



Winter Rails RPG

Role-playing Rail families in an Ice Age

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Preface

The ingredients used in the challenge to create this game are “Games must use colours as a mechanic”, “Families”, "Nature always takes back what's hers", using parrots, Jolly Roger, safe port and swashbuckling without it being a pirate game, and the train image used on the front cover. Though not an officially used mechanic, the game is partially inspired by the board game 1830.

The game is set in a world that was starting to industrialise with great railways built between the cities that has fallen into an Ice Age. The cold caused crops to fail and widespread famine in the cities, which led to widespread rioting and lawlessness. The local communities in the country were better off with herds that they could keep in barns and keep food supplied to the local people. The trains were taken and run between the communities by the original workers who over three generations became family units running the trains between communities. Inevitably though greed and desperation saw greedy men capture some trains from the weaker families and become the robber barons on the rails of whom everyone lives in fear.

Characters in the game are members of a family who run a train within the setting. Each character has a role within the family and a special innate ability that they use for the benefit of the family unit. To the train men and women who run the gauntlet through the frozen winter family is everything, they are the people you can really trust. Some assembly is required to play the game as the cards in Appendix B will need to be printed out and cut up for the players to use. It is suggested about two sheets of statistic cards be printed per player and one sheet of combat cards.

Throughout the rules I have coloured important rules and tables in a dark and light blue to ensure that they stand out. Examples of the rules are given in light green boxes to try and ensure that the rules can be clearly understood.



Chapter 1 Setting

In the Beginning

The World of Escarthia was created by the Goddess Nature with the help of the God Progress. In the beginning Progress had little to do and left most of the actual work of building the world to Nature. Nature set up the trees and the animals on the world and ensured that they survived in perfect balance that would see the world run itself throughout time. Exhausted from her labours and seeing that the world would run itself Nature fell asleep.

Progress was not satisfied with the world as it was. It did not develop and did not move on and excite him. So he created a race called Humans on the world that had an inbuilt desire to strive for something better. They would not just kill what they needed to survive, they would be better and devise ways to be more efficient so that they could move on and create new things. Although Progress was happy with Humanity he wanted to give them something extra that would give them an advantage. So he dipped his hand into the Well of Eternity and drew forth mystical abilities that would give the Humans advantages in their dealings with the world.

Early Development

Initially Progress was happy with the results as the Humans began to develop tools to help them hunt and expand. But then, as the humans started to meet they started to fight each other. Progress was upset as the endless fighting was reducing the numbers of Humans and also he initially believed prevented progress. So Progress began to interfere with humanity by giving visions to three humans that inspired them to set up temples to him. So the three great cities of Progrestor, Devlos and Halania on Escarthia were founded by the prophets Mesqua, Joulondes and Haram. They preached against the barriers to Progress on the world and revealed that the source of Humanities mystical powers to be Progress. If Progress were not worshipped then the Priests taught that peoples powers would fade and

humanity would go back to being like the animals that still inhabited the wild areas.

These revelations helped cement longer periods of peace in the world and development continued apace. The discovery of bronze, then iron and steel brought about the crafting of weaponry that helped people hunt and kill nature better. People prospered and expanded, cutting down forests to build new dwellings and fuel fires.

The Waking of Nature

There were still many though that followed the old ways and retained the knowledge of Nature and her great works building the world. The Naturists had lived secluded lives in the wilds, but were increasingly encroached upon by the expanse of the rest of humanity. The Priests of Nature travelled far to meet in a conclave and there they decided that they must perform a great ritual to wake the sleeping Goddess so that she might see for herself the damage that humanity had caused upon her world.

The ritual was long and complicated but ultimately was a success. Nature began to stir and to flex her roots in the world. This was felt by many in the increasing number of earthquakes during this period.

Nature's Initial Reaction

Nature awoke to see what had become of the world she had created and she was not pleased. She gave powers to her Priests to communicate with the animals on the world so that they could help save them from Progress' humans. This act was too little and was not stemming the tide, so she began to use her greater powers to try and remove humanity from the world. She sent typhoon's, hurricanes and terrible whirlwinds to try and rip humanity from Escarthia. However the humans were resilient and rebuilt their homes, ripping down more of Nature's forests to repair their homes. Nature was thwarted temporally and decided to end this tactic against her enemies. This ended the Time of Storms.

The Industrial Revolution

The discovery of coal some two hundred years ago really brought Progress a stage further. Coal led to a number of discoveries involving the production of steam including heating in the homes of the growing cities and the invention of the Steam engine. Now travel between the Cities and the outlying villages would be possible and great effort was spent in laying track down to bring trade and people closer together. Several fledgling companies were formed by like minded people to develop new track and services to the different parts of Escarthia.

The Ice Age Cometh

Meanwhile Nature was plotting once again for the downfall of humanity. She began to slowly but surely shift the axis of the world, altering its weather patterns to bring colder weather to the world. Then finally Nature tipped the world over the threshold and a permanent change to the climate came about. Ice and snow filled the world and temperatures plummeted. Crops failed and humanity with little feed their herds dwindled. The great Cities of Escarthia had massive food shortages and people began to starve to death. Fighting and rioting broke out as man killed man for food.

Many of the outlying villages survived by keeping what little food they had for themselves, though they soon found they still needed to trade for things they could not get locally.

The people running the trains fled from the cities on the trains to the countryside, though they had to work hard to keep the trains running. Snowfalls on the line were a constant danger and the engineers developed ploughs on the front of the trains to help get them through the smaller ones. Sabotage from Nature's Priests was another constant danger, but the people running the trains learnt to use spotters and trained Parrots to keep an eye on the track ahead and warn of breaks in the rails. Known areas of trouble were flagged with a skull and crossbones on a black

background to warn other trains that the region ahead contained trouble. This has since become the universal symbol for trouble amongst Railwaymen. The Railwaymen would trade their services for food and coal as a new barter system became the norm with the collapse of the economy. The people running the trains would often have an expert in negotiation on board to ensure they got a fair trade for their services.

