

Without Form

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Without Form is a post-apocalyptic science fiction game set on the remote world of New Earth. Players take the roles of the Scarred, men and women gifted with the ability to overcome the omnipresent Guidelines that are implanted in the brains of New Earth's population. Almost alone among New Earth's populace, the Scarred are capable of dealing with the terrible consequences of the world's newfound freedom. For the purposes of the contest, this game includes the following elements:

- 1) "Characters draw from a common pool of skills/traits that they must share."
- 2) "Game must allow that any skill can be used as a combat skill."
- 3) "Caste structure. Does not need to be linear, with someone on top and someone on bottom, just division of roles / identities / expectations."
- 4) "In this brave new world, evolution is through suffering."
- 5) "Character creation is based on archetypes, but characters may change archetypes during downtime."

A History of New Earth

Twelve hundred years ago, the unaging Shepherds arrived on New Earth, fleeing the ancient homeworld of man ahead of a darkness they never discussed with their charges. It was enough to know that they could never return to the world they had left. They were obliged to make New Earth a home fit for their kind, and for several centuries they occupied themselves with the construction of giant terraforming engines and geological transformation probes, all intended to make of New Earth a fit paradise for their occupation. Assisting them were the ancestors of the Flock, the men and women less exalted than the Shepherds but still necessary and useful for the labors. While the nanostations the Shepherds brought with them could manufacture almost any material goods if provided enough power, individual creativity and expertise was necessary to employ these goods. As such, the ancestors of the Flock worked hard to make New Earth a proper home for humanity.

The Shepherds labored as well, though not with the coarse substances of matter that their subordinates handled. Instead, they designed a society which would be free from the scourges of war, want, and environmental degradation. They would replicate the Earth's biosphere perfectly, but the populace would be something improved. Through the implantation of the Guidelines, the ancestors of the Flock became the Flock itself- the great mass of humanity, purified and improved by the careful hand of the Shepherds.

The Guidelines were very simple; they were a set of imperatives enforced by neuro-interfaced nanite conditioning. Intentionally trespassing against the Guidelines produced agonizing pain for a greater or lesser degree of time depending upon the degree to which the transgressor felt culpable. While never directly fatal, the agony experienced by grave transgressors was such as to make suicide an attractive option; the spectacle was more than sufficient to encourage others to keep carefully to the enlightened path given them by the Shepherds. Aside from the general Guidelines imprinted into all of the Flock, some received additional conditioning for special duties. A few, known as Shaped, were given much abridged versions of the Guidelines. These Shaped served as the enforcers and hunters of the Shepherds, hunting down and disposing of members of the Flock who had proven themselves uncontrollable by the Guidelines.

This was rarely a difficult task. Repeated inflictions of the agony of Correction tended to burn out the nanites, resulting in black streaks and patterns on the skin of the victim. These "Scarred" could ignore the Guidelines, and act with a freedom incompatible with the harmony and security of the Flock. Along with the Scarred, there were those men and

women who simply had no conscience, no capacity to feel culpability for their actions. For the good of society, it was necessary to eliminate these people. The Shaped spent a great deal of time hunting through the back country of New Earth, combing out the Scarred and runaway sociopaths.

Both Scarred and psychotics were rarities, however. The life of a common member of the Flock was one of undisturbed tranquility and abundance. The nanostations provided material goods in ever-flowing abundance, allowing society to configure itself in all manner of ways that would be impractical under any other circumstances. Most members of the Flock lived strictly ornamental lives, producing nothing but "creative works" devoid of novelty or "innovative thoughts" that repeated the wisdom of their Shepherds in slightly different phrasing. Some among the Flock were detailed to more mundane labors by the Shepherds, in order to provide a supply of more "authentic" goods and services rather than the nanoproduced kind. That this often involved grinding hand labor to accomplish was of no concern to the Shepherds, and after the Guidelines of these workers were adjusted, it caused no concern to the laborers, either.

For the past two hundred years, society on New Earth has remained static. Men and women of the Flock produce endless streams of music, art, philosophy, and other creative endeavors, yet the occasional dangerous spark of true novelty is crushed by the Shepherds and their Shaped servants. People live in peace, because to fight is a grave violation of the Guidelines. People share freely of their goods, because to hoard is a grave violation of the Guidelines. Defacement of public property, disrespect towards the Shepherds, and the acquisitive desire for personal property are also all grave violations of the Guidelines.

It is possible that the Shepherds do not have the ability to confer their own immortality upon the members of the Flock; at least, that is what they have always claimed. The best they can do is to correct the genetic code of their subjects to prevent all manner of diseases or frailties. It is during a child's genetic rectification in the Shaping Vises that the Guidelines are imprinted upon them. The nanites are not heritable, so a child born without this rectification available would not be subject to the Guidelines. These "unauthorized children" are commonly sought by the Shaped so that they can be safely integrated back into the society at large.

The Rapture and the Shaped

Last night, the Shepherds vanished. Some did, at least; others were simply found dead by their servants, sitting or lying peacefully in their favored places. There was no explanation left behind, no hint of forewarning that this was about to occur. One moment New Earth was under the hand of its benevolent masters. The next, those masters were gone.

The consequences ripple outward slowly but inexorably. Without the guiding hand of the Shepherds, the nanostations are breaking down, and once broken, they are all but impossible to repair. The vast engines that provided the power to manufacture nanotechnological goods are spinning down and collapsing, the terraforming engines that maintain the world's rotation and atmosphere are no longer being tended. The basic infrastructure of the planet was always kept well in hand by the Shepherds, and with their absence, vital tasks of maintenance and regulation are no longer being performed. The Flock are baffled at this sudden vanishment, and panic is beginning to build. The old social structures were based on unlimited material goods, and the idle days of creative labor and pensive thought are proving insufficient for producing a hot meal or warm clothing.

