Abstract

The nightmare of modern office life: a dehumanizing environment – the kind of thing that makes you a cog in the machine – a number. Faced with that, driven to a breaking point, humans create their own petty fiefdoms, or Get Out.

Frogger is about Getting Out. The artwork on the side of the old Frogger arcade console depicts a frog as an office worker, trying to get away, get across obstacles, and get to the thing he wants – the thing he needs. That's what this is about. You're a *Frogger*.

Figuring out the Setting

There are any number of settings in which this kind of story can take place. Below, we'll take a look at the 'dials' that you can set to determine the kind of setting you'll be playing in.

The Reality Dial: Office Space *vs.* Shawn of the Dead

How 'realistic' is the game going to be in tone? Something as much like the real world as possible, or elements that you can reasonably expect to only see in a movie or a roleplaying game?

The Tone Dial: Harold & Kumar *vs.* Falling Down

Are you going for zany comedy or dark, harrowing drama? Talk about this so that you don't run into a problem where some of the people playing expect wacky hijinx and some of expect blood-operas.

The Group Veto

Everyone has a lot of freedom to introduce elements into either their or other's scenes; however if someone introduces something that two or more people at the table think is inappropriate, that player needs to reset that contribution and try again.

Character Creation

1. **Name** your character.
2. Define the **role** that you character fills in the corporate world.
3. Define three or more **Traits**, each rated from 1 (eh) to 6 (incredible). You have 12 points to distribute.
3a. Traits can be anything from expertise in a particular area, to a natural ability, to a noteworthy attribute.
4. **Add details** about the character. Clothing, general appearance, unusual physical features, et cetera.
5. **Add stuff** you'd like or that makes sense for the character to have in that setting and the setting.
6. Decide on your **Breaking Point** – that moment in which your character decides that he has to Get Out.
7. Write down your character's **Home** – the goal they are pursuing.

The System: Watching the Clock

Every character has at least three Traits – possibly more -- ranging from 1 to 6. Every Scene in the game involves successfully winning a Conflict, AKA "crossing traffic". The player for that Conflict picks a number between 1 and 12 (as on the face of a clock), then rolls one twelve-sided dice (or draws a card from the "Conflict" deck of cards) – essentially, the player is trying to guess the number that is about to come up on the die or on the card. (Jacks, Queens, and Kings count as 11s, 12s, and 13s, respectively, so using cards makes conflict a bit more of a challenge, but you don't need weird dice to play.)

If you have a Trait that applies to the Conflict, you don't have to guess the number exactly – you just have to get close; you can move forward or back on the clock face from the number you guessed, trying to reach the random number you rolled or drew. If the distance between the two numbers is less than or equal to your Trait's score, you succeed.

If you don't have an appropriate Trait, you have to guess the randomized number exactly.

Earning Experience: Getting Paid Time Off

If you are close enough to the target number that you didn't have to use the full range of moment allowed by your Trait to reach it, the number of "unused" points are added to your experience total.

Critical Success: Punching the Clock

When you have an appropriate Trait and guess the target number exactly, you have get a critical success – the Scene works out in the best way that it possibly can – probably better than you might have hoped. In addition, a Critical Success gives you a 1-point bonus to your next Conflict roll (but not to any do overs involved).

Critical Success also doubles the number of experience points you receive.

Using Experience: Learning Behavior

It costs 6 experience points to gain a brand new Trait at 1, 12 points to increase a 1-point Trait to 2, 18 to increase a 2-point to 3, et cetera.

Stuff You're Gonna Need

1. These rules
2. Copies of the player sheets
3. Paperclips to track bad karma
4. A deck of cards for Complications.
5. Either one twelve-sided dice or another deck of playing cards for Conflicts.

Jargon

Bad Karma. A measure of how currently screwed your character is. Bad Karma accrues when a Conflict goes badly, and you get rid of it either by paying Karmic debt or Spreading the Misery.

The Boss. One person playing the game doesn't make up a character. The Boss sets up Scenes, helps figure out Conflicts in those scenes, moves the action from one character to the next, and plays most every character in the story not under the control of the rest of the players.