The World Today

The original company men who took off on the trains bred over the past three generations and have become almost like a family on the train. The need to prevent incest on the trains heightened over the years and train families would meet up at times on the lines and discuss potential alliances between the families through marriage. Oft-times husbands and wives would switch trains to join their new partner and bring new blood to the train. They would be expected to give their full loyalty to the new train and bring no conflicted loyalties from their previous train.

The cities became so bad over the years that they were fully abandoned due to disease and lack of food. The fortunate ones managed to flee to relatives in the country, but many were left to starve and die.

The Robber Barons

A few of the desperate people escaped from the cities to the countryside and took up the status of bandits, trying to take what they could. Since they had no interest in taking over a community and becoming farmers themselves they needed some way of moving themselves around the land to be able to take what they wanted. They soon realised that the idea solution would be for them to take over a train themselves and move around and take what they wanted. These robber barons used force to take over a train (before the families realised and started to arm themselves) and enslaved any survivors, forcing them to drive the train for them. There are a number of notable robber barons and their trains including Faroosh

the Cutthroat on the Ghost Express. The train is painted entirely white to try and camouflage itself against the snowy background.

Life on the Trains

Life onboard the trains is a hard but satisfying life. Everyone running the train is part of the family and is therefore someone who you owe loyalty to. Betraying a member of the family to outsiders is a crime that is dealt with harshly by the head of the family. Other major disciplinary behaviours on the train are wilful sabotage and negligence of duty. Different families administer different punishments for transgressors, though due to the close knit nature of train families these are usually rare occurrences.

The head of a train family is usually the eldest member of the family or the person who has the most experience in running the train. They make key decisions on the destination of the train and on disciplinary measures. Where there is no priest onboard they often are the ones to conduct naming ceremonies, marriages and death rites.

Death Rites are usually conducted beside the track and a small train wheel with a name is usually used to mark the grave. Where possible bodies are usually saved until the train passes one of a number of burial sites that the family uses. Whenever the train passes the burial site it slows down as a mark of respect for fallen comrades.

Marriages are conducted using the traditional words from the Book of Progress given below.

Of Lord of Progress bless this union
Of [male name] and [female name]
So that they may bring advancement to the world
And follow the guidance of your prophets.

May they bring forth the next generation
Through their love and commitment to each other
So that they will bring more of your bounties to
The world and be given your many blessings.

Seal this union between the tracks
So that they shall be together in your eyes.

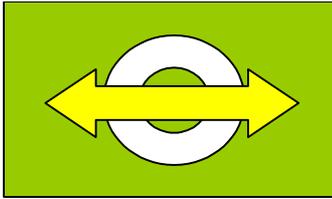
The defence of the train is usually given to the senior member of the security team on the train known as the Chief Guard. The Chief Guard's responsibility is to ensure that the train and all the members of the family remain safe and that his Guards are wary to any threat. At times the Chief Guard can over-rule the Engine Driver and the Head of the Family though there is no established procedure for this. As a result this can sometimes lead to disagreements and tensions that can factionalise a family. Such family strife is a source of great sadness and discomfort to their members. They will not however communicate this strife to other families as this would expose the family to ridicule.

At the age of about 13 a member of the family who has been pious enough receives a gift from Progress. At this time they grow out of their baby name (such as Cog, Sprocket, Daisywheel or Piston) and are formally named to the family in the presence of Progress. The naming ceremony is a source of much pride amongst rail families and the child who is named is made to feel special for around a week around their naming ceremony. Those that do not receive a blessing from Progress are left at the next opportunity at the Siding Shed. This is very unusual and a great source of shame for the individual involved.

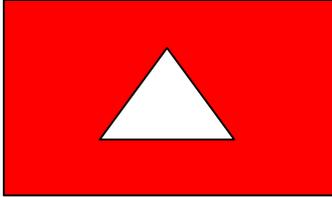
The Signals

The old signals are no longer used as they once were during the industrial age. In those times they were used to signal the status of the points ahead and whether a train could enter a new piece of track. Since each train now keeps a watch out ahead and also that there is no longer anyone to man these, these are no longer used in that way. Instead train families hang flags upon them to pass messages to other passing trains. This could be a warning of danger or could be a request by the family for a gathering at their Siding Shed. Messages usually start with the family flag followed by up to three or four more flags to provide a coherent message.

Some example flags are given below:-



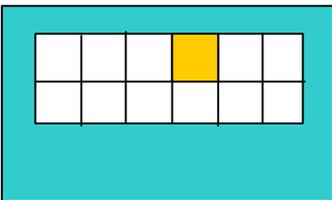
Family Meet



Snowfalls likely



Our Siding



Month number



Poor Track Ahead

Siding Sheds

The Siding Sheds are the safe port where the train goes to do major repairs. The sheds are occupied mainly by family members who are not blessed with progress whose responsibility is to keep them clean, tidy and safe. The Siding Sheds of train families are used as meeting points for a number of families to discuss politics, marriages and issues affecting the entire way of life. Typically meet of all the families occur annually and are arranged a year in advance, though there are often smaller ones called with up to a months notice to discuss more urgent issues.

Parrots

Each train family maintains a group of trained swift flying parrots who are used to scout ahead of the train and bring back news of danger. They are trained at a young age to spot different danger signs and are taught the appropriate word for each. Examples of these words are “Train”, “Railbreak”, “Snowfall” and “Bandits”. The train usually has up to a dozen parrots that are bred and used in rotation to fly ahead and keep an eye on the track ahead. As the parrots can only fly up to 40 miles an hour, when they are scouting ahead the train is restricted to that speed.

Nature Worshippers

One of the biggest dangers to a train (apart from the Robber Barons) are the Nature Worshipping people who live in the wilds. They have abilities to dominate the wills of animals and can at times cause many problems for the train. The rise in the population of savage Polar Bears has led to security being tightened. A single Polar bear can often be fought by the swords and bows of the security team. But an attack by a pack of bears, particularly when the train is stopped can cause the train great difficulty. The train’s parrots can be mobbed by a murder of crows bent to the will of the Nature Worshipper.

Nature worshippers see the train system as one of the great evils of Progress and see it as a vital link in keeping the remainder of humanity alive and communicating. Trains and their crews are therefore one of their prime targets for attacks. The only blessing is that Nature Worshippers usually are in small groups that typically don’t co-ordinate between each other. If that were to happen the men and women of the trains would have a real battle on their hands.