Within a few months of the Rapture, as many as two thirds of the planet's population will be dead. Unable to adjust to the lack of their machines, unable to eat the engineered flora and fauna of New Earth, these wretches will die of privation or sickness in short order. Those that do survive will be those who have found and hoarded caches of nanomanufactured foods, which remain impervious to spoilage. A tiny handful will be

supported by those artisanal farms and rustic garden retreats that some Shepherds founded and stocked with suitable laborers. Within a year or two, no more than five percent of the total population will remain alive, most of them subsisting on the foodstuffs of these vastly-expanded farms.

The Shaped can recognize the impending crisis. What strikes them as worse than any loss of life is the crisis that will come after- the birth of a generation of men and women totally unfettered by the Guidelines. Without the Shaping Vises operational and imprinting the Guidelines on the new generation, the demons of war, greed, and conflict will once more be unleashed on the world. They struggle to master the Shaping Vises that the Shepherds left behind them. Their efforts are halting and flawed; the results are commonly maddened monsters barely capable of accepting instruction from the Shaped. The Shaped are willing to make as many such monsters as are necessary to master the Vises, and some say that the beasts have practical value in hunting down the refugees and Scarred that will seek to escape the guidance of the Shaped. In the absence of their masters, it is necessary that the Guidelines be preserved for the good of all humanity- and the Shaped are the ones best suited for ensuring that.

The Guidelines

The Guidelines imprinted onto most of the Flock are basic in nature. They include the following strictures.

A person shall not use physical violence against another human being. This stricture is absolute. Not even self-defense is allowed as a justification for violence. In the unlikely case that a member of the Flock finds himself being attacked by another person, he is required to flee and seek the help of a Shaped, as the proctors are not under this particular stricture. In the aftermath of the Rapture, those who are still bound by the Guidelines are thus made easy prey to more violent souls.

A person shall share goods with the needy. For centuries, this Guideline was merely ornamental, a pious expression of altruistic wish. With the nanostations to provide endless supplies of whatever was required, there was never any hardship in sharing goods with others. Now, however, the Guideline inflicts hideous tortures on those men and women who are unwilling to give half their limited store of food, or clothing, or clean water to anyone who demonstrates a need for it. A crowd of the Flock can thus end up sharing out limited supplies until none of them have enough to survive, and all perish.

A person shall take no more than their fair share. Another ornamental Guideline, this rule has taken on a deadly new life. A member of the Flock is incapable of taking the last of a resource, or more of a resource than they need immediately. When faced with a shelf full of packaged food, a member of the Flock will take no more than they need for their next meal, even though they know that no more food is being created by the nanostations. An entire crowd of the Flock might end up all staring at the last can of food on a shelf, none of them capable of actually taking it no matter how hungry they might be.

A person shall work to help society. This Guideline was the most ambiguous of the four, as so much could so easily be taken to be useful work for society. Even the diligent production of terrible poetry or banal artistic work could be considered by its maker to be a grave and important addition to New Earth's wealth. Where this stricture becomes sinister is in the minds of men and women dedicated to a particular sort of work. These souls end up compelled to work at their ordained profession or else suffer the pangs of the damned if they abandon it for so much as a day. Those who are rendered incapable of performing their duties by circumstances often become Scarred due to the relentless negative feedback-assuming they survive the agony.

In addition to these basic four Guidelines, others were occasionally implanted into specific workers or those engaged in delicate duties. The procedure was never as precise as the Shepherds might have wished, and such overarching commands as "Obey the will of the

Shepherds" or "Seek out and report deviations" were never satisfactorily implanted. The most successful implants were those which forbade a specific physical behavior. Intellectual activities were never well-policed, as a person who honestly believed that they were acting within the bounds of the Guidelines was impervious to correction.

It is this very literal and self-defined nature that makes it possible for a clever speaker to convince a member of the Flock into performing acts that they could not bring themselves to commit alone. By providing rationalizations and explanations for why a particular act isn't really contrary to the Guidelines, the speaker can induce enough confidence in the listener to overcome the conditioning for a time. While it doesn't provide the perfect freedom that sociopathy or being Scarred provides, it is a great deal faster and less painful to induce.

Character Generation

To begin, the game master randomly deals out a resolution card to each player, holding back the Soul of the Nameless card for GM use. If there are more than five players, deal out cards to the first five and then deal out a new set to any excess. The resolution cards represent how a character resolves any skill or combat tests, indicating which difficulties are used for each skill level and what special modifiers might apply for the character.

Once a card is received, Traits are divided up. Traits are special abilities that extend beyond ordinary skills, and the relevant Trait card indicates what each one grants. If more than one player wants the same Trait card, they can roll off to see who gets it. While there is no structural reason why more than one PC can't share a Trait, a community tends to suffer if its leaders lack a wide range of talents, and so the GM is advised to forbid it.

Finally, the players choose skills for their characters. Each character has seven points to spend on skills. A Novice skill costs one point, a Trained one costs two points, and an Expert one costs four points. Characters cannot start with any skill at a Master level. Skills can be picked from list below, with additional skills added at the discretion of the GM.

Characters begin the game with nothing but their clothing and a few minor personal effects. Acquiring useful equipment requires spending time during the Preparations phase, and the players generally won't have time to do that until after their first Crisis phase.

Traits

The Warrior: You have a natural aptitude for violence. Your skill tests in combat add double the normal success points. Your Violence skill is always treated as one level higher than normal, though no higher than Master. You get four actions during the Preparation phase between Crises.