Breaking Point. The moment near the beginning of the character's story where the character decides they are going to try to change things. The Inciting Event.

Conflict. A point in the story where your character attempts to overcome a challenge that's been put in his or her way to prevent them getting Home.

D12. A twelve-sided dice.

Details. You are a special. You are a beautiful and unique snowflake.

Lanes of Traffic. Conflicts that must be got over in order to get Home. You get home by crossing five Lanes successfully before you fail to cross five lanes.

Home. The ultimate goal that your character wants to achieve by Getting Out.

Role. Exactly what kind of cog in the corporate machine the character is.

Scene. An interaction between the player's character whose turn it currently is, and any number of other characters (played either by other players or The Boss).

Traits. Qualities that you character possesses at some level that is notably above the norm.

Example Frogger *character for an Alien Invasion game*

Name: Marcus Lamont
Role: Nighttime security guard at UStore-Here.
Traits: Ex-jock: 4, Good with Puzzles: 5, and Doesn't get worked up: 3.
Details: Big ex-football player in decent shape, a chipped-tooth smile, and big hands.
Stuff: On the job, carries a night stick, a radio, a cell phone, and his gun (never fired).
Breaking Point: His shift partner is vaporized by the Alien Invaders
Home: His brother Carl's house; he wants to get his brother, sister-in-law, and their kids out of town.

Crossing Traffic: An Overview of Play

All conflicts in *Frogger* are conducted using the sequence of play and steps below.

1. The player or The Boss establishes a Scene by building off of either the Breaking Point or whatever the last scene was, establishing the desires of the character, and drawing one card from the **Complication Deck**. A **Scene** happens when something is going on somewhere in the story that involves stuff that the players actually <u>care</u> about, and should always lead to a Conflict.

2. The players establish the opening of the Scene and play through it to a point of Conflict. Other players can increase the Severity of a Complication by spending Bad Karma.

3. Either a player or the Boss initiates Conflict, determining the Goal of everyone involved and what character Traits, if any, apply.

4. "Fair and Clear": determine actions, context, and events; the Boss sets Modifiers and other players can spend Bad Karma for one-time penalties.

4a. The Fair and Clear Rule: *Nothing 'counts' until the players involved guess their number and either draw a card or roll that die.* <u>Until then</u>, everyone gets to say what they're going to do, listen to what OTHER people say they're going to do, and if they want, change their plans… which lets the other people change THEIR plans, and so forth, until it all gets sorted out. You <u>must</u> let it get sorted out. Everyone has to agree exactly on who is doing what to and with whom before anyone goes to Conflict Resolution.

4b. Modifiers: The Boss may add a Penalty or Bonus to a given roll (reducing or increasing the effective Trait by 1 or 2). The player may have earned Bad Karma (which reduces the chance of success, see below). If a penalty reduces your effective Trait below 0, you automatically fail. Boss-applied modifiers and Bad Karma penalties apply to *all* rolls, including Do Overs. See Also: Spreading the Misery, below.

5. Resolve the Conflict by conducting a Trait Check for all player characters; provide narration and outcomes as dictated by success or failure. Players can get "do overs" (see below) if they like, but eventually, one way or the other, a Conflict ends. Note: the mechanics in *Frogger* resolve **whole conflicts** –do a Trait check to see if you got what you wanted, period, in the whole scene.

6. Someone narrates the results of the Conflict, and you move on to the next player. Lather, rinse, repeat.

6a. The Boss usually narrates both wins and losses for a Conflict

7. Character vs. Character conflicts: see *Working Together* and *Working Against Each Other*, below.

The Do Over

When you fail a Trait check, you may "Do over" by accepting a Bad Karma token. The effect of Bad Karma is that your Traits are reduced in effectiveness by one for each Bad Karma token currently in your possession – this effect even penalizes your do over attempts, and since you cannot attempt a do over if your chance of success has been reduced to less than zero, there is a hard but variable limit (depending on your Trait level) on the number of attempts possible. A *s*eries of do overs does not have to be based on the same Trait from beginning to end, however, so be aware that this limit can change.

