CLASH

a game about conflict by Brie Sheldon

What is Clash?

Clash is a story about conflict. This game is engineered to replicate the rise and fall of long going, ingrained social conflicts between opposing sides. It is best for an even number of players, and intended for long-term play.

What do you do in Clash? You fight. You debate. You struggle. But most of all, you interact and find the end of the story of wars, battles, and heartbreak.

What You Need to Play

To play Clash, you need eight-sided dice (D8), pencils, these rules, index cards, and paper copies of the character sheets from the back of the book.

There is no Game Master or storyteller individual in Clash. The only ones telling the story are the players. It is best for 4-8 players in teams of two, three, or four.

Dice Rolls

All dice rolls are made with eight-sided dice (d8's). Players will roll the number of dice equal to their dice pool, and count the number of successes. A success is any die that results in 4 or more.

Why D8s?

This game uses 8-sided dice in order to give the players a chance to get slightly greater than a 50% chance at succeeding on the rolls. When players have a higher chance of success, it gives them hope - but it also means that the World has a higher chance of succeeding in causing Catastrophe.

Content

Players will work together to create a high conflict environment where the characters would be on two or more sides. Good examples would be gang wars, feuding families, or tribes at war.

Content

Deciding the setting should include a discussion of what kind of content will exist in the game. Every story has the possibility of approaching or confronting complicated and sometimes uncomfortable subjects. It is inevitable that, in a game about conflict and warring ideals, players may come to discuss something that is a hot-button topic. Some players may want to dig deep and investigate racial relations in history - the two teams could consist of a majority race and a minority race, and that kind of conflict can get really rough to work through. Conflict, however, is the meat of Clash.

Setting Boundaries

At the beginning of your setup, the group should discuss the boundaries they are comfortable with approaching and those they aren't sure about. Will there be sexual content in the game? What about graphic descriptions of violence? Is this a comedy, or a tragedy? It may be useful to think of movie ratings while setting these boundaries, but be aware that there are always chances that someone will either push the boundaries or break them.

Pushing and Breaking Boundaries

If players come to a point where they have the opportunity to tell more of their story by pushing or breaking the established boundaries, but they aren't sure if other players will be on board, it is always best to discuss it ahead of time. However, sometimes these barriers come up organically and it can be hard to judge the other player's feelings. In these cases, players are encouraged to tell the story in the best way for their character, while being aware of other players' comfort with the subject matter.

Script Change

If the story, actions, or narration turn in a direction that makes a player uncomfortable, there is a tool that can be used to guide the story without interrupting the flow of the game. At the start of the session, prepare two cards (index cards work well) labeled "Rewind" and "Fast Forward". Discuss together how these cards will be used. If content comes up in game that a player is not comfortable with or would prefer to avoid, they can tap these cards. If a player taps

"Rewind", whoever is narrating should pause and approach their narration in a different way. If a player taps "Fast Foward", the current narrator should skip forward to the next topic or scene.

Example:

Jeff is describing how his character, Jerome, is flirting with a girl at a club. He describes how Jerome leans in close to the woman and wraps his arm around her, even though she doesn't seem interested. Kelly, another player, taps the "Rewind" card. Jeff pauses and backs up, describing the scene differently. In this instance, he describes how Jerome tries chatting the girl up, but gets shot down.

Later, Kelly is describing her character Lindsay in a brutal fight scene. She talks about how Lindsay gets shot in the leg, and goes into graphic detail about blood spurts and gore. Jeff taps the "Fast Forward" card, so Kelly knows that the detail is too much. She quickly summarizes her narration and fades the violence to black.

Creating Setting and Conflict

When creating your setting, you want to focus on developing the conflict. This is not meant to be a good versus evil story. The list of questions below should help you to build a fully fleshed out conflict. Players should take turns making suggestions for these questions, and the group should come to an agreement on which are best to take. When you have chosen the answers, write them on a sheet and keep it in the center of the table near the World pool so that everyone has easy access.

Who is the conflict between?

What started the conflict?

How long has the conflict been going on?

What has happened to make the conflict worse, and what has happened to make it better?

What are three major milestones in the conflict - the originating event, a turning point, and the most recent spike in activity?

What is at stake for each group involved in the conflict?

Are there other groups involved in the conflict that serve mostly to stir up trouble, like police forces or even political influences?

If the there are leaders of the players groups, who are they?