The Planner: You have a plan for every occasion. Your Preparations require no upkeep, and once per session you can use a skill as if you had Prepared it for the purpose at hand. You get four actions during the Preparation phase between Crises.

The Leader: Others naturally trust and believe in you. Once per session, you can inspire people to a particular course of action without concern for their Guidelines, if you're able to persuade them to cooperate. Either they fight through the pain of breaking them or you convince them that the action really isn't contrary to their Guidelines. Skill tests involving personal interaction are never Hard for you. You get five actions during the Preparation phase between Crises.

The Sage: You know what others don't. Once per session, you can ask the GM for the answer to a particular question. If there is any remotely possible way that you might know or remember the answer, you do so. If it is impossible, this ability is not expended. You get three actions during the Preparation phase between Crises, and you require no resources to Study an intellectual skill.

The Crafter: You know how to make or repair what you need. You are always assumed to be Prepared to use any skill requiring tools or special equipment, except for tools necessary

to repair or build nanotech items. Once per session, you can make or find a mundane item that you need provided there is any remotely possible way that it could be had. You get four actions during the Preparation phase between Crises.

Skills

Agriculture: This skill is somewhat esoteric. While most of the Flock have a basic understanding of how plants grow, only a comparative handful are trained in efficiently growing large crops of foodstuffs. The value of this skill has increased drastically since the Rapture and the collapse of the nanostations and their manufactured foodstuffs.

Art: This covers skill in a particular artistic field, whether sculpture, poetry, music, or some other discipline. Talent in a creative profession was highly esteemed by the Flock before the Rapture.

Athletics: Running, jumping, swimming, climbing, and other forms of vigorous athletics are covered under this skill heading. Athletic games were one of the last fields in which competition was allowed to exist, and even in that case, the more violent pursuits of wrestling, boxing, or other contact sports were all but unheard-of. The Guidelines of the participants would have to be largely disabled in order for them to do such things, and only the most degenerate of Shepherds would tolerate such violent pursuits.

Computers: Computers are ubiquitous among the Flock, but most of them have gone dead with the lack of power or have become physically inoperable when their nanotech support systems collapsed. Someone with skill in Computers is capable of jury-rigging repairs to some such stations, or extracting useful data from otherwise dead terminals. With active computers, sufficient skill can allow for control or reprogramming of their original purpose.

Construction: Building a structure requires its own type of expertise. This skill is used to build- or destroy- buildings and large civil works of all kinds. An expert in construction will often be able to identify the best means of getting inside an otherwise-inaccessible building.

Geography: Aside from the practical knowledge of the local terrain, this skill also covers knowledge of local landmarks and features of interest. A character skilled in the local geography can more easily find caches of supplies and overlooked resources. Most of the Flock have only a notional understanding of areas outside their personal experience, and are poorly equipped to identify places that might have supplies of use to them.

Macrotech: This skill covers the design and repair of tools and implements with parts large enough to be seen with the naked eye. A significant portion of the daily technology used by the Flock was macrotech, as the Shepherds were leery of allowing unsupervised use of nanotechnological tools by the Flock. Most artisan's tools were macrotech, as were most forms of public transport and building engineering. Building new macrotech devices is generally possible, provided the necessary tools and materials are at hand.

Manipulation: All forms of deceit, bluffing, and mental manipulation are covered by this skill. Aside from the obvious uses for lying, this skill can also be used to persuade a member of the Flock that a particular line of action really is permissible under their Guidelines. The more drastic the act, the greater the difficulty in justifying it. Before the game starts, players who invest in Manipulation should talk with the GM and learn to what extent the player him or herself will have to provide the justifications. Some GMs are happy to let players simply roll the skill, while others may require the player to actually come up with the line of thought being used.

Medicine: Formerly, sickness and injury was dealt with by the quick application of metasalve, a grayish nanite paste that penetrated the victim's skin and corrected medical difficulties. The genetically-engineered good health experienced by most of the Flock made metasalve a rare necessity, and the resources required to make the stuff kept it in limited quantities. After the Rapture, easily-accessed supplies of metasalve were quickly expended, forcing people to fall back on more basic principles of medical care. This skill represents the rare ability to work with less optimal tools to cure disease and repair injury, and is rarely possessed by anyone except for biological researchers and medical nanotech specialists.

Nanotech: This skill is used to diagnose and repair damaged nanotech, such as the nanostations, Shaping Visas, and other extremely sophisticated artifacts. This skill is extremely difficult to use in the field, as most nanotech repairs require elaborate tools and supplies that cannot be conveniently carried. The most that can normally be accomplished without advanced tools is to identify whether a piece of nanotech is salvageable or whether it's so much intricate junk. In theory, it's possible to use this skill to design or build entirely new nanotechnological devices, but the knowledge and industrial base required to execute such designs is virtually impossible for most people to access. The Shepherds were very careful to prevent most nanotech from being capable of duplicating itself in any way.

Perception: Some people are simply more perceptive and attuned to their surroundings than others. High skill in Perception makes it easier to discover hidden caches of goods, notice an impending ambush, or detect the subtle signs of deception in a liar's comportment.

Politics: Political life on New Earth has always been a thing ordained and designed by the Shepherds. While many of the Flock can speak for hours on the wisdom and prudence of their Shepherd's favored political system, most of them are hopelessly incapable of extrapolating outside that narrow perspective. Concepts of self-interest and selfishness are so widely abhorred that most of the Folk would never permit themselves to take such factors into account in their dealings, instead preferring elaborately altruistic exchanges that promptly fall apart now that resources are scarce. A person trained in Politics is under no such burden; they quickly recognize the nature of the local power structure and can identify and deal with persons of importance in it.

