

Read this Book First!

DROWNING & FALLING

THE FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME OF ADVENTURE AND DEATH FROM DROWNING AND FALLING

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BENEFICIARY

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Learning how to play DROWNING & FALLING games

Start Here

There is a world far from here - a world like our own, but completely different. A gritty medieval world of magic and mystery with enchanted creatures, drowning, and falling! Are you brave enough to face the danger? Do you enjoy killing monsters? Do you like acquiring treasure? Do you have good balance and a decent Australian crawl? If so, prepare to test your mettle against the sorts of devilish challenges your friends tend to create, because only the best heroes will emerge victorious in the savage world of Drowning and Falling!

The saga of Fyren Cloudfather

By Bryan Hansel

Fyren Cloudfloater stood at the edge of the precipice and stared down into the rushing water below. Behind her, slowly climbing down the cliff that separated her and her men from the safety of the plateau, a mass of an amorphous blob slowly climbed down. Fyren pulled her mace from its sheath with a quick jerk and loud swoosh, and the sound of the mace rung into her ears and into her mind. She remembered back to her childhood when the mace now in her hand belonged to her father, Besyrwan the Waterwalker. On the last day of her father's life, Fyren watched him walk across the water and before she could warn her father, she saw a cliff shark fall out of its nest and land in the water. The wave quickly splashed, rolled, and turned as a frothy white bubbling gurggle until it rolled over her father.

Besyrwan was no more.

Days later, the waterlogged corpse floated to the shore and Fyren retrieved the mace, her father's mace. It was that fateful day, when her father drown from the wave created by the falling cliff shark, that Fyren vowed to carry her father's mace and fight the forces that would cause the drowning and falling.

Awaking from her remembrance, Fyren took a final look into the Canyon of Falling Rocks and turned towards the blob -- now closer. She knew in his heart that if this blob approached any closer, she would be forced off the cliff, and she would fall to her death in the frothy whitewater below. Would she drown or die from the fall, she didn't know, but Fyren didn't want to find out.

At the top of her lungs, Fyren called out, "Men, fight! Fight for your lives, or I'll throw you over the edge myself."

The other adventures pulled their swords and axes and readied their spell books. They all joined the battle cry, "I will not drown or fall!" They rushed the slowly climbing amorphous blob with Fyren in the lead.

Preparing for the Game

The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game is best played with a bunch of people - you and all your friends. Playing with three is the bare minimum, and it really starts to get fun with five or six participants.

As a group, you'll need:

- A place to play.
- Some post-it notes for finished challenges and treasure.
- A standard deck of cards for creating challenges.
- Snacks.

Each player ought to have:

- A pair of standard six-sided dice.
- A pencil.
- A Drowning and Falling Characters Sheet, or some scratch paper.

Group preparation consists of giving each player some playing cards, with which you will all create challenges by writing them on post-it notes. The rules for creating challenges are in Part Six: Underworld And Wilderness Adventures.

Individual preparation consists of making up a character, and then making up a few more as backups. It's pretty easy, so always try to keep a spare around - that's why it's called a characters sheet.

The life of an adventurer in the Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game is fraught with peril - deadly peril that can kill you! The characters sheet includes space for multiple guys, and you might want to roll up a few in advance, just to be sure. Everybody plays one at a time, though.

Making up a guy

Every character in the Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game is as unique as a snowflake - having fifteen different traits makes it possible! These fifteen traits are divided into two categories - helpful and harmful.

Generating your traits

Trait generation is random. Roll a six sided die for each trait and write the result next to it. For your ten helpful traits, higher is better. For your five harmful traits, lower is better. If you are lucky you will have a better character than your friend who is unlucky. It is all in the implacable hands of fate!

If you have fifteen dice handy, you can roll all your traits in one gigantic mega-throw! Just toss them all, then line them up based on the distance they fell away from you, and write the result starting at the first trait (Brave) and continuing until you get to the end.

If you want to have some kind of equitable and balanced point-allocation system, go ahead and get your friend's buy-in and make one up - but know that you'll be missing out on rolling a bucketful of dice for every character.

A final word of advice here - don't share your characters sheet with other players. Eventually they will create evil wizards, and any information you give them will be used against you.

Helpful Traits

The helpful traits are: Brave, Cool, Mysterious, Blessed, Fast, Agile, Alert, Observant, Tough, and Strong.