Clothing and Getting Around

Train families tend to wear warm clothing, primarily furs as part of their normal daily work.

Wearing gloves is normal, except in doing fine detailed work that requires further manipulation. The wearing of furs further angers the Priests of Nature.

When not travelling by train members of Train families usually wear snow shoes. However if they are covering long distances, then they will sometimes use skis. In exceptional circumstances they will use ice skates if they must cross a frozen lake. These are capabilities that characters can take if they wish.

Adventure Seeds

To give GMs some idea of the sort of adventures that they can present players with in this setting six adventure seeds are detailed below. GMs can use these ideas or modify them as they see fit.

1. The Saboteur

The train crew pick up some passengers for a run from Allestone to Morbay. Each of the passengers is slightly odd, and when the train is sabotaged in the middle of the icy plains the train crew must work out who the saboteur is without ruining the train's reputation. Oh and they must repair the train before the forces of Nature attack!

2. Into the City

A man in the community at Morbay has discovered that his family hails from the city of Devlos and that they were the holders of great fortune. He wants to go into the dangers of the City and recover it and he'll pay well for a train crew prepared to take the risk. Of course the city is dangerous and the line will only take them in so far before it is impassable.

3. The Rescue

The train crew arrives at the small community of Doschun to find it devastated and only a small boy is left hiding amongst the coal sheds. His parents and the others have been taken by a group of Nature Priests who are to sacrifice them on Midwinter's day to allow Nature to make the winter even colder. The train crew must brave the wilds to go and rescue the villagers.

4. Up the Junction

The train crew arrives back at their Siding Shed to find that one of the boys not blessed with Mystical powers has absconded with a number of valuable train parts. Rumours on the line have it that he has joined up with a rival crew on The Auberge Express. Can the crew use diplomacy at the next family meet to recover the parts and their errant crew member?

5. The Baron's Catch

One of the train crew's parrots has returned to warn the crew of trouble ahead on the line. The scouts have gone out and reported that the notorious Robber Baron Jorge Valmond has attacked and captured the Ferris Flyer on the down line and is making it safe. Will the crew form a plan and go to their rescue?

6. Plague

Some members of the train crew have fallen ill with a mysterious disease which has started to spread. The doc has isolated the people into a single carriage and has done what he can for them, but he has never seen this disease before. Only a Priest of Nature could hope to save them, but what will the train crew have to do to get the enemy to help them before members of the family start dying?

Sample Non Player Characters

A number of sample NPC stats are given below.

Nature's Servants

a) Sample Nature Priest

Phy[4], Agi[7], Men[1], Per[4], Soc[5], Spi[4]
Borrowing (specific)
Priest (generic)
Bow (specific)
Endurance (generic)
Tracking (specific)
Preaching (specific)
Staff (specific)
Health - 6, Movement – 50 ft / round

b) Sample Nature Follower

Phy[4], Agi[7], Men[1], Per[7], Soc[2], Spi[4]
Acolyte (generic)
Notice (specific)
Bows (specific)
Dagger (specific)
Beserker (specific)
Tracking (specific)
Animal Channelling (specific)
Health - 6, Movement – 50 ft / round

c) Sample Polar Bear

Phy[7], Agi[7], Men[2], Per[4], Soc[1], Spi[1]
Powerful Jaws (specific)
Swim (specific)
Claws (specific)
Track by Smell (specific)
Thick Fur (specific)
Natural Instinct (generic)
x
Health - 9, Movement – 50 ft / round

Robbers

a) Sample Robber Baron

Phy[2], Agi[4], Men[4], Per[4], Soc[6], Spi[1]
Robber Baron (generic)
Tough as Nails (generic)
Leadership (specific)
Sword (specific)
Tactics (specific)
Eagle Eyed (specific)
Trade (generic)
Health - 5, Movement – 35 ft / round

b) Typical Robber Lackey

Phy[3], Agi[4], Men[4], Per[4], Soc[2], Spi[1]
Robber (generic)
Combat (generic)
Appraise (specific)
Bows (specific)
Gambling (specific)
Awareness (generic)
Carouse (generic).
Health - 5, Movement – 35 ft / round

Others

a) Sample Trader

Phy[2], Agi[3], Men[4], Per[4], Soc[2], Spi[1]
Trader (generic)
Tough Bargainer (specific)
Appraise (specific)
Persuade (specific)
Crossbow (specific)
Awareness (generic)
Fit (generic)
Health - 4, Movement – 30 ft / round



Chapter 2 Character Generation

Players generate characters in this game who are all members of a family running a train through the world of Escarthia. The players should jointly agree on a name for the family and a name for the train that they run.

The system uses coloured numbered cards that represent the temporary capability of a character in each area for a scene. The different areas that are represented are physical, mental, social, perception and spiritual strength.

Statistics

The game has six main statistics that help define the physical, mental and spiritual abilities of your character. These abilities that describe the character in the game are built up from the characters capabilities. Each statistic will start at a value of 1 and will gain a certain amount based on which capabilities are chosen for the character. The statistics represent the following:-

Physical

This statistic represents the physical prowess, strength and fitness of the character. It also represents both the physical fatigue that a character has as well as their resistance to diseases and poisons.

Agility

Agility represents how quickly you can physically react and how dextrous the character is in fiddly situations that require a steady hand.

Mental

This statistic represents the raw intelligence of the character representing his knowledge and capacity to think up innovative solutions. It also represents a measure of the mental determination to succeed as well as the mental endurance of the character.

Social

This statistic represents the characters ability to interact socially with and influence other people within the game. It is not only the ability to try and influence other people and bring about

different reactions in them. This includes performance abilities such as music and dance.

Perception

This statistic represents the characters ability to sense the world around him or her and is the ability to notice things out of the ordinary.

Spirit

This statistic represents the characters strength of soul and their personality. It also represents the strength of the characters ability to channel mystical based capabilities.