Science: This skill may include any or all of the conventional sciences. Some GMs may require players to choose a specific science to specialize in, while others may permit one skill to cover everything from physics to sociology. This skill generally does not allow the repair of technology not directly related to the science in question. Sciences such as chemistry may permit the creation of useful compounds if the necessary ingredients can be found- which is often something of a challenge, as the nanostations had no need for conventional industrial inputs.

Security: The Shepherds trusted a great deal in the Guidelines to keep the Flock away from inconvenient places and behaviors. Even so, nanotech sealants and more mundane electronic locks were often used to secure sensitive areas and stockpiles. This skill allows the user to defeat these measures, though overcoming anything more elaborate than a mechanical lock generally requires appropriate macrotech or nanotech tools.

Stealth: Whether skulking away from some dangerous animal or hiding from Shaped searchers in the shell of an abandoned city, the Stealth skill is used for all tests of concealment and quiet movement.

Survival: Bereft of the help of nanomanufactured food, clothing, purified water, and shelter, most of the Flock can expect only a lingering death. Those trained in Survival know how to make do with simple macrotech tools, though it is a more difficult feat on New Earth. The Shepherds have engineered many of the local plants and animals to be mildly toxic to human beings in order to prevent runaways and the Scarred from having an easy time living away from the nanostations. Those trained in Survival know how to find those plants and small animals that can still be safely consumed, and how to survive the normal extremes of an outdoor climate.

Toughness: Enduring pain, weariness, hunger, and thirst is the purview of this skill. It's also used in combat to determine how difficult it is to overcome the character.

Trade: The idea of buying and selling is highly theoretical to most of the Flock. Some Shepherds permitted limited amounts of trade within their societies, but few people have a deep understanding of profit, loss, and other basic principles of trade. Those who possess this skill can identify profitable trading opportunities and convince others of the advantages of the exchange- whether or not those advantages are real.

Vehicle: Everything from riding beasts to jet aircraft comes under this skill. Most of the Flock haven't the slightest idea how to do more than take public transportation, but those

trained in the subject are often quite broad in their skills due to the varying whims of their Shepherd masters. This skill can also be used to repair or build vehicles, granted the right tools.

Violence: Many among the Flock are simply incapable of performing acts of violence against other human beings. The idea of specifically studying the correct and efficient ways to injure and even kill their fellows is anathema. Despite this, the Shaped and some among the Scarred have found it necessary to resurrect the arts of violence, whether to protect themselves from others or to oppress those of the Flock unable to resist them. Most combat consists of tests against the Violence skills of the participants.

Skill Tests

All conflicts are resolved by skill tests. The GM decides whether a particular task is Hard, Average, or Easy, and then gives the relevant skill for the test. The player then rolls 3d6 and compares the total to the difficulty listed on his or her Resolution Card for that skill level and test modifier. For example, someone with the Soul of the Polymath resolution card has Athletics at a Novice level. The GM calls for them to make an Easy Athletics roll. They look at their card, which tells them to roll 3d6 and add +0 for an Easy task. They need to roll 12 or better to succeed at the test, with their Novice skill. Were they Untrained, they would need 13 or better, while a Master would succeed on 7 or better.

For every point by which the roll exceeds the difficulty, 1 success point is earned. Some tests require a certain number of success points. A "Hard Athletics 3" roll would require a Hard Athletics roll that succeeded by at least 3 points in order to be successful.

Some skill tests are opposed skill tests, in which a character is competing with another person. Normally, both characters make skill checks and the one who earned the most success points wins.

Some skills require that they be Prepared before they are used, indicating the provision of special equipment, tools, or expertise. Repairing an electric-powered bus cannot generally be done bare-handed, for example. Any skill which cannot be performed empty-handed generally requires Preparation beforehand. A character who has Prepared this skill beforehand can make the roll as normal. One who hasn't may not be able to make the roll at all, at the GM's discretion, while some skills, such as Survival or Agriculture, might be usable at a penalty of -2 or -4 to the roll. Use of a Prepared skill lasts for one encounter or task, even if it requires multiple rolls to complete. Preparing a skill generally requires the use of downtime actions during the Preparation phase, though the GM may choose to award it if the characters find relevant tools or equipment during a Crisis phase. Using a Prepared skill uses up the preparation. To use the skill multiple times during a Crisis, multiple Preparations are necessary. Note that the Violence skill never needs to be Prepared, though some equipment may give advantages in using it.

Combat

Combat takes the form of modified skill checks. First, every "side" in a fight is assigned a Defeat Point total. For players, this Defeat Point total is worth five points for each player in the group, plus an additional bonus for each player's Toughness skill; 1 point for Novice Toughness, 2 points for Trained, 4 for Expert, and 8 for Master. Thus, each player adds between 5 and 13 points to the Defeat Point total of the group. For NPCs, normal Flock members who are somehow capable of fighting add three points, while more experienced and dedicated combatants might add five, seven, or even more points at the GM's discretion. It's generally best to tally a group's Defeat Point total before the game starts, as it does not normally change during play.

Once Defeat Points are determined, each "side" in a fight makes Violence skill checks. Their success points are totaled, and to this total is added a flat number of points for the

Violence skill of each participant- Novices add 1 point, Trained add 2, Experts add 4, and Masters add 8. Characters with the Warrior trait add double their success point totals, but not double their Violence skill points. The GM is allowed to add or subtract points to these rolls based on the tactical situation, player actions, or other details appropriate to the situation; these modifiers should not normally be more than 5-10 points at most. Special equipment or armor might also adjust these totals. This total is then applied as Defeat Points to one or more enemy sides, divided up however the players choose and the GM allows.