Brave reflects the character's raw courage. Use it when bravery is called for!

Cool is that certain quality that the really cool kids possess.

Mysterious refers to a character's air of mystery, or aura of mysteriousness.

Blessed is the degree to which the Gods favor a character.

Fast indicates the character's raw speed, and also whether he is fast or not.

Agile comes into play when feats of agility, dexterity, nimbleness and adroitness are called for.

Alert provides guidance on a character's general state of readiness for sudden trouble.

Observant is all about being observant, and observing things.

Tough is a measure of a character's ability to absorb punishment - a measure of toughness, if you will.

Strong is pretty self-explanatory. Do I really need to get into what being strong is all about?

Harmful traits

The harmful traits are Pathetic, Unlucky, Clumsy, Oblivious, and Weak.

Pathetic includes all things dorky and embarrassing. For example, if your character plays role-playing games other than The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game, his Pathetic is probably high.

Unlucky refers to general ill fortune. The character with a high Unlucky will be a cosmic whipping boy.

Clumsy refers to a character's lack of agility, dexterity, nimbleness and adroitness.

Oblivious is a measure of all-around cluelessness, absent-mindedness, and lack of observational skill.

Weak, like strong, is pretty self-explanatory.

What's up with the weird combos?

Clumsy-5 and Agile-6? It happens. It is your duty as a role-player to find an exciting reason why your alter-ego, your virtual champion, would be simultaneously fabulous and lame. Embrace contradiction! In play, all of your helpful scores are going to spiral down like airplanes on fire anyway. If it really bothers you, choose a character class that allows you to change one of the scores you don't like.

Hit points: Staying alive

Your hit points are equal to the sum of the five highest helpful traits, resulting in a number between five and thirty, hopefully closer to the latter. This is the number with which all characters start. Your total hit points do not go up if your traits increase. Hit points will be reduced by injury from drowning or falling. They can be restored by the earnest prayers of a good cleric, or to a lesser extent by some good magic. But for the most part, they will go down until they hit zero - see "Getting Hurt".

Alignment: Staying focused

Just like real life, there are two alignments in The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game. Each character you make must be good or evil. This choice will guide your decision-making in play. As a guideline for appropriate play, good characters normally do good things and evil characters are more likely to do evil things. Wizards and clerics have access to amazing alignment-based spells and prayers.

Part One: Of Men and Magic

Playing an evil character is obviously wrong and bad, but in the interest of presenting a complete role-playing system, rules have been included for it.

Character class: Staying classy

You must choose a class for each character you create. Your class will determine many things, such as whether you carry a sword or wear a purple robe with stars on it. You will probably want to pick the class that is most beneficial to you, but there are no restrictions. Each class has advantages. As a group, the very best strategy is to diversify! Also, if you roll up a guy who will obviously be slain right away, make your next character an evil wizard so you can turn him into a zombie to wring some usefulness out of his corpse.

Warrior: Warriors fight things and know countless menacing poses to strike fear into the hearts of their many enemies. Change Brave and Strong to 6, regardless of what you rolled. This means that if you roll up a weak, cowardly character, make him a warrior. Warriors also ignore penalties from monsters of their level or lower. Thus, a level two warrior suffers no penalty from a difficult or easy monster.

Wizard: Wizards possess the arcane lore of ages past, and channel the eldritch energies of the cosmos to do their bidding. They also wear crazy robes and/or capes. Gain a number of spells equal to your Mysterious trait. Choose good or evil spells based on your alignment. Play a wizard if your Mysterious is high.

Cleric: Clerics are the stalwart faithful who travel the paths and byways in service to their Gods, caring for the dead and praying for things. Gain a number of prayers equal to your Blessed trait. Choose a number of good or evil prayers based on your alignment. Play a cleric if you like tagging along and healing people, or if your Blessed is high.

Elf: Elves, the wispy denizens of the deep forests and secret places beyond the realm of mankind, are beautiful to look upon and somewhat fun to play. Change any single helpful trait to 6, regardless of what you rolled, and add one magic spell, based on your alignment. Elves are resistant to drowning. As an elf, you get to re-roll any one die per drowning encounter. It can be a test you failed, or it can be a damage die. Play an elf if you are afraid of drowning or if you are a girl.