Capabilities

The capabilities for a character are the things that define who they are and what they can do. These can be skills a character would have, innate characteristics or a group of skills that define a role for a character. Capabilities can be generic or specific. Generic capabilities are ones that cover a number of skills. Examples are job roles such as Scout or Diplomat and broad definitions such as Charismatic. Generic capabilities generate 1 point for their associated statistic. Specific capabilities cover a single skill such as Climbing or Public Speaking. Specific capabilities generate 3 points for their associated statistic.

Characters can gain 7 capabilities for their characters, which are divided into four different categories below.

Job

Each character has at least one job on the train, though they can have up to 3 jobs. Jobs are by their nature generic capabilities. Some example jobs are given below with their associated statistics. This list is not exhaustive and players and GMs can come up with their own

Engineer (Physical)

The engineer job covers all the abilities involved in driving and navigating the train.

Scout (Perception)

The scout job on the train ensures that there are no threats to the train ahead and covers tracking, spotting and listening skills. If there is a snowfall

blocking the line ahead then the scouts range out to check that there isn't an ambush ahead.

Medic (Mental)

The medic aboard the train looks after all the injuries and wounds of the family including performing midwifery duties for the family.

Diplomat (Social)

The diplomat aboard the train is in charge of negotiations with other trains for the swapping of parts and for potential marriage matches. Sometimes the diplomat and the negotiator aboard a train are the same person and sometimes they are two separate individuals.

Negotiator (Social)

The negotiator on a train is responsible for getting supplies and negotiating contracts. Social skills and bargaining / trade skills come under this job.

Cook (Perception)

The cook is responsible for preparing meals for the family. They have skills in taste, smell, herbalism and cooking.

Repairman (Agility)

The repairman ensures the any defects on the train are repaired and are also responsible to supervising repairs to the track.

Security Man (Physical)

The train is defended by the security people on the train. All are armed with either swords or bows, and many trains have mounted crossbows on the roof.

Steward (Social)

The steward is responsible for the safety and comfort of any passengers on the train. They have social skills in ensuring the safety of the passengers.

Areas of Expertise

An area of expertise is alike a skill in a traditional RPG, but slightly widened. They can also be more descriptive things like "I know what your thinking" in place of something like Psychology. Many of these will be specific capabilities, though anything that is very general and covers

multiple skills should be classed as a generic capabilities. Players may choose as many of their capabilities as areas of expertise as they wish.

Physical Capabilities

Physical capabilities are innate special abilities that give the character an edge. Many of these relate to combat, but they could relate to other areas. Examples of physical capabilities are "Ambidextrous" (Physical), and "Nimble Fingers" (Agility). A character may take up to two physical capabilities. Some examples are given below, but players and GMs are welcome to come up with their own physical capabilities.

Ambidextrous (Physical)

An ambidextrous character can use either hand as well as each other. This means that the character can attack with two weapons at once and use the double strike combat tactic.

Berserker (Physical)

The berserker ability causes the character to attack furiously aiming blows all over the place, but not bothering about defending. Characters with this ability can attack using the furious blows combat tactic. If they do so they cannot choose a defence other than no defence and must choose furious blows again next turn unless they are calmed down.

Eagle Eyed (Perception)

This specific capability allows the character to be very keen sighted and spot things that other people would normally miss.

Fit (Physical)

This is a generic capability that signifies that the character is generally capable of feats of stamina.

Good Looking (Social)

This generic capability means that the character is good looking and will gain positive reactions from potential suitors.

Nimble Fingers (Agility)

This generic capability means that the character has fast fingers and can perform a number of sleight of hand and fine detail work very well.

Mystical Capabilities

Each character can have one mystical capability that is a strange ability that is unique to them. These mystical capabilities evolved in humans many centuries before the onset of the Ice Age and appear within children around the age of 13. There are a great variety of mystical capabilities and a selection is presented below. GMs and players can agree to create new mystical abilities but they should try and keep them balanced for game play.

Welfare (Spirit)

This mystical capability allows the healer to transfer some of his physique into an injured person to help them heal. The ability uses the spirit statistic to see whether the character succeeds and if successful will transfer 1 point of physical card per point of health regained by the injured character.

Aura Detection (Spirit)

This specific mystical capability allows the character to view the aura of another. A success in this capability will show the character the colours of the other person's aura.

Empathy (Spirit)

This specific mystical capability allows the character to have a feeling for the mood and disposition of someone that they observe for a while. The empathy skill gives a bit more than you would get just through observation and would give a bit more insight into the reasons for the mood they are in.

Meditation (Spirit)

This specific mystical skill allows the character to spend an hour meditating to recover a card they have used in the scene of another statistic other than spirit.

Borrowing (Spirit)

This specific capability is an ability used by the Priests of Nature to transfer their sight and consciousness to an animal for up to an hour. They must be next to the animal when the borrowing attempt is made.

Danger Sense (Spirit)

This is a generic capability that gives the character a sense that a particular action is dangerous. The character must request to use the skill to be made aware of whether an action is likely to be dangerous.

Example

Alice decides that her character Ellys Mayweather is a negotiator for the train with some extra and rather useful abilities. She chooses her seven capabilities as follows: Negotiator (Soc, generic), Bargain (Soc, specific), Quick Thinker (Men, generic), Aura detection (Spirit, specific), Bareback Rider (Physical, specific), Tracking (Perception, specific), and Bowman (Agility, specific).

<i>Physical (1+3)</i>	<i>= 4 points</i>
<i>Agility (1+3)</i>	<i>= 4 points</i>
<i>Mental (1+1)</i>	<i>= 2 points</i>
<i>Social (1+1+3)</i>	<i>= 5 points</i>
<i>Perception (1+3)</i>	<i>= 4 points</i>
<i>Spirit (1+3)</i>	<i>= 4 points</i>

Virtues and Sins

Characters are additionally defined by the virtues and sins that they exhibit. The virtues and sins are paired up just as the seven deadly sins and the seven cardinal virtues are paired.