NPCs are not normally given individual rolls to accumulate Defeat Points against their enemies,. It's normally more convenient to make a single roll to determine success points and then multiply it by the number of NPCs in the group. A group of 4 Shaped, for example, might be listed as "Combat: 12+successes, difficulty 9". The GM would roll once against difficulty 9, multiply the success points by 4, and then add it to 12.

Once a "side" has suffered a total number of Defeat Points equal to their maximum, they are defeated as an effective force. They may break and run, they may be left dead, they may surrender... the exact outcome will depend on player actions and GM discretion. Even those who manage to escape may be either Lightly Injured or Gravely Injured. Lightly Injured PCs take a -4 penalty to all skill tests, while Gravely Injured characters are incapable of doing anything but being carried. Injuries cannot normally be fixed during Crises, unless metasolve or some other nanite medical resource is available. Light Injuries are generally healed by the time a Preparations phase is complete, but Grave Injuries require action taken to cure them.

Normally, only the Violence skill can be used for combat. By special care taken during the Preparations phase, a player can prepare a different skill for use in combat. This may involve using Macrotech to build a particularly useful weapon, Security to unlock the safety margins on a pen welding laser, Manipulation to convince some strong but foolish Flock member to serve as a bodyguard, or any other skill that can be justified to the GM. This requires an action during Preparations, but this skill then serves in place of Violence during any one fight.

Resolution Cards

Soul of the Laborer

This resolution system represents the traits of the laborer, the member of the Flock conditioned to simple tasks or undemanding intellectual labors. To determine success in a test, choose the relevant skill and roll equal to or higher than the difficulty listed below. For each point by which the difficulty is exceeded, 1 point of Success is attained.

Skill Level	Difficulty
Untrained	16
Novice	13
Trained	11
Expert	9
Master	7

Test Modifiers	
Hard	+4
Average	+0
Easy	-4

Special

The laborer always has a Success of at least 2 on Easy tests for which he is Trained or better.

The laborer always has a Success of at least 2 by blind luck on a roll of 18.

Soul of the Athlete

This resolution system represents the traits of the athlete, the member of the Flock intended to pursue excellence in competitive games. The athlete excels in tests against an opponent, but is ill-equipped to deal with the mundane concerns of daily living. To determine success in a test, choose the relevant skill and roll equal to or higher than the difficulty listed below. For each point by which the difficulty is exceeded, 1 point of Success is attained.

Skill Level	Difficulty
Untrained	16
Novice	13
Trained	11
Expert	9
Master	7

Test Modifiers	
Hard	+2
Average	+0
Easy	-2

Special

The athlete always has a Success of at least 1 when making an opposed test against another person, including combat rolls.

The athlete never has an Easy test that is not an opposed test against another person; all such tests are at least Average.

Soul of the Thinker

This resolution system represents the traits of the thinker, the member of the Flock intended to pursue esoteric philosophical or technical topics. The thinker can occasionally perform marvels through some insight or special training, but lacks zeal for more direct struggles. To determine success in a test, choose the relevant skill and roll equal to or higher than the difficulty listed below. For each point by which the difficulty is exceeded, 1 point of Success is attained.

Skill Level	Difficulty
Untrained	16
Novice	13
Trained	11
Expert	9
Master	7

Test Modifiers	
Hard	+2
Average	+0
Easy	-2

Special

Once per game session, the thinker can claim a Success of 2 on any roll. He or she may do so after the roll is made.

The thinker always loses 1 point of Success in any test related to physical effort or struggle, except one for which the above ability is used.

Soul of the Savant

This resolution system represents the traits of the savant, the member of the Flock wholly devoted to one particular art. Within this sphere, his or her talents are unquestionable; outside it, the results are more dubious. To determine success in a test, choose the relevant skill and roll equal to or higher than the difficulty listed below. For each point by which the difficulty is exceeded, 1 point of Success is attained.

Skill Level	Difficulty
Untrained	17
Novice	15
Trained	11
Expert	8
Master	5

Test Modifiers	
Hard	+2
Average	+0
Easy	-2

Special

The savant is a figure of focus; only one skill can be possessed at Master level.

Soul of the Polymath

This resolution system represents the traits of the polymath. Whether through some peculiar Guideline imprinting or a sheer genius for improvisation, these members of the Flock show a rare kind of versatility. Still, while polymaths are seldom at a loss for a knack, nothing ever seems to go as easily for them as for others. To determine success in a test, choose the relevant skill and roll equal to or higher than the difficulty listed below. For each point by which the difficulty is exceeded, 1 point of Success is attained.

Skill Level	Difficulty
Untrained	13
Novice	12
Trained	11
Expert	9
Master	7

Test Modifiers	
Hard	+2
Average	+0
Easy	+0

Special

Once per session, the adventurer can make one roll on a skill as if he were a Master at it. Blind luck or a brief flash of insight aids him.

Soul of the Nameless

This resolution system represents the traits of the nameless and faceless multitudes of the Flock, devoid of special virtue or failing. This system is commonly used by NPCs and other peripheral characters. To determine success in a test, choose the relevant skill and roll equal to or higher than the difficulty listed below. For each point by which the difficulty is exceeded, 1 point of Success is attained.