What part of the territory has suffered the greatest scars from the conflict?

Using Group Questions

The above questions should be used for a few different purposes. First, they should help players in building their characters by giving them guidance on what the complications are in the story, as well as helping players to establish opposite goals than the group they are part of. Second, they can be used to guide narration of World effects and to provide non-player characters (NPCs). Finally, players should use these questions to define the Stakes for their group.

NPCs

Non-player characters are background players in the story that can be part of World events or included in scenes. When NPCs are included, the player setting the scene will choose other players at the table to act as those NPCs.

Each player should define at least one NPC related in some way to their character socially or otherwise, including a name and general description of how the NPC relates to the conflict. Examples would be a character's brother who is very in support of the group's goals, or a cop that has been following one of the characters around town.

Stakes

Each team or group will have a Stake in the game, defined in advance by all players on that team. When this Stake is at risk, called out, or the main focus of a scene, the player from that group can tag it to add one die to their roll if they also place a die into the World pool. The Stakes should be written as a phrase or specific term on a piece of paper with the name of the team or group, and the player should use the words on the paper specifically to tag the Stake.

Choose a Side and Know Yourself

Sides

Before creating characters, players must choose a side in the overall conflict. There are no neutral parties. Choosing a side is vital to how your character acts, reacts, and how your relationships will develop. Players should divide themselves equally between the sides.

Relationships

Once they choose their side, they create relationships with the other players - friendships, family, enemies - each character must have a relationship with one character on their side and one with a character on the opposing side. More relationships are useful, but not required. They must also have one good memory or one bad memory with each of those characters. Use the relationship map or a map like it to set up your relationships.

As the story plays on, you will develop and change your relationships. It's best to reevaluate relationships at the end of each session, making any necessary changes to the relationship maps to help guide the next session.

Archetypes

When choosing a side, you should also look at an archetype that you want to help guide your character's identity. Example archetypes would be Leader, Warrior, Mentor, Elder, Martyr, Youth, or Lover. When you are setting your story, feel free to use terms that are more appropriate to the flavor - if you're setting your story in late 1800s, for a young member of a gang you might use Urchin, or for a story about feuding families, you might use familial labels like Matriarch, Sister, or Black Sheep. You should consider adding an additional descriptor to the archetype, such as Reluctant Leader, Spurned Lover, or even Cowardly Warrior. Use these to guide character development, place yourself in the hierarchy in your group, and present a face to the outside world.

How the World Sees You

You should also spend significant time thinking about how the outside world perceives you, as well as your character's individual goals. When you describe your character to other players, only tell them the things that they would know from observing you or things that would be common knowledge. Write these down, and use them often.

What are you known as, and what do you do?

What do you want most?

Who do you trust?

What do you have at stake?

What is a unique feature of yours that others notice?

What is holding you back from what you want?

Do you believe in the goals of your group?

Using Character Questions

Now that you've answered questions about your group, and about your character, you can use them when you compose scenes. You should consider what motivations your character has before you start a scene, and use that to determine who you want to talk to - NPCs or other players, or groups of players. You should also use those questions to guide how much you reveal to other players. Are you secretive by nature as a character? Do you want everyone to know whether you agree with your group or not? If you have secrets, be secretive. If you have been exposed, or embarrassed, let it show in your conflicts. When you go into scenes, your answers to these questions should inform whether you agree to people's requests and how you approach the conflicts.

Character Goals

Every player should define three character goals related to their questions. They should all be goals that should be able to be completed within three sessions, but not in less than one session. For example, a player might have an individual goal to find out who fired the first shot in a battle. Another player could have an individual goal to build up the courage to confess their love for someone. These goals can relate to NPCs, the World, or other players. Keep the character relationships and group goals in mind during goal creation.

Signatures

A Signature is a unique item or mannerism defined by the players in advance. It can be any item, or even a specific physical object or behavior. This is a useful tool to help others recognize your character, and give you a solid attachment to your character. If it is a physical item, you could consider having a prop at the game table.-

Action Pools

Action pools are a set number of dice or points available to each character. Each player has three Action Pools, as explained below. Players begin with 10 Creation Points to divide between these at the start of play, and receive Development Points at the end of each session to assign.