Cardinal Virtue	Cardinal Sin	Colour
Chastity	Lust	Pink
Temperance	Gluttony	Orange
Charity	Greed	Purple
Diligence	Sloth	Yellow
Patience	Wrath	Red
Kindness	Envy	Green
Humility	Pride	Blue

Characters start the game with all the sins / virtues at zero, but can move the scales up to seven times. For each movement towards a virtue the player must move another one towards the sin. Therefore at game start the character can have up to 7 points towards the virtues and 7 points towards a sin. This reflects the characters starting vices and virtues at game start.

Example

Alice decides that Ellys is a talented but a bit lazy so she moves the sloth scale up by three points, and compensates by moving the wrath one down by two and the greed down by one. Alice also decides that Ellys takes a bit too much pride in her work and moves that up by 4 points, moving greed down by two and envy down by two. This gives her:

<i>Chastity / Lust</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Temperance / Gluttony</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Charity / Greed</i>	<i>-3</i>
<i>Diligence / Sloth</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Patience / Wrath</i>	<i>-2</i>
<i>Kindness / Envy</i>	<i>-2</i>
<i>Humility / Pride</i>	<i>4</i>

Health

A character in Winter Rails has a health score equal to 2 plus the value of its physical score. The health of a character does not diminish when physical cards are used in challenges. Health will only deteriorate as a result of taking wounds from combat or wounds from other sources. When a character hits zero health they will fall unconscious. They will die in 10 rounds if not attended to.

Movement

A character in Winter Rails can move up to 5 times their agility plus fifteen foot in a round.

Example

With a physical of 4 and an Agility of 4, this gives Ellys 6 health and a movement of 35 foot per round.

Equipment & Encumbrance

Characters can have any equipment they think is appropriate and the GM allows them to have. The rule is though that is it is not on the character sheet then you don't have it with you.

Characters can either be unencumbered, partially encumbered or fully encumbered depending on what they are carrying. A character who is unencumbered can move freely. A character who is partially encumbered will receive a penalty of -1 to physical actions, and a fully encumbered character will receive a penalty of -2 on all physical actions.

Characters with less than a few smallish things on them are unencumbered. Characters with some medium sized things are partially encumbered, and characters carrying loads of stuff or bulky items are fully encumbered. It is up to the GM to decide which category each character fits into from their equipment lists on the character sheet.

Money

The form of trading used in the game is barter rather than money and as a result characters do not have money in the game.

Background

The player should write up a background for his character giving the GM an idea of who the character is, what their passions and motivations are. The more character hooks that the player can provide in their background the better. This will enable the GM can fit these into the overall story and integrate the character more easily.



Chapter 3 System

Unlike many role-playing games, the Winter Rails system uses sets of cards to help determine outcomes of challenges. There are two types of cards in the game – statistic cards and combat cards. Statistic cards are numbered from 1-5 and are colour coded to signify the different statistics. These are detailed in the table below.

Statistic	Colour
Physical	Red
Agility	Green
Mental	Blue
Social	Mauve
Perception	Yellow
Spirit	Grey

Players must refresh their cards and choose each scene cards from the pool that add up to their statistic. They cannot get change for a card they have chosen during the scene.

Skill Checks

There are two types of skill checks used in the game – a check against the environment or a non player character [NPC] and a skill check battle between characters.

Task Resolution – Temptations & Failure

Task resolution in Winter Rails works in a different way to task resolution in normal roleplaying games. The player announces what it is that they are trying to do and the capability that they are using to do it. The GM then advises whether the capability is appropriate and what the associated statistic the test is made on. The player then uses cards from his pool for that statistic to make a bid added to his capability value (1 for generic and 2 for specific) for him to succeed at the task he has described.

The GM has a set of cards totalling 3 for each player per statistic for the scene. The GM can then overbid the player by either describing a temptation to them or describing how they fail. Where possible it is better for the GM to use a temptation than a simple failure, but there are circumstances where a temptation may not apply.

Players do not receive the cards if they accept a failure rather than a temptation, but the GM still loses them. The GM should therefore try and keep the number of temptations high to recycle cards into the player's hands.

If the player accepts the temptation then they take the GMs cards into their statistic pool and the GMs interpretation of events occurs. If the player does not accept the temptation then they **MUST** overbid the GM by at least 1 point. The GM may choose to accept the player's bid and then takes the card values that the player has bid. In this case the player succeeds at the skill. The GM should not try and overbid the player where possible to stop them doing things. The whole idea of the system is to put temptations in the path of the player so that they can choose what they will do to succeed.

The range of temptations that the GM may use to tempt the players is based on the seven deadly sins and each has a colour associated to it. A player who accepts a temptation must fulfil it and also gains the number of points in that sin equal to the cards they accepted from the GM.

Examples

Richard's character Escavez wants to bargain for new parts for the train from the Michela the scrap yard dealer. He offers 1 social card on top of his generic trader capability to get a good deal on the trade. The GM counters by saying bidding 3 social cards and says that if he accepts some sub standard goods that may fail he will get a good deal and the trader will throw in some personal items for Escavez. Richard rebids using a 1 and a 2 social cards, and the GM then offers two 2 point social cards and a 1 pointer for the temptation. Richard decides to accept the temptation and receives 5 points of Greed and the social cards. He gets a good deal and a little personal stuff thrown in. Now he just has to hope that the hooky spares he's bought don't fail!

Maria's character Haida is an apprentice Repairman and going to repair the train after it has broken a chain link before they are attacked. Maria bids 1 physical card on top of her generic Repairman capability to repair the train in good time. The GM then counters by bidding a 3 physical card offering Maria a temptation. Maria can repair the train in good time but can also alter the repair

on the boiler that her boss senior Repairman Jovanne made last week, so that when it breaks it looks like he is getting old and senile. Maria only has three physical cards but feels that she does not want to betray her mentor and get 3 points of Envy so bids the 3 cards back to the GM. The GM accepts the bid and takes the three physical cards.

The Effects of Sin

The sins a character makes during play build up and the character will increasingly become known for them by their reputation. Greedy characters will get the appropriate reactions from NPC's who know of their reputation and their aura will be visible to people with mystical abilities that can see them. NPCs will not react particularly badly to against a character with a mild value in the sin. Someone at noticeable will be detectable by an NPC who is good at doing quick evaluations of character. A character with a heavy value in a sin will be noticeable by many NPCs though not unobservant ones with poor perception levels. A character that is well known may well have been gossiped about as exhibiting this sin and will be reacted to accordingly by the majority of the world.

