are focused skills, magic spells, limited powers, etc. They don't get a rating and only cost one "skill point" against your total. This means you can't add them to an ability to get a target number; instead, you get to treat actions based on the trick as Unskilled and add two abilities together to get your target number.

Nameless does not provide a list of skills for you to choose from. Besides being a waste of space, we couldn't possible think of all the skills you'd need in any game. Besides, it's sooo much more fun to make them up (and name them) yourself. Don't knock it 'til ya try it!

There are no rules for "advancement" in Nameless; if you want to tweak a character during play, just shuffle their Skill points around. (People have to use their skills if they don't want to lose them, and there are only enough hours in the day to be good at so many things!) Talents, Flaws, nifty gear, and in-character benefits can all be used to develop characters during play.

## **Gear**

There are no game mechanics for gear beyond using bonus and penalty cards. Usually, you can describe what an item lets a character do in words alone and just role-play it out. As far as chargen goes, characters should always begin play with any gear they need to use their Skills. Beyond that, make them justify their gear with talents, flaws, bribes, etc.

## **Mooky Stats**

Don't bother writing up complete game stats for minor characters. It really *is* just a waste of time, and most mooks wouldn't have Motivations, Talents, or Flaws anyway!

Instead, you should just decide how competent you want your mooks to be and give them a few Target Numbers to use (if they need game stats at all).

For example:

- Cop: Combat (5) Police Work (6) Sneak (4)
- Scholar: Field of Study (8) Social Skills (4)