Dwarfling: The stout and jolly dwarflings enjoy a good pipe and a flagon of ale at the end of the day! They are lucky and adorable. Change any single harmful trait to 1, regardless of what you rolled, and add one prayer, based on your alignment. Being little, dwarflings are resistant to falling. When playing a dwarfling, you get to re-roll any one die per falling challenge. It can be a test you failed, or it can be a damage die. Play a dwarfling if you are a huge

Led Zeppelin fan.

Modify your character's traits and add spells and prayers according to the class you choose.

The birth of Gwarl

Johnette is making up her first character. She rolls a bunch of dice and gets this result:

Brave-2
Cool-6
Mysterious-4
Blessed-1
Fast-3
Agile-3
Alert-5
Observant-1
Tough-5
Strong-5
Pathetic-3
Unlucky-5
Clumsy-1
Oblivious-2
Weak-2

Not bad at all. Johnette sees that Unlucky-5 and decides to make her character a dwarfling, changing the harmful trait from a five to a one. She names him Gwarl Ovenwhisper.

Gwarl will have 25 hit points. Johnette decides that he is of good alignment, and chooses Holy Do-Over as his single prayer. Johnette also notes that he gets to re-roll any one die per falling challenge due to Gwarl's dwarfling nature.

Magic

Magic - is there anything more awesome or powerful or mystical? When a character uses magic, weird rainbows appear around them and the air tinkles with tiny, frightening bells. Role-play it! Wizards can cast spells at any time, and they automatically succeed. Once cast, a spell is gone forever - they are like bullets of pure imagination! If you are a wizard or elf, you have the option of gaining a new spell when you go up a level. An evil wizard is, generally, an unreliable companion.

General Spells

Magical Tornado of Magic: This spell, available to all wizards, lowers the monster penalty by one each time it is cast. It is intensely irritating.

Bulldrag's Arcane Guardians: This spell, available to all wizards, provides a single re-roll during the current challenge for two randomly-determined members of the party. Draw straws or roll a die to figure out who the arcane guardians guard. It can be cast multiple times simultaneously, and arcane guardians can double up on the same adventurer.

Good Spells

Sailor's Charm: This good incantation protects the person it is cast on from drowning. It can be cast by wizards on themselves. The recipient automatically succeeds in their next drowning roll, whenever that occurs. It is not retroactive.

Wings of Love: This good eldritch spell protects the person it is cast on from falling. It can be cast by wizards on themselves. The recipient automatically succeeds in their next falling roll, whenever that occurs. It is not retroactive.

Summon Apprentice: The apprentice is a much-maligned helper that can be summoned by any good magician. The poor apprentice has two dice worth of hit points (rolled by the wizard) and will insert himself into any dangerous situation ahead of the wizard, taking damage intended for his master until he dies.

Wizard's Balm: A good wizard can cure one die worth of hit points caused by drowning or falling to two different characters at the same time, but only on others - not himself. And not on an elf. Roll each healing die separately.

Wilkin's Helping Hand of Help: With this good spell, a wizard can choose his own harmful trait in a challenge, taking over that duty from the challenge creator. He also chooses one of his helpful traits, as normal.

Evil Spells

Create Zombie: An evil wizard can raise a fallen comrade from the dead as a mindless zombie. Like an apprentice, the zombie has two dice worth of hit points (rolled by the wizard) and will insert itself into any dangerous situation ahead of one member of the party, who is chosen by the former player of the dead character. A zombie must be raised immediately after a character dies. Since most sensible people will have the zombie guard their own new character, the totally boss thing to do is to make up an evil wizard when you die and take this spell right off the bat.

Magic Rocket: This spell, available to evil wizards, is used to hurt people. If cast on a player character, the victim takes one die of damage. It can also be used to destroy a single treasure. Neither of these actions is helpful in any way.

Gregor's Hand of Malignant Dunking: This evil spell causes the victim to automatically fail their next drowning roll. Pure evil.

Alan's Hot Wind: This evil spell causes the victim to automatically fail their next falling roll. Why would you take this spell? It's just mean.

Azagor's Icy Puppet-Strings: This evil spell allows the wizard to choose which players will decide another player's traits in a challenge. Two players must be selected to choose helpful traits, and one to choose a harmful trait. Both the wizard himself and the victim can be assigned choices if desired.