Pool Maximums and Minimums

Each player cannot have more dice in their pools than twice the amount of points spent in creation and development, and cannot have lower than 1 point or die in each pool except when they Sacrifice (see p. 3). For example, if a character has spent 3 Creation points on their Threat pool, they cannot have greater than 6 dice in that pool. If they add a Development Point to their Threat pool for a total of 4 points spent, they can now have up to 8 dice.

Threat Dice

Threat is your physical ability. You will roll Threat when you physically threaten, force, or harm another character. This pool does not refresh at the end of the session - the available dice are carried over.

Influence Dice

Influence is social ability. You roll Influence when you try to convince, intimidate, or negotiate with another character. This pool does not refresh at the end of the session - the available dice are carried over.

Avoidance Pool

Avoidance is unique. When a player takes no action during a scene, or specifically chooses to fail - not concede, but fail - without a contested roll, the Avoidance pool comes into play as detailed in the Actions section. The Avoidance pool is refreshed at the end of every session.

World Pool

The World pool represents the outside forces in the conflict. The detailed rules on how players interact with the World are detailed later. This pool does not refresh at the end of the session - the available dice are carried over.

Additional Rules for Pools

Reaching Pool Maximums

When you reach your pool maximum for any pool, which is equal to twice the Development Points and Sacrifice points allotted to that pool, any dice given to you in order to Take Control are distributed into the World pool.

Sacrifice

At any time, a player may choose to sacrifice themselves for their cause. They automatically win the conflict in their current scene. They will choose two other players who will add one point to their maximum points of a single pool that the sacrifice chooses, and also who will get one die to use in their next scene. This player must narrate how they leave the story, retire their character, and can create a new character in their place. Players may also choose to use Sacrifice in response to a Catastrophe to reduce one effect of the Catastrophe.

Scenes

Each session will have two scenes for each player, then a short intermission. After the intermission, the players will roll the World pool to see what the world has in store for them, and consult the World Against Us table. Then, each player will have two more scenes, and the session ends. The youngest character will start the first scene. If there is a tie for youngest, each player will roll a die and the lowest number goes first. The scenes are taken in turns clockwise around the table.

Setting Scenes

In the first two scenes, players can ask for something from another character, or they can choose to narrate a scene without other players. In the second two scenes, players can do anything they would normally do in the first two scenes, but can also ask other players to narrate a scene for them that they play in.

Scenes should not be consecutive attempts - if one person tries to wrestle down an enemy, the next player should not also try to wrestle down that same enemy. The same goal should not be attempted twice in a row.

What is conflict?

Conflict in a scene is when a character wants something, but the other character doesn't want to give in. Even when a contested roll is won or another player takes control, the losing players don't have to give in completely, but they do have to concede in some way to the winning player.

Types of Conflict

There are three types of conflict in Clash. The following includes those conflict types and associated resolution rules.

Minor Conflict

Minor conflicts are the conflicts that can be resolved in one scene. These conflicts can be resolved using Compromise, Contested Rolls, or Taking Control. Conflict can also be dismissed in scenes by Taking No Action. When players have either resolved conflict through rolls or feel they have reached a compromise, they will simply say the conflict is "Resolved". If they choose to Take No Action, they will define the conflict as "Unresolved". It is useful to state at the end of the scene whether these conflicts are resolved or not, because players may want to revisit the conflicts in the future.

Major Conflict

Major conflicts are involved in the resolution of player goals and World Against Us Catastrophe events. If players feel they have resolved an individual goal, they can petition the group for an additional Development point at the end of the session. In this case, majority rules. If the petition is refused, the player may choose to put a die in the World pool. If the petition is granted, that player has an additional 1 point to add to their pools. Catastrophe events from the World Against Us table should take at least one session to fully resolve the conflict, preferably two or three. Details on how to resolve those events are in the World section. When a Catastrophe event is resolved, all players have the option to rewrite one of their individual goals, remove a die from the World pool, or change their relationship with another PC.

Conflict Arc

A conflict arc is relevant to the overall story. Conflict arcs should not take fewer than 3 sessions to resolve, typically closer to 5 or seven. When a conflict arc is resolved, all players must agree that it is resolved. When the arc is resolved, all players are awarded an additional Development point for the session, and may choose to rewrite the group Stakes. Each player also has the opportunity at the end of a conflict arc to change their character's archetype.

An example of a conflict arc would be when a group loses or achieves their Stake - such as, when one team obtains the territory they were fighting over, or if the leader of a group is killed. It could also be if an agreement would occur between the groups to have a truce, or if a group splits because of an internal conflict.