Skill Level	Difficulty
Untrained	16
Novice	13
Trained	11
Expert	9
Master	7

Test Modifiers	
Hard	+2
Average	+0
Easy	-2

Game Phases

A game of *Without Form* is divided up into phases of two kinds- Preparation and Crisis. The Preparation phase covers the downtime between occasions of peril, with the players spending time developing their community, improving their own equipment and skills, and preparing for the challenges to come. This phase might cover months, or even years depending on the pace of the game. The Crisis phase involves dealing with specific problems and dangers that threaten the community. These events are usually resolved in a matter of days, or even hours. While GMs can pace things in any way that pleases, the following is a possible pattern for Preparations and Crises.

Crisis Phase 1: After the Rapture

The players find themselves together in the immediate aftermath of the Rapture. Perhaps the Shepherds have just vanished; perhaps it's been as long as a month since they died or disappeared. The player characters are Scarred, but even they are tested by the sudden lack of all the nanotechnological goods and conveniences once provided to all the denizens of New Earth. The GM faces them with the need to find or make a place of safety where they can regroup and assess the situation, preferably before being overwhelmed by tides of desperate Flock or renegade Shaped.

Preparation Phase 1

This preparation phase is generally devoted to players making use of the resources they found in the prior crisis phase to Prepare their skills and perhaps make an item of equipment or two. They might choose to develop their base of operations into a larger community if they feel they have the time and resources to spare. Any un-Prepared skills they were forced to do without in the prior crisis will weigh heavily on their minds; a GM can expect them to be mainly concerned with making up for those basic lacks.

Crisis Phase 2: Gathering In the Multitudes

The Shaped are beginning to adjust to the situation. Cooperation is still high among them, and their private nanostations are still functioning at a modest level. The players

encounter the first signs of Shaped activity and their collection of members of the Flock to be reimprinted with new Guidelines more serviceable to their new masters. The players may have to avoid or overcome initial attacks as the Shaped seek to collect them or extinguish a potential danger early. They obviously need to build up their community if they hope to be able to hold out against such assaults. Many among the Flock have died by now, with the corpses of the weakest and most fragile littering the abandoned cities.

Preparation Phase 2

Players will still be tempted to put their resources towards personal improvement. Failure to develop the Population, Prosperity, Security, and Freedom of their own community will have highly negative consequences in future crises, however. A community is best off having a rating in each statistic at least equal to the current Crisis being faced. Anything less than that gives the Shaped an opening to exploit.

Crisis Phase 3: Seeking the Weak Spot

By this time, the players should be recognizing some shortcoming in their resources; some commodity they need to gather. The GM can provide them with potential cache locations and let them work out ways to overcome the security and dangers of the places and collect their goods. At the same time, the Shaped are taking a more careful assessment of the players' community. For each community stat below 3, the Shaped launch some kind of attack against the weak spot, whether a swarm assault against a poorly-manned community, a strategic strike against the limited resources of an unprosperous one, a disciplined military attack against a community with poor defenses, or a propaganda assault against one with many unliberated Flock who might be susceptible to such commands. These attempts should be repeated during every Crisis in which the community lags behind. Failure to deal well with the attacks will result in degradation of the community.

Preparation Phase 3

Stung, the players might be taking more care to build up their community now and deny their enemies an easy weak spot. They may also be choosing to invest resources into schools, factories, and other resource-producing structures, gambling on their ability to fend off Shaped attacks on their weaker points until the structures can start producing a steady flow of goods.

Crisis Phase 4: A New Threat

The Shaped aren't the only peril on New Earth. At this stage, a new recurring danger appears to the community. Perhaps it's a rival group of Scarred and their Flock followers. Perhaps it's an atmospheric distortion caused by terraforming engines run amok. Perhaps it is a new plague or an influx of twisted predatory beasts from some Shepherd's private reserve. Whatever the danger, this threat not only promises to endanger the community, it also destroys or captures most of a particular resource. In order to get the captured material back or unearth a replacement source for the lost goods, the threat must be at least temporarily defeated.

Preparation Phase 4

Expect players to invest more heavily in resource-producing structures. Losing so much of their stores at once is likely to introduce them to the advantages of a controllable source of resources.

Crisis Phase 5: And So Forth

From this point on, the GM ought to have a clear idea about the kind of stories that most interest the PCs. The GM should also have at least two established sets of antagonists, in the Shaped and the new threat introduced in the earlier crisis. Ultimately, a successful community might become the focal point for a new society, one founded on principles more congenial to the players' wishes. Yet for all their success, the players are inevitably going to be faced by rivals and enemies who prefer a different vision of Utopia- one with a larger place for their own wishes.

Preparation Phase Actions

When between Crises, the characters have the opportunity to prepare themselves for future challenges and deal with the needs of their community. In order to accomplish much of either, resources are necessary, most of which can be divided up into several basic types. These resources are either produced by the community or scavenged by the players during their Crisis response. For convenience, resources are measured in "units" to represent the rough amount available. The exact amount and type of good that qualifies is left vague, as most players won't be terribly interested in dealing with the more particular details.

Power: This resource is most commonly found in the form of rechargeable power cells. These cells are brightly-colored tubes that can be attached to each other to form larger batteries or broken into smaller component cells for portable devices. The color of the cells indicates the strength of their charge, from the bright red of a full charge down to the deep blue of an empty cell. A fully-charged cell of the smallest divisible kind is no larger than a watch battery. Most of the Flock have no idea how to recharge these batteries. Even if they did, the vast majority of the charging stations are dead.

