

CHAPTER ONE

THE BASIC CONCEPT

Conceptually, Universalis is a collaborative story telling endeavor in the form of a game. Players begin by selecting what kind of story will be told during that session. No time needs to be spent preparing this ahead of time. It is decided at the table in round robin fashion, using Coins to purchase aspects of the game world as desired. When all players are satisfied that they understand the nature of the game to be played, actual play begins. Players will create all aspects of the setting, including all characters (main and supporting), all locations (and all setting details), and all props (basically anything else, animal vegetable or mineral). They will then use these elements (collectively called Components) to develop the plot; telling the story through events and dialog and through the use of dice during plot complications.

All players have equal authority over the direction the game will go. There is no designated “Game Master” as there is in most Role Playing Games. Technically one could say that all players serve as joint Game Masters with their respective authority being measured and regulated in the game through the use of Coins.

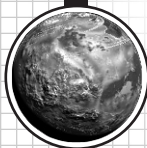
A finished game may be left as a complete project on its own, or players may revisit that same setting with new tales to tell. Future games may gradually build up an entire world or cycle of stories, which reuse existing Components from previous games.

COINS MEASURE STORY POWER

Coins are the resource that quantifies and regulates how much control each player will have to 1) define the setting by Creating Components and 2) to move the story in the direction they prefer through Events. If you spend Coins, you gain power over the story. Its that simple.

Chapter 4 discusses how these Coins are used to Create Components. Chapter 5 discusses using these Coins to establish scenes and Events.

Stones, tokens, or actual pocket change can be used to represent these Coins. The supply of Coins a player has available to him is called his Wealth. Players will spend these Coins and earn additional ones throughout the game, so a central reserve of Coins (the

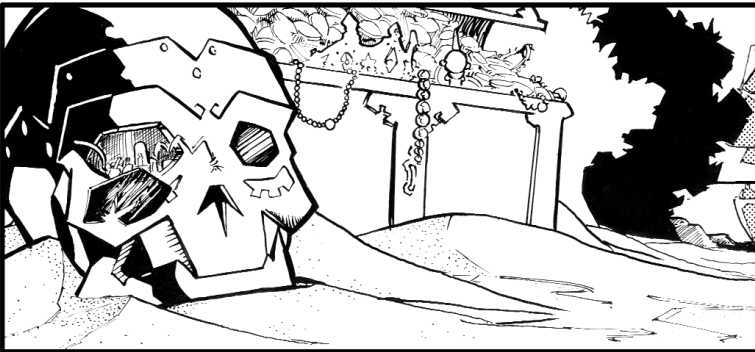


Bank) is required. Players will receive a certain number of Coins at the beginning of each game. How many is up to the individual playgroup to decide.

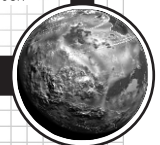
- There are two ways to get additional Coins:
 - 1) at the end of each scene, Coins will be awarded through Refreshment.
 - 2) by Originating Plot Complications, players will have the opportunity to win additional Coins

The Coin mechanic sets up a miniature economy in the game which functions regardless of the number of Coins involved. However, different amounts of Coins will result in a different feel to play (a Coin rich vs. a Coin poor environment), and players are encouraged to experiment until finding the level they find most enjoyable. In general, a game with high initial Coins will allow players to spend many Coins building the environment in the first scene before getting to the action. A game with fewer initial Coins will require getting to the action earlier because only by starting new scenes and Originating Complications can more Coins be acquired. A game with a low Refreshment rate will encourage players to have more frequent Complications as a way of earning more Coins. A game with a high Refreshment rate provides less encouragement for using Complications in this manner.

It is suggested that initially players start with 25 Coins each and Refreshment be set at 5 Coins per scene, until players become familiar with the rules. After a few sessions, groups can adjust this amount to find a level that suits their style of play. The number of Coins to be



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used must be chosen before the Game Preparation Phase begins.

CONTROL, AUTHORITY, AND SETTLING DISPUTES

There are four mechanisms in the game for maintaining organization and settling disputes between players. The first is the Social Contract which is discussed in Chapter 2. This is basically a pre-game agreement between players about how the game is to be played. Chapter 3 introduces rules for play order and regulations for who gets to say what and when. Chapter 3 also discusses the Challenge mechanic which is how disputes between players are resolved if they cannot be settled by other means. Finally and most importantly, authority resides with the Coins themselves. A player's Wealth is a reserve of potential, but as yet unused, authority. As Coins are spent to gain immediate control over an aspect of the world, the player is simultaneously giving up some potential for control in the future. This dynamic, and the need to replace spent Coins is what drives the game forward.

FACTS: AS TRAITS, EVENTS, AND TENETS

Facts are a crucial core concept to Universalis. Each type will be described in detail in later chapters, but each has several things in common. Each defines some aspect of the game or story, each costs 1 Coin, each provides added weight to Challenges, and each can provide 1 die to appropriate Complications.

- **Traits:** Facts purchased for Components (described in Chapter 4)
- **Events:** Facts purchased for scenes (described in Chapter 5)
- **Tenets:** Facts purchased for the game itself (described in Chapter 2)