Sin	Colour	Mild	Ntce	Heavy	WK
Lust	Pink	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Gluttony	Orange	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Greed	Purple	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Sloth	Yellow	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Wrath	Red	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Envy	Green	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Pride	Blue	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+

Sin Cleansing

Obviously over time characters will build up large values in sins over a long campaign. To combat this effect the value of a sin will go down by 1 per session that it was not increased until it reaches zero. So if Richard's character Escavez did not increase his greed in the session following the one above then his Greed value would drop back down by one to 3.

Player versus Player Skill Rolls

The above situation covers all skill checks against the environment and against GM controlled NPCs. There is a second situation that is not covered here which is a player versus player conflict. In this situation players blind bid cards of the appropriate type against each other and the winner is the player who bid the most. In the event of a tie the players may choose to add a second set of cards to the bid face down and the total values of the two bids are then compared. The highest total value is then the winner. In the event of a second tie then the defending player is counted as the winner.

Example

Many days later Haida has found out about Escavez's dirty deal in buying parts and is hunting for him to give him a piece of her mind. She is therefore classed as the attacking player and is searching using her "Notice odd things" generic capability which uses the perception statistic (of which she has 2 cards in). Escavez as the defending character chooses his "I don't want to be found" capability which uses the agility statistic (of which he has 4 cards). Maria selects 1 perception card and places it face down and Richard also selects one (not wanting to waste his cards). This is a tie and they then choose whether to add more. This time Maria adds her remaining perception card and Richard adds a second agility card. The contest is still a draw but Richard as the defending player wins the contest and remains hidden.

Unskilled Attempts

If a character has no suitable capability (whether generic or specific) for the attempted action that they are trying to do then they cannot bid more than one card value of that statistic for their attempt. The GM can then choose whether to accept their bid, allow them to fail or offer a temptation to the player. In this case offering the temptation to the player will mean that if they choose not to accept it then they will fail since they cannot increase their bid above 1 for the attempt.

Scene Renewal

At the end of a scene each player and the GM each return their card holding back to their normal amount as per their statistic. This means that if a player has gained additional cards in a statistic from a temptation and not used them then they will lose them. The GMs card pool will go back to being 3 points per statistic per player. Special capabilities that affect the number of cards received also activate at this point so it is possible for a player to hold more cards than their statistic.

Combat

Initiative

Combat works differently to the skill resolution system above. First of all characters state their intentions for the round in increasing order of the mental statistic during initiative with the lowest value stating first. Characters can either try to defend against one or more melee attacks, or against one or more missile attacks, but not both at the same time.

Playing Combat Cards

Characters participating in combat MUST play an attack and a defence card from their selection of cards face down in front on them. They may add agility cards or physical cards from statistic pool with their attack card and these are lost after resolution. Agility cards add to the "to hit" chance and physical cards will add to any damage caused if the character hits.

If a character is not attacking and going on full defence then they would play the "No Attack" card and the "Full defence card". If they have a berserking capability then they may play the "Furious attack" card and the "No defence" card.

Cards are revealed simultaneously and the results viewed on the table [see Appendix C] and applied to base chances. A character with a generic capability in combat such a combat

specialist will have a base value of 2 to hit or defend. A character with a specific capability such a Swords Master will have a base chance of 3 to hit or defend with a sword. A character without a capability will have a base chance of 1 to hit or defend.

After cards are revealed then the value of the attack as given below is compared against the defence value of the defender as given below.

Attack Value = Capability Value + table value + agility cards + any bonus / Penalty

Defence Value = Capability Value + Agility Cards + any bonus / Penalty

In melee if the attacker beats the defender's score then they do 1 point of damage plus the physical cards added to the attack to the defender. Human punches and kicks will only do a standard 1 point of damage.

Missile attacks cannot add any physical cards to the damage and will do a flat one point of damage for every 3 points that the attacker wins the roll by (round up). So if an archer has an attack value of 6 against a defence value of 2 then they would deal 2 points of damage to the defender.

Effects of Damage

If a character or NPC gets down to zero health points then they will fall unconscious and bleed to death in ten rounds unless they are first aided. An unconscious person can be killed by anyone attacking them in the round after they fall unconscious. As a character gets more injured they will start to take penalties in combat which are detailed in the combat modifiers section below.

Attack Card Descriptions

Certain attack and defence cards have special abilities that will be activated if the participant wins the combat. These special effects are described below.

Feint

The feint will do no damage to the combatant this turn if it succeeds but will give the character a bonus of +2 to their next attack and +1 to the damage next turn.

Full Defence

A character choosing the full defence option will get a bonus of +2 to their defence value on top of any number from the resolved table, but must choose the “No Attack” option as their attack.

Furious Attack

This can only be chosen by a character with a berserker capability. This gives a two point damage bonus if the attack succeeds.

Missile Attack

This performs a ranged missile attack during which no defence is possible so the “No Defence” card must be played.

Missile Dodge

Can only be applied to a missile attack and cannot be combined with any melee defence card.

Disarm

If the attack succeeds no damage is done but the defender’s weapon is knocked from their hand.

Retreat

A character in retreat is performing a tactic retreat from combat and is moving steadily away but not at full running speed. If a character wishes to run away at full speed they would need to choose the “No attack” and “No Defence” option leaving them open to be hit. A character making a successful retreat will not be able to be hit by characters using melee weapons who are currently attacking him in the next turn.

Charge

This allows the character to move a distance into combat with another character. The attack is fairly unfocussed but may surprise the defender. The person charging receives -1 to their defence this round.

Leap

This involves an acrobatic stunt to avoid an attack and can only be used by characters with an acrobatic or athletic capability. The character must use an additional Agility card (which does not count towards the attack) to land properly or they will fall over.

Knockdown

This action attempts to knock the opponent to their knees for you can attack from above next round. The opponent must take a “No Attack” in a subsequent round to get up again.

Double Strike

This can only be used by characters with the ambidextrous capability. This is an unfocused attack using two weapons to either attack two targets or the same target twice. As it is unfocussed it has less chance to hit.