Actions

Scenes are resolved either through a compromise, contested rolls, taking control, or by taking no action.

Players may also choose to interact with The World. For all action rolls, the target number is 4.

Compromise

If players choose to narrate conflict and reach a compromise without having a contested roll, neither player has to put a die into the World pool. However, in their next scene with conflict, each of these players have the Upper Hand. It is important to remember that players should not agree to compromise against their character's goals and ideals without good reason, and that there may be consequences within their group for compromising.

Example: Jim, a Reluctant Warrior, and Lori, a Devoted Martyr, are arguing over who should go to face off with an enemy. Jim has pressure on him from his family and feels responsible, but Lori wants to show everyone she can win.

Lori: "I'm a good fighter, and I'm not afraid of these guys!"

Jim: "But, my uncle expects me to represent the family."

Lori: "What if we went together and you were my backup?"

Jim thinks it over. No one would really know if he got involved in the fight or not, with how tough Lori is.

Jim: "That works for me. Let's do it!"

Contested Rolls

In a scene where players encounter a conflict, they can use a contested roll to between players to resolve. They may roll either dice pool in the contest, but have to narrate their action. The player who accepts the loss in this instance will mark down an additional die for rolls against The World.

Example: Jim and Lori go to meet in an alley with three of the members of an opposing gang. Lori immediately runs up and tries to attack one of the men. The opposing player, Tom, a Steadfast Fighter, doesn't want to give in, so the players decide to have a contested roll.

Since it is a physical altercation, Lori and Tom both roll their Threat dice pools. Tom rolls fewer successes than Lori, so he fails the contest. In response, he puts forward a die to Take Control.

Taking Control

In the event a player with the larger dice pool loses a contested roll, they may choose to take control by passing one of their dice to the winning player and adjusting their available Dice pool (but not their total Dice pool) accordingly. When this happens,

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it's important to remember that the opposing player does not lose. They will concede in some fashion, but it should always have the effect of only giving in a little bit - the player would often respond with "Okay, I'll give a little, and..." and they narrate the final effect. You cannot Take Control using Avoidance pool points.

Example: Tom narrates how he tries to strongarm Lori and Take Control by passing one of his dice to Lori. Lori doesn't want to give in, so she uses the Upper Hand that she gained from her original compromise with Tom.

The Upper Hand

The Upper Hand is a reward for Compromise. If you have The Upper Hand, you are able to ignore another player Taking Control.

Example: When Tom tries to Take Control, Lori returns Tom's Threat die and holds up her right hand.

Lori: "I am going to call on Jim to have him help me out of the situation! Jim, come pull me away."

Jim: "I walk up and grab Lori and pull her away from the fight."

Lori called on Jim in her scene to act, so he gets to act freely. If another player wants to oppose him, they should do so in their next scene.

Taking No Action

In a scene where players have no conflict or choose not to resolve conflict, the player with the highest Avoidance will place a die into the World Pool. Players may also choose not to act in a scene with conflict, or choose specifically to fail without a contested roll. In this instance, that player will place a die from their Avoidance pool into the World pool.

Example: Lori and Jim are now embroiled in the fight, and the scene moves to Jim's turn. Jim doesn't want to be involved with the fight at all.

Jim: "After I grab Lori, I back off and stay on the sidelines. Unless she makes me get involved, I'm not getting in to the heat of anything!"

Jim puts a die in the center of the table and marks down his available Avoidance points.

The World

The external forces of the universe, of social pressure, of political force, all have an affect on the characters even if they seek to avoid it or fight against it. The World has its own dice pool, as detailed in the Dice Pools section.

Us Against the World

When players choose to interact with the World, they will narrate a scene with NPCs and roll their appropriate pool against the World to resolve any conflict. Designate other players to act as the NPCs. Players who are planning to use physical force or intimidation would roll Threat and those intending to use social capital or persuasion would roll Influence. The World pool will be rolled in opposition. If the player fails at their roll against the World, the World pool is increased by 1. If they succeed, they can remove one die from the World pool.

Example: It's Tom's scene. He narrates sirens blaring in the distance and the police approaching to interrupt the fight. Other players may choose to say they aren't involved in the scene, so long as Tom agrees. If Tom insists another player will stay, they should use a contested roll as detailed above. Tom will tag another player in to act on behalf of the policeman.