Prayers

Praying to the gods is even more magical and mystical than magic. There are gods of good and gods of evil, and they will hear and obey your words until you run out of prayers. Then they will abandon you. If you are a cleric or dwarfling, you have the option of gaining a new prayer when you go up a level. Evil clerics are real good-for-nothings - most of their prayers are just cruel.

Good Prayers

Please Help the Drowned Person Amen: This good prayer causes the recipient to recover one die worth of hit points caused by drowning. It cannot be directed at the cleric himself.

Please Help this Person who has Fallen Amen: This good prayer causes the recipient to recover one die worth of hit points caused by falling. It cannot be directed at the cleric himself.

Part One: Of Men and Magic

Please Imbue this Person with Your Awesome Power

Amen: This good prayer raises all of the recipients' helpful traits by one point, even above six, until after the next challenge. It can be directed at anybody, including the cleric himself.

Holy Do-Over: This prayer, available to good clerics, allows the recipient to re-roll any single die - a challenge roll, a healing roll, whatever. It can be cast on anybody, including the cleric himself.

Righteous Appropriation: This prayer allows a good cleric to steal a single item of treasure from a monster prior to defeating it, or from another player character.

Righteous Destiny: This prayer allows the cleric to assign both his own helpful traits in a challenge, rather than having the player on his left provide a trait. Obviously he's in a better position to choose an ideal combination.

Evil Prayers

Shower Wet Hatred Upon this Swimmer So Mote It Be:

This evil prayer causes an extra die of damage to the victim for each failed drowning roll in a single encounter.

Let Them Fall As You Fell My Dark Lord: This evil prayer causes an extra die of damage to the victim for each failed falling roll in a single encounter.

Let the Abyss Gaze Back into Thine Enemies: This evil prayer raises all of the victim's negative traits by one point until after the next encounter.

Unholy Do-Over: This prayer, available to evil clerics, allows the recipient to re-roll any single die. It can be directed at anybody, including the cleric himself.

Blasphemous Song of Stealing Treasure: This prayer allows an evil cleric to steal a single item of treasure from a monster prior to defeating it, or from another player character.

Foul Destiny: This bastardly prayer allows the cleric to assign both helpful traits in a challenge to another character, rather than having the player and the person on his left provide traits. If the cleric has a good idea about the areas in which the victim is weak, he can do a lot of harm.

Advancement and Not-advancement

Characters begin with no levels. They gain a level each time they succeed in a difficult or awesome challenge, and lose a level each time they fail any challenge - even easy challenges. As a tasty side benefit, killing monsters or facing extra-crazy challenges can also net you treasure, which helps you out a lot. Easy challenges are not noteworthy in terms of loot.

Rising and falling levels make The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game different - and better - than many other role-playing games. If you have experience with those other games, it may take a little getting used to. Levels are much less monolithic and more flexible. Going negative is entirely possible and is the harbinger of some very rough times ahead.

Gaining a level allows you to improve your character in one of three ways:

Buff up: You can increase a helpful trait by one point, with no maximum. Yes, this means you could, with some effort, have one completely boss trait that would never fail. This sort of behavior is what evil wizards were born to monkey-wrench.

Compensate: You can decrease a harmful trait by one point, down to a minimum of one. This is a sensible long-term choice and rarely gets the attention of evil wizards.

Reload: If you are a wizard or elf, you can add a spell. If you are a cleric or dwarfling, you can add a prayer. There is no upper limit to the number of spells or prayers you can possess.

Remember that warriors also gain some immunity to monsters as they rise in levels.

Losing a level requires that you lower a helpful trait of your choice by one. You can't raise a harmful trait or lose a spell or prayer - you can only begin the slow, relentless spiral of death! One strategy is to lower your character's worst traits first, starting with those rated at two. Another is to chip away at your character's best traits, keeping your average up. You can't lower a trait already at one, although you will want to. If all your character's helpful traits descend to one and by some miracle he is still alive, the next time a trait is lost, he dies.

Gwarl levels up and down

Gwarl Ovenwhisper, dwarfling and adventurer, has a run of good luck. He finds himself drowning in a gigantic bowl of porridge (and being eaten by a giant), but emerges only slightly injured from the difficult challenge and toting some hot new treasure. He's level one now! Gwarl used his Holy Do-Over to succeed, so Johnette decides to reload that prayer as her leveling-up bonus. Later on Gwarl is pulverized by an awesome challenge and fails his first roll, and thus the entire challenge. Johnette lowers her character's brave from two to one and braces herself for more trouble.