Stand Ground

This is used to block passage of a character travelling past them or hold against a charge. A successful defence using this will prevent an opposing character passing them.

Mystical Attack

This is the character designating use of a mystical power in attack. They will perform no other action in attack or defence and they must choose “No Defence” when they are attempting this.

Mystical Defence

This is defending against a mystical attack. It is possible to still be attacking whilst mystically defending but if that is done then both the attack and defence will be at a -1 penalty.

Surprise

A character who is suitably hidden that is not spotted by the character they are to attack, will gain surprise on them. A character gaining surprise will be able to attack knowing that the character will be defending using the “No defence” option. Surprise attacks are very dangerous as the attacker can add cards to the attack to cause the defender more harm.

Combat Modifiers

Sometimes a character will gain advantage or be impaired due to position of some other benefit. These are given as modifiers to the attack or defence and are described in the table below. For wounds only the most serious level applies.

Description	Modifier
Attacking Above	+1
Defending from the ground	-1
Defender in partial cover	-1
Defender in significant cover	-2
Character is partially encumbered	-1
Character is fully encumbered	-2
Attack / Defend from water	-1
Character has up to 2 health lost	-1
Character is up to ½ wounded	-2
Character is over ½ wounded	-3
Attack / Defend in low light	-3
Attack / Defend from horseback	-1
Missile Weapon – close range	+1
Missile Weapon – med range	-1
Missile Weapon – long range	-3

Additional Opponent Rule

For each additional character opposing the character there is a -1 penalty to the character's skill for the purposes of defence.

Example

Escavez is using his sword capability (specific which gives him a value of 3) fighting three thugs. He chooses to attack thug 1 using a "Head Shot" with 1 additional physical card and chooses a defence of "Parry Left" using 1 additional agility card. The thugs have a generic combat ability (giving them a score of 1) with 4 health and they choose to "Attack Right", "Low Cut", "Attack Left" and "Parry Left", "Leap" and "Parry Down" as defence.

Escavez attacking thug 1 has 3 +1 (head shot against parry left) giving him 4 against the thugs total of 1. He therefore does 4 (3 + the 1 physical card) in damage to the thug putting him unconscious.

Thug 1 attacking right against Escavez's parry left gives him -2 (generic skill of 1 minus 3 from the combat table) against Escavez 2 (3 minus two additional combatants plus one for the agility card). The first thug misses Escavez.

The second thug doing a low cut against parry left gives him 2 (generic skill of 1 plus 1 from the combat table) against Escavez's total of 2. Since its even the thug does no damage.

The third thug doing an attack left against parry left gives him 3 (generic skill of 1 plus 2 from the combat table) against Escavez's total of 2. He has an advantage of 1 which does one point of damage to Escavez.

Missile Weapons

Ranged weapons will have different attack values depending on the range they are trying to hit at. The modifiers for range (in yards) are given in the combat modifiers table above. The table below shows what range the missile weapons in the game operate at and the required physical statistic to use the weapon.

Weapon	Phy	Short	Med	Long
Comp Bow	3	25	50	100
Short Bow	2	20	40	80
Long Bow	6	30	60	115
Crossbow	5	30	60	120
Sling	1	8	15	30
Dart	1	6	14	28
Knife	1	5	12	25

Weapons

All weapons in the game deal the same amounts of damage. Whilst this may not seem realistic, being hit by anything with a sharp point will hurt nearly as much. This includes the natural weapons of large animals such as a polar bear.

Armour

Characters in Winter Rails do not wear armour and do not get any benefits from it. The game is supposed to simulate a swashbuckling game and

in that respect armour will not help against a well-chosen thrust.

Medicine and Healing

The natural rate of healing is quite slow and without proper medical care people will often die of infection in the wounds. Wounds will fully heal normally at the following rates:-

Wound type	Time
2 or less health lost	2 day or 4 days
Under ½ health lost	2 weeks
Over ½ health lost	4 weeks
Unconscious	2 months

This time can be improved using an appropriate medical capability. The time to heal fully will be reduced by 50% with a successful application of a medical capability.

Mystical capabilities such as Welference can also heal people at a quicker rate involving the transfer of physical cards to the injured person. After partial mystical healing occurs then the time to heal the remainder is recalculated on the table above.

Experience

Winter Rails uses a different experience system to many traditional RPGs. Players who the GM judges have role-played the best in the previous session are rewarded with a temporary 1 point card for the statistic of their choice that can be used in the following session. This card is regained each scene until the end of the session.

Additionally GMs can award virtue points for virtuous actions that players perform in character. This helps them reduce their overall level of sin.

Train and Family Design

Once players have created their own characters they need to do some joint work to

create the family that they will represent and also the train that they use.

Family

The players should first of all agree on a family name that will form the surname for all the player characters. Once this is done the players should draw and agree upon a flag design that will be used by family to signify their messages on the signals.

Train Design

Once this has been done players need to co-operatively design their train. To do this players will take the basic train design and are allowed to allocate 7 points of improvements to the train design. Players must also agree on the livery for their train which will help other families identify it from a distance.

Trains are defined using five different characteristics that give it features used in play. These characteristics are Speed, Engine Efficiency, Breaks, Carriages, and sturdiness and are defined below.

Speed

This is the normal speed and maximum speed of the train that the train can attain.

Level	Normal Speed	Max Speed
1	30 mph	45 mph
2	35 mph	50 mph
3	45 mph	60 mph
4	55 mph	70 mph
5	65 mph	80 mph
6	80 mph	100 mph

Engine Efficiency

This is the amount of coal and water used by the engine for a full days solid running. This gives an indication of how often the engine must stop for water and how often the train needs to resupply with coal. Tenders can usually fill between 5,000 and 10,000 gallons of water in one go.

Level	Coal used	Water Used
1	15 tonnes	16,000 gallons
2	14 tonnes	15,000 gallons
3	13 tonnes	14,000 gallons
4	12 tonnes	13,000 gallons
5	10 tonnes	12,000 gallons
6	8 tonnes	11,000 gallons

Breaks

This represents the distance required for a train to come to a full stop when running at speed. The distance given is for each 10 mph that the train is travelling.