Food: Virtually all of the food eaten by the Flock was compiled by nanostations and automatically shipped to food distribution points around the cities and towns. Legions of dedicated Flock artisans were constantly exploring the outer regions of the culinary arts by means of ingredients and flavors that had no parallel to mundane physical reality. Only a tiny fraction of all food consumed was actually raised by hand, and these "artisanal farms" sent most of their produce to those Shepherds who still felt pleasure in the more "authentic" dining arrangement. The Rapture has ended this comfortable state. No more than a handful of nanostations still function, and those require power that is often unavailable. As of a month after the Rapture, the last of the stockpiled food supplies are beginning to give out. Wide-spread starvation will begin within weeks. Fortunately, nanoproduced foodstuffs are immune to spoilage, and hidden stockpiles or forgotten caches might still be located around cities and towns.

Tools: For all the elaborate elegance of the architecture and material culture of the Flock, relatively few tools existed that could be used by human hands. The nanostations produced almost all goods required without any intermediary steps. Artisans still existed, however, hand-crafting prototypes for new styles of goods, or producing exquisite and unique works for the Shepherds. The tools of these artisans remain precious, whether an "authentic hand chisel" or a pen welding laser.

Military: Military supplies are the rarest variety of resource. They include weapons, armor, and other implements intended purely for the infliction or aversion of violence. Before the Rapture, organized violence by members of the Flock was all but unknown. Most members were fully conversant with the intellectual concept of "war", and could even feel a thrill of righteous horror at it, but the Guidelines made it impossible for groups to clash save for those rare and tragic circumstances when two groups' self-defense Guidelines kicked in at cross purposes. Still, despite this peaceful past, there remain some older tools that have use in war. Hunting weaponry existed, as did body armor for sport use and dangerous occupations. As time goes by, more of this resource will be newly-made by the Scarred and other members of the Flock who have reconciled themselves to present needs.

People: Perhaps the most important resource, for all that they require so much effort to support. These people represent members of the Flock capable of functioning outside their ordained role. Few are actually Scarred. They are simply men and women who have learned how to rationalize new tasks within the framework of their conditioning. They are much less flexible and versatile than the Scarred, but they can supply the basic labor and military service that remains necessary for any community's survival. Players might find a "cache" of this resource during a Crisis, bringing men and women back to their communities as useful participants.

Knowledge: This final resource is perhaps the most elusive. A member of the Flock formerly required very little knowledge outside of his or her role. Some indulged in personal

study for their own satisfaction, but there was little point in growing too fascinated in a line of knowledge that one would never be permitted to use practically. The Shepherds took care that all of the Flock were literate, but the writing available was almost invariably related specifically to a member's role in society, or explanations of how the latest permutation of civil order would improve self-realization. Hard technical data was almost nonexistent, and even mundane skills once related to daily survival have atrophied. Growing a vegetable garden is a feat completely beyond most members of the Flock. Thus, players often find themselves needing to seek out stores of technical information in order to repair some nanotech artifact or develop a useful crop rotation.

These stores are brought back to and stored at the players' *community*. This community might consist of a band of nomadic refugees, a clique of ideological fanatics, a farming village, or any other safe haven that the players have established and lead. Communities have ratings as well in *Population, Prosperity, Security, and Freedom*. A freshly-founded community will have a rating of 1 in each area, and failure to bring these ratings up as new Crises arrive can result in the community being overwhelmed by the dangers of their environment. If a rating is ever brought to 0 by outside attacks or internal strife, the community dissolves and the population either flees to seek safety elsewhere or dies from internal conflict or inability to adapt.

Taking useful steps during the Preparation phase requires *actions*. The number of actions a character receives during the Preparation phase depend on the Trait that they drew; some Traits give their possessor more actions than others. Players take their actions one at a time based on their Traits. The sequence of actions is Planner, Leader, Crafter, Warrior, and Sage. In cases where a particular action requires using up some of the community's resources, no permission is required from the other players. In this way, it is possible for a particularly selfish player to use up all of the available resources early in the sequence. A player who strongly objects to another player's action can spend one of their available actions to cancel it; costing both them and the original player their actions to no useful effect.

In cases where there are fewer than five players, the players may not have enough actions to build up their community. Give one bonus action to each player if there are only 3 or 4 characters, and two bonus actions to each player if there are fewer than 3.

Below are a list of possible actions that can be taken to build up the players' community or the player characters themselves. Other actions might be possible, at a cost in resources and time to be determined by the GM.

Community Building Actions

Liberate Community: People, Knowledge, and Food resources equal to the community's Freedom

Through dedication and effort, the player helps more of the local people throw off the shackles of the Guidelines. Some have so compromised their own understanding of the Guidelines that they can now perform almost any action, while others endure the pain of becoming Scarred. Regardless of the source, more of the local population is now capable of acting with free will. Increase the Freedom rating by 1.

Grow Community: People, Tools, and Food resources equal to the community's Population

Desperate Flock members gather to the beacon of hope and security that is your community, and the player character helps integrate them into local society. Increase the Population rating by 1.

Defend Community: People, Military, and Food resources equal to the community's Security.

Some among the flock prove capable of visiting violence on others. This action shapes

them into a force capable of maintaining order and protecting the others of the Flock. Increase the Security rating by 1.

Enrich Community: People, Tools, and Knowledge resources equal to the community's Prosperity.

Most among the Flock have no idea how to create material goods by hand. With effort and instruction, the player character is able to teach them how to use tools effectively. Increase the Prosperity rating by 1.

Community Structure Actions

Develop Armory: Tools and Knowledge equal to the armory's level

As alien and strange as the idea is to most of the Flock, it is possible to create workshops purely for the manufacture of military goods and training. For each level of armory present in a community, 1 unit of Military is produced at the beginning of each Preparations phase for each. Each use of this action increases the armory's level by 1; to increase the armory by multiple levels, multiple actions must be taken. Multiple armories cannot be created; a single one must be advanced.