Challenges

The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game is filled with challenges. Every challenge poses the risk of drowning or falling - you will fall, you will drown, or you will triumph. This means that all challenges take place near things to fall off of or things to drown in, or perhaps both. The Underworld and Wilderness Adventures section of the book offers plenty of insight into how to arrange challenges.

Challenges always requires a series of three tests - each a die roll - to overcome them. Each challenge is rated as either easy, difficult, or awesome.

An easy challenge requires one out of three rolls to be a success for the character to avoid a penalty. Once you succeed, you can stop rolling. You can miss two and still overcome the challenge on the third.

A difficult challenge requires two out of three rolls to be a success for the character to avoid a penalty. If you succeed in two tests, you need not roll the third. You can miss one and still overcome the challenge.

An awesome challenge requires all three rolls to be a success for the character to avoid a penalty. If you miss a single roll, you fail. Luckily, these are pretty rare.

If you fail more than the allowed number of times in any challenge, your character goes down a level and must reduce the helpful trait of your choice to one. Depending on how the challenge was constructed, there may also be additional penalties for failing test rolls.

Resolving challenges

For each of the three linked rolls, the player will be trying to get a total under a target number on two six-sided dice. To determine the target number, two players and the challenge creator need to be involved.

First, the creator of the challenge describes the scene - what's around, and what's happening. Based on this, the player whose character is in danger chooses a helpful trait to use, and describes using it to avoid falling or drowning. Then, based on that description, the person to that player's left (no matter who it is!) chooses a second helpful trait that they are using to avoid death or injury. Add these two together to get a number, generally between two and twelve. Finally, the challenge creator chooses a harmful trait that is interfering, and the value of this is subtracted, giving a final total target, usually between two and eleven. To succeed, the player must roll equal to or under this number on two dice.

No trait can be used twice during a challenge. Once a trait is used (helpful or harmful), it is effectively gone until the next challenge. This means a lot of traits will be invoked, which is fun.

A successful roll means that third of the challenge has been overcome. If this is enough to complete the challenge, stop rolling. If not, pick some new traits and roll again.

A failed roll means that the character is hurt. Damage is the difference between the target number and the number rolled. The nature of the challenge may also incur additional penalties for failure. Later Gwarl screws up an easy challenge, slipping on a patch of wet pavement, and Johnette fails three times in a row, nearly killing him.

Crushing failure

Losing all three challenges is a brutal and humiliating experience. And, like all brutal and humiliating experiences, you learn and grow from it. If your character fails all three challenges in a difficult or awesome situation, you go up a level anyway. This will be cold comfort when contrasted with the hideous damage your character has no doubt suffered to earn this boon.

Getting hurt

As mentioned, damage is the difference between the target number and the number rolled, modified by circumstances based on what the character is drowning in or falling into. Ironically, you have a greater potential to take damage from easy challenges, since you can fail twice (taking damage each time) and then succeed.

Damage is removed from hit points. If hit points reach zero, your character is dead, and all your treasure is suddenly up for grabs. Roll up a new character and catch up with the adventurers as soon as you can. They will have divided your loot among themselves by then.

Part One: Of Men and Magic

Gwarl gets hurt

Johnette's character, Gwarl Ovenwhisper, is drowning. Clemont created the challenge and Sandy is the person on Johnette's left.

Clemont: OK Johnette, Gwarl has slipped in a pool of water and is drowning! It's an easy challenge.

Johnette: He's a mighty dwarfling! He's Strong! He can swim for ages. That's 5.

Sandy: And he's Agile and can probably find a hand-hold on the mossy lip of the pool.

Johnette: Right, and his Agile is 3, so that's a total of 8.

Clemont: Yes, but he's scared - real scared. Pathetic, actually.

Johnette: His Pathetic is 3 - crap! I need to roll a five or less on two dice. (She rolls an 8) Whoa! That's three damage, and I failed the first test. Two more to go, and I hope I make one of them!

What if a character gets strangled or burned?

Then, quite frankly, you are playing wrong. The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game is about the horror and sorrow of drowning and falling. It simply does not support "burning" or "strangulation" any more than it supports wizards flying airplanes. In a game that strives for focused realism, these extraneous elements have no place.