Level	Stopping Distance
1	200 yards per 10 mph
2	180 yards per 10 mph
3	165 yards per 10 mph
4	140 yards per 10 mph
5	125 yards per 10 mph
6	110 yards per 10 mph

Sturdiness

This models the potential for failure in an engine including heat damage, corrosion of the tank and the failure of parts. The failure time is an average time to an unexpected failure.

Level	Failure Rate
1	Once a week
2	Once a fortnight
3	Once a month
4	Once a quarter
5	Once a half year
6	Once a year

Carriages

Level	No. of Carriages
1	3
2	4
3	5
4	6
5	7
6	8

The basic train design is appropriate for all trains which are then enhanced. A basic train has a level of 1 in each of the statistics which is highlighted in the tables above. To raise a characteristic by one level costs one point of the available 7 improvement points. In addition the following special enhancements are available below using improvement points. Further enhancements not listed here can be purchased by agreement with the GM.

Roof Mounted Crossbow (1 point)

A rotating crossbow mounted on the roof (that can go through tunnels) and fire through 360 degrees.

Custom Built Animal Carriage (1 Point)

One of the carriages has been converted to allow for the transportation of animals.

Movable Winch and Pulley Arm (1 point)

A fold out winch and pulley has been fitted to help load heavy cargo. The winch folds away into part of the carriage.

Carriage finely fitted out (1 point)

One of the carriages has been finely fitted out to encourage important passengers to give custom to this train. This is more likely to attract passenger custom from rivals.

Booster Engine (2 points)

This is a separate engine used for getting the water temperature up before intake to allow for the locomotive to move off up to 50% quicker from a cold start.

Parrots

The train will have up to between half a dozen and a dozen parrots on board that are used for reconnaissance. Parrots should be named by the players and are encouraged to give them brief two or three word personalities. Parrots have only 1 health point each and use the missile dodge card when they are attacked in the air. They additionally have the following statistics and capabilities.

Phy[1], Agi[3], Men[1], Per[3], Soc[1], Spi[1].
Fly (Generic), Swoop (Specific), Notice
(Specific).

GM Tips

When dealing with multiple NPCs in a combat it may be better to use a spreadsheet with a drop down for each NPC for their attack and defence values instead of using cards. This may make it quicker and easier for you to do the admin for your NPCs.

Printing out the combat table and the specific rules on combat abilities (P21) on a page may be useful to help players and keep combats moving swiftly.

The game relies on GMs being creative in thinking up temptations for the characters. It may be worthwhile spending a little time thinking about suitable things for the different statistics that may be appropriate for each character before the game begins.

Appendix B – Cards

PER 1 PER	PER 1 PER	PER 1 PER	PER 1 PER
PER 2 PER	PER 3 PER	PER 4 PER	PER 5 PER
AGI 1 AGI	AGI 1 AGI	AGI 1 AGI	AGI 1 AGI
AGI 2 AGI	AGI 3 AGI	AGI 4 AGI	AGI 5 AGI
PHY 1 PHY	PHY 1 PHY	PHY 1 PHY	PHY 1 PHY
PHY 2 PHY	PHY 3 PHY	PHY 4 PHY	PHY 5 PHY

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SPI 1 SPI	SPI 1 SPI	SPI 1 SPI	SPI 1 SPI
SPI 2 SPI	SPI 3 SPI	SPI 4 SPI	SPI 5 SPI
SOC 1 SOC	SOC 1 SOC	SOC 1 SOC	SOC 1 SOC
SOC 2 SOC	SOC 3 SOC	SOC 4 SOC	SOC 5 SOC
MEN 1 MEN	MEN 1 MEN	MEN 1 MEN	MEN 1 MEN
MEN 2 MEN	MEN 3 MEN	MEN 4 MEN	MEN 5 MEN

Duck Defend	Retreat Defend	Leap Defend	Sway Back Defend
Disarm Attack	Attack Right Attack	Attack Left Attack	Body Shot Attack
No Attack Attack	Furious Attack Attack	Missile Attack Attack	Low Cut Attack
Double Strike Attack	Feint Attack	Knockback Attack	Charge Attack
Mystical Attack Attack	Head Shot Attack	Parry Left Defend	Parry Right Defend
Full Defence Defend	Stand Ground Defend	No Defence Defend	Mystical Defence Defend
Body Parry Defend	Parry Down Defend	Missile Dodge Defend	Shield Block Defend

Appendix C – Combat Table

This table gives the bonus or penalty applied

Defender's Card

	Duck	Parry Right	Parry Left	Body Parry	Parry Down	Shield Block	Missile Dodge	Retreat	Leap	Sway Back	Full Defence #	Stand Ground	No Defence	Mystical Defence
Head Shot	-3	+1	+1	+1	+3	+1	+1	0	-1	0	-1	+1	+1	+1
Attack Right	+1	+2	-3	-1	-1	+1	+1	0	0	0	-1	0	+1	+1
Attack Left	+1	-3	+2	-1	-1	+1	+1	0	0	0	-1	0	+1	+1
Body Shot	+1	+1	+1	-3	-1	-2	+1	0	+1	0	-1	+1	+1	+1
Low Cut	+2	+1	+1	-1	-3	+1	+1	0	-3	+2	-1	+1	+1	+1
No Attack	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Furious Attack *	+1	0	0	0	0	-1	+1	-2	+1	+1	0	+2	+3	+3
Feint	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+1	-2	0	0	0
Missile Attack	0	0	0	0	0	-1	-3	-1	-1	+1	0	+1	+1	+1
Charge	+2	+1	+1	+1	+1	-1	+1	-1	+1	-1	-1	-3	+2	+2
Knockdown	+1	0	0	-1	0	+2	-1	-1	+2	+1	-1	-1	+2	+2
Disarm	0	0	0	0	+2	+1	+2	-1	0	-2	+1	0	0	0
Double Strike *	0	-1	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	+1	+1	-1	-1		+3	+3
Mystical Attack	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2

* Defence must be “No Defence” if this attack style is used.

Attack must be “No Attack” if a full defence is applied.