Develop School: People and Knowledge resources equal to the school's level

Members of the Flock can be taught to share their knowledge with their fellows. For each level of School present in a community, 1 unit of Knowledge is produced at the beginning of each Preparations phase for each. Each use of this action increases the school's level by 1; to increase the school by multiple levels, multiple actions must be taken. Multiple schools cannot be created; a single one must be advanced.

Develop Factory: People and Tools resources equal to the factory's level

Whether an actual factory, a workshop, or an extraction mine, this action creates an ongoing source of prosperity in the community. For each level of the factory, 1 unit of Tools is produced at the beginning of each Preparations phase. Each use of this action increases the factory's level by 1; to increase the factory by multiple levels, multiple actions must be taken. Multiple factories cannot be created; a single one must be advanced.

Develop Generator: Tools and Knowledge equal to the generator level

In most communities, power cells are useless once depleted. Careful effort and knowledge can create generators capable of recharging spent power cells. For each level of the generator, 1 unit of Power is produced at the beginning of each Preparations phase. Each use of this action increases the generator's level by 1; to increase the generator by multiple levels, multiple actions must be taken. Multiple generators cannot be created; a single one must be advanced.

Spread Communications: Tools, Food and Power equal to the communications level.

This action advances the network of news and propaganda that spreads from the community, bringing in more hopeful Flock seeking safety. For each level of the communications, 1 unit of People is produced at the beginning of each Preparations phase. Each use of this action increases the communications level by 1; to increase the communications by multiple levels, multiple actions must be taken. Multiple communications cannot be created; a single one must be advanced.

Plant Farm: People and Knowledge resources equal to the farm's level

Difficult as it is for most of the Flock, planting and cultivating farms is the only hope for staving off long-term starvation. For each level of the farm, 1 unit of Food is produced at the beginning of each Preparations phase. Each use of this action increases the farm level by 1; to increase the farm by multiple levels, multiple actions must be taken. Multiple farms

cannot be created; a single one must be advanced.

Skill Preparation Actions

Prepare a Skill: 1 Tools per skill

This allows a player to prepare a technical skill for use during a Crisis. He or she gathers the requisite tools and ensures that they are available and near to hand. The player may choose as many skills to prepare as he or she wishes, but each skill chosen costs 1 unit of Tools to prepare. Thus, a character who decides to scavenge up some electronic lockpicks for Security, a belt toolkit for Macrotech, and a first aid kit for Medicine would spend 3 units of Tools and have one Preparation for each of the three skills. Note that preparing the Nanotech skill is a special action, and requires substantially more investment. Note also that to prepare multiple uses of a skill requires taking this action multiple times.

Prepare Nanotech Skill: 2 Tools, 1 Knowledge, 2 Power

Preparing the tools necessary to repair or modify nanotechnological devices is highly expensive in time and materials. Very few nanotech devices can be repaired at all in the aftermath of the Rapture, and those that can be generally require a prohibitive amount of Power to work. Still, possession of a functional nanostation is an incredibly valuable resource to any community.

Prepare Violence Substitute: 1 unit of any applicable resource

Prudent characters can prepare for combat using skills more to their liking than brute Violence. A crafter might fabricate a gun, a technician might cut safety parameters on equipment, a psychologist might prepare a Guideline-bending explanation of why violence is impermissible against her, or any other skill might serve as well provided some explanation is given. Like all skill preparations, each fight requires its own Preparation, and each Preparation costs 1 unit of some relevant resource and an action to prepare it.

Maintain Preparations: 1 People, or 1 Tools, or 1 Knowledge

Preparations rust and decay, and must be kept fresh if they are to be ready. This action need only be taken once, and need not be taken for Preparations made that same phase. Otherwise, a character who does not take this action loses any Preparations they may have made, both skill and violence substitutes.

Character Adjustment Actions

Study a Skill: 1, 2, 4, or 8 Knowledge units

A character may spend an action studying a skill during the Preparation phase. Acquiring a skill at Novice level requires 1 unit of Knowledge, Trained requires 2, Expert requires 4, and Master requires 8. A character can take this action only once during any single Preparation phase.

Build Equipment: 1, 2, 4, or 8 Tools, Knowledge and Power units, rounded up

Characters can spend time building equipment to assist with a particular skill. Equipment may grant between +1 and +4 on rolls for that skill. +1 equipment costs 1 Tool, 1 Knowledge, and 1 Power. +2 Equipment costs twice as much, +3 costs four times as much, and +4 costs eight times as much. After every event or combat in which the equipment is used, roll 3d6; on a 5 or less, the equipment is broken and must be repaired at a Hard repair skill test. A character must have a relevant crafting skill in order to build equipment; Novice for +1 gear, Trained for +2, Expert for +3, and Master for +4.

Cure Injury: 1 People, 1 Tools, 1 Knowledge

A Gravely Injured character can be nursed back to health by application of this action.

The player need not spend the action personally; it may be done by another. Until the Grave Injury is repaired, however, the character is unable to spend other actions.

Change Trait or Resolution Card: 1 Knowledge for each player in the group

By dedication and application, a character can alter his or her relationship with the world. An athlete might find his purpose narrowing to a grim focus, while an airy contemplative might be pulled in the myriad directions of a polymath. By taking this action, the player can exchange either their Trait or their Resolution Card for a Trait or Resolution Card not already possessed by someone else in the group. Optionally, a GM may allow the PC to choose a Trait or Resolution Card already possessed by someone in the group, but this should cost twice the normal resources. Traits and Resolution Cards define a character as "the most like" that concept in a group; when multiple people share the same traits, it becomes progressively harder to emphasize them, rather than seeking a less crowded field of potential.