If this sounds strange to you, perhaps you are not ready for The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game.

Part Two: Underworld and wilderness adventures

In part one you have learned how to build up and tear down characters with speed and alacrity. Now, in part two, you will learn how to craft the thrilling maelstrom into which your precious alter egos will be remorselessly hurled!

Creating challenges

Give each player some playing cards randomly. For a 90 minute to two hour game (about right), give about 32 cards total - so eight each if you have four players. Vary from this suggestion based on the number of players and the amount of time you want to spend. Give the same number of cards to each player. A speed round of two or three cards each might be fun! Distributing an entire deck will lead to an epic and lengthy dungeon crawl.

Any card can represent an area in or around the dungeon with a challenge in it. Don't get hung up on causality - it's perfectly fine to make a challenge take place, for example, at the local harvest festival if you like. Just wave your hands and mumble when describing getting there. Getting the adventurers back to the dungeon will be somebody else's problem.

Number cards (two through ten) are easy challenges. Only one success out of three is required.

Face cards (Jack, Queen, King) are difficult challenges - two successes out of three are required.

An Ace is an awesome challenge - three successes out of three are required.

Making your challenges exciting, dangerous, and cool

The basic configuration is simply a bunch of cards, each representing an area with a general challenge. But you can, and should, pair or stack cards to make challenges more interesting. Additional elements can become descriptive (it's not just lava - it's boiling lava! More damage when you fail!) or thematic (if you fall off the wagon, your pathetic is totally going up!) in nature.

Up to three additional cards - including monsters - can be added to a room. So in an eight-card-per-player game, you could conceivably have eight different unremarkable rooms, or two very complex and interesting ones. Something between these two extremes is probably ideal.

What additional cards can do

Any black card can be added to an existing room to add an extra die of damage with each failure. Adding a second black card adds a second die on failures (for a total of two dice of damage) and a die of damage even on successes! You can't include more than two cards to increase damage.

Any red card can be added to an existing room to lower a helpful trait by one with each failure, as chosen by the player. Adding a second red card forces the players to raise

a harmful trait by one with each failure as well, as chosen by the room creator! You can't include more than two cards to attack traits.

Any combination of cards totaling more than nine can be used to increase the challenge from easy to difficult, or from difficult to awesome. Note that a ten card can do this all by itself. If you had a ten, you could stack cards to move from easy to difficult, and then again to awesome if you wanted.

Any card can be designated a monster. Monsters penalize the existing challenge, based on their card value, from -1 to -3 on player rolls. This means that if your target number is eight, and there is an awesome monster involved, you must roll a five or less (8 minus 3) to succeed. Monsters always leave treasure when defeated. Monsters rarely work together, so no more than two can appear in any one challenge.

While these effects can stack on top of each other, each card only has one effect - it is either a room challenge, a bonus to damage or trait loss, an increase in challenge, or a monster.

The extra-crazy challenge

If you end up using four cards in a challenge - the base card, plus three more - what you have authored will be extra-crazy. In addition to any monster-based treasure, this challenge will give up one, two, or three treasure of its own, just like a monster, just because.

Writing it all down

Once you have your cards sorted into rooms, write the details of each on a separate post-it note and keep it to yourself until called upon to reveal your handiwork in play. The nice thing about authoring challenges and keeping them around is that you can, over the course of the game, construct a virtual map of your dungeon on the tabletop. Be sure to add little skulls when characters are killed.

Clement throws down some challenges

Clement draws eight cards:

King of spades
Queen of hearts
Seven of spades
Seven of hearts
Six of spades
Four of clubs
Four of spades
Three of Clubs

First, he sets up three rooms, using the king, queen, and a four.

He pairs the seven of clubs and four of spades, totaling eleven, and uses that to increase the challenge

Part Two: Underworld and wilderness adventures

of the king - making it an awesome challenge. He writes down: "Awesome falling challenge. A mile-wide chasm spanned by a single fraying steel wire that is slick with cliff shark droppings."

He adds the six of clubs to the queen, making it a difficult challenge that inflicts an extra die of damage with each failure. Clemont writes down: "Difficult falling challenge plus 1 die damage per failure. Stilt-walking over broken glass beverage containers and medical waste."

Finally, Clemont first adds the seven of hearts to the four of clubs room. This will be an easy challenge, but failing it will cause the loss of a helpful trait. He still has the three of clubs, which he makes into an easy monster in this room. Clemont writes down: "Easy drowning challenge plus helpful trait loss on failure and easy monster. Drowning in self pity after finding a negative review of the adventuring party in a popular dungeon newspaper at a news kiosk staffed by well-informed goblins."

Challenge suggestions

It's good form to create challenges that include elements of drowning and falling. The base challenge is always one or the other, but by adding additional cards, you can make a challenge more colorful. Not just a fall into a pit - a fall into a pit of ice-choked grease! Not just drowning in a raging river - drowning in a raging waterfall with jagged stalagmites at the bottom!

Remember that the base damage in all challenges is equal to the difference in the roll and the target number. Thus, if the target number is 9 and you roll an 10, you take 1 hit point of damage. This is the standard, and can be increased when you design challenges if you like.

When creating a challenge, use the guidelines below to determine damage and challenge difficulty, but feel free to interpret them in a way that is both satisfying and fun. If you want a raging lava river filled with angry robots but only have an easy challenge to use, make it a very small and irritating lava rivulet filled with verbally abusive robots and don't worry about adding a bunch of penalty damage cards. These lists are not canonical, so be creative and go nuts.

Easy Drowning

Drowning in still water - a well, pond, or sewer. Perhaps an Olympic swimming pool, or garden water feature, or the endless tears of a reluctant virgin?

Difficult Drowning

Drowning in thick liquids. Blood, oatmeal, or mud would be good. Drowning in your own fluids would also fall under this classification.

Drowning in raging or turbulent water, like a gigantic underground stream. Drowning in hot liquids, like a vat of tea.

Awesome Drowning

Drowning in thick, hot liquids, like lava or hot tar. Drowning in sand or wheat, fine grains of any sort. Any drowning can become awesome by cranking up the madness to action movie levels - a regular old "hot liquids" challenge becomes "a torrential rain of boiling goat urine."

Advanced Drowning

You can easily arrange drowning in self pity or drowning in debt. Add a couple of trait-shredding red cards to a challenge and get all personal and weepy. This sort of challenge can be a refreshingly absurd change of pace between greased balancing beams, Gorgon warlords and belching pits of acid.

Drowning in greed is a great option. Characters bickering over treasure may be drowning in greed, but you can drown in greed without treasure as well. Characters drowning in greed can be the victims of both red trait-damaging cards and black hit-point-crushing cards - their lust for wealth is physically painful.

Easy Falling

The most basic falls involve tripping, slipping, and falling down. Falling off things and out of things like logs and barrels are great as well.

Difficult Falling

Dangerous surfaces, like jagged stone, fire ants, or flaming oil can all complicate a fall. Falling in complicated ways, or bouncing around, or passing through trap doors, or being vaulted into the air first, can make challenges difficult. So can falling from a great height, or onto sharp things.

Awesome Falling

Awesome falling challenges should be, well, awesome. Falling onto poisoned spikes, into flaming tar pits, or through industrial beef-processing machinery would qualify. You can ramp up a simpler challenge with colorful language. "Slipping on a wet staircase" is one thing, but "slipping on a wet staircase without a handrail" is something else entirely.

Advanced Falling

Falling in love, falling out of love, or falling for a trick all cry out for some red cards in the challenge to tear down the helpful traits and build up the harmful ones. Falling out of love is a popular precursor to drowning in self pity.

Characters bickering over treasure may have a falling out, but you can have a falling out without treasure as well. Characters having a falling out might gain or lose traits, but they might just beat the crap out of each other, too. Or both.

Part Two: Underworld and wilderness adventures

Getting drunk and staying drunk

Drowning your sorrows and falling off the wagon: Getting drunk is itself a potentially serious challenge in Drowning and Falling. Any easy challenge can be declared alcohol-based as a special case, and no damage is accrued through failure. Success means the character is drunk for the next challenge, with appropriate penalties and benefits.

Being drunk makes survival harder when you are drowning. Increase the challenge from easy to difficult, or from difficult to awesome. If a awesome challenge is encountered, a drunk character automatically dies!

However, being drunk makes survival easier when you are falling. Decrease the challenge from difficult to easy, or from awesome to difficult. If an easy test is encountered, a rubber-boned drunk automatically succeeds.

Monsters and treasure

The world