Tom: "The police arrive. They get out of the car, and one of the policemen is a real tough guy, slapping his baton in his hand. I'm going to try to reason with them to let us alone."

Tom narrates a conversation with the police and rolls his Influence dice pool against the World pool. His roll has more successes than the World pool, so he removes one die from the World pool.

The World Against Us

When players roll the World pool after the first two scenes, they consult the table below, and respond to the event either by conflict with other players, narrating an individual scene and placing a die into the World pool, or choosing to allow another player to narrate their scene and placing a die into the World pool. Add the number of dice that show a 4 or above to determine what event takes place.

World Against Us Table

1-2 - Embarassment: Two players should narrate in the next scene how they are socially disgraced, embarrassed, or how their status is affected in their social circle. The player(s) with the highest Influence dice available mark their current Influence pool available down by two, and the two players with the lowest Influence dice available add a die to their Influence pool.

3-4 - Injury: Two players should narrate in the next scene how they are physically injured or what made

them appear weak. The player(s) with the highest Threat dice available mark their current Threat pool available down by two, the two players with the lowest Threat dice available add a die to their Threat pool.

5 - Pressure: Powers in the World are putting pressure on the characters. It's time for someone to step up and take the heat. The player with the highest Avoidance pool available puts one die in the World pool to carry over to the next session. This player should narrate a scene where they interact with the World - an NPC, a non-player represented group, or some other external force that can cause stress to the character. If there is a tie for the highest pool, all players with the highest pool are affected.

6 and Up - Catastrophe: All players must help to define a major event that affects their teams and their characters individually. When doing so, they create a problem for the team that needs to be resolved and will write the problem down and place it in the center of the table on a Catastrophe card. Each player takes one die off of their highest available pool.

Example: It is the end of the first two scenes. There are four dice in the World pool. One player rolls the World pool, and it comes up with two successes. At this point in the game, Lori and another player, Ellen - playing a Tough Bruiser - have the highest Threat dice available. They mark down their available Threat dice by two. Tom and Jim have the lowest Threat dice pool, so they add two dice to their available Threat dice pool. In the following scenes, each player narrates or holds a scene that demonstrates the effect of the World pool. Lori and Ellen would detail how they were harmed, and Tom and Jim would detail what they gained to make them tougher.

Resolving Catastrophes

Examples of Catastrophes include major loss of resources like having a home burglarized, losing a big fight, or being in the path of a natural disaster and having to recover. Players resolve Catastrophes as a group. Catastrophes should be written on a card and placed in the center of the table. Each player should try to have at least one scene per session that addresses the Catastrophe - working to resolve it, or even trying to make it worse if they choose.

Example: In a later session, the groups encounter a Catastrophe in their World Against Us roll. They decide the Catastrophe was a fire at Lori and Jim's uncle's diner, where all of the players barely escaped. The fire was arson, and now they have to determine who started the fire - and why.

Each scene following the Catastrophe details a player working to find the answer. At the end of the session, the players should give a brief description of the scene they set to resolve it.

Lori: "I talked to a cop and found out that the fire had been started with gasoline in the back room."

Tom: "I kidnapped and interrogated Ellen to find out what she knew."

Ellen: "I turned it around on Tom and he confessed that he wasn't involved."

Jim: "I Took Responsibility for the Catastrophe."

Taking Responsibility

If a player has only one point remaining in their available Avoidance pool when a Catastrophe occurs, they are at greater risk during the Catastrophe. They will roll 1d8 and if the result is four or less, they will Take Responsibility for the Catastrophe. When a character Takes Responsibility, they will start the next session with one less available point of Avoidance.

Example: Jim had been avoiding conflict the entire session, hiding from other players and acting suspicious. When the Catastrophe happened, he rolled 1d8 and the result was a 3, so he Took Responsibility for the Catastrophe. His final scene detailed what happened.

Jim: "I was sick of my Uncle telling me what to do and trying to get me to fight against the other team. I figured if he had something else to focus on, he'd leave me alone, so I lit the fire in the back room. It wasn't supposed to burn so fast!"

Development

At the end of each session, players will receive one point to develop their characters. One point is equal to one die in a pool, and equal to one point in Avoidance pools. There are other opportunities for gaining Development Points when players resolve conflicts, and these Development Points are of the same value as those awarded at the end of the session.

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