Failing the first check means the character failed in a non-critical way. The player or Boss narrate how. The player can choose to Give at this point or may take a point of Bad Karma to call for a Do Over. Failing the subsequent checks means that the character failed again in progressively more serious ways. At any point, the Conflict can stop, either due to player victory, the player conceding the Conflict, or Bad Karma building up to the point where the character's relevant Traits are effectively less than zero.

Bad Karma: Paying your Karma Debt

The first way to get rid of accumulated Bad Karma is to take the Karmic Hit. On your next turn, announce you are going to pay off your karmic debt. Erase one of the *Successful* Conflicts that on your character sheet and narrate an appropriate setback on you progress toward Home. Once this is done, hand all Bad Karma back to The Boss, and play your turn normally.

Bad Karma: Spreading the Misery

If you're having a bad day, why not drag others down with you? On another player's turn, you can spend a point of Bad Karma against the player in question, either to significantly increase the severity of the Complications involved in the scene, or to give them a –1 penalty on ONLY the first Trait check in that Scene's Conflict. You can only spend on Bad Karma per scene in this manner.

Working Together

The rules for working together are simple: both (or all) involved characters make Trait checks, and if either (or any) of you succeed, it counts as a success, but only for the character to whom this scene belongs. If the character who 'owns' the scene calls for a Do Over, *both* characters take a point of Bad Karma.

Working Against Each Other

When two characters are truly working directly against one another, the group needs to make very sure that everyone knows exactly who's doing what during Free and Clear. Once that's done, both players roll and calculate the amount that they made their check by (failing the check entirely always counts as a -1). The character with a higher degree of success is considered the winner. Neither side gets experience. In the event of one side calling for a Do Over during a "Vs." conflict, BOTH participants must do over their Trait check, but *only* the player calling for the do over earns Bad Karma. The Boss narrates the results of all all Frogger-vs.-Frogger conflicts.

Winning

The character wraps up a conflict and checks of the fifth "win" box on their sheet. They get one more scene, where they "get Home" – get what they want and ride into the sunset.

Losing

Not everyone's going to win. Winning is going to be hard, and Losing is going to hurt. Regardless of who narrates, remember this: make that final, wrap up, "your guy lost" scene as awesome as possible.

The Complication Deck

Before any scene is laid out, the primary player involved draws one card from the Complication Deck. The card drawn determines complications the Scene should involve and Severity.

Spades: Technical difficulties

The Scene should involve some kind problem with technology, gear, belongings, et cetera.

Clubs: That's gonna leave a mark

Clubs mean violence, and depending on the Tone of the game, this could be fairly serious.

Diamonds: Paying the Devil

The problem is money. Wrap the story's fist around a roll of quarters and sock em in the mouth.

Hearts: Love hurts

All's fair in Love… so grab that Love and shoot 'em in the face.

The Joker: Getting Ganged Up On

The hits just keep on coming: the player draws two more complication cards uses them both.

Severity

The bigger the card that you drew, the worse things are. For severity only, aces are biggest card in each suit.

Do Over Example:
Theresa is trying to talk a cop out of giving her a speeding ticket, but she blows her unskilled check – the cop isn't interested in hearing about her sick… umm… aunt… Margie opts to go for a Do Over; she takes a Bad Karma token and in the follow-up check announces that she's going to be using her Voracious Reader Trait. How? I have no idea – that's for the player to explain…

Boss Tip: Lanes of Traffic

The Highway: Discreet Threats

For the first half of a story, keep the Conflict simple and discreet – establish the main threats.

The Median: Taking Stock

About halfway through, present a moment to reflect on how very very far they've got to go. Inject doubt.

The River: In Over Your Head

The character dives in for the last big push for Home, and you want that water swirling into their mouth and ears. Keep the pressure up and push the scenes in a way that makes the players want to succeed even if it means lots of Bad Karma.

Frogger character sheet

Name:
Role:
Traits:
Details:
Stuff:
Breaking Point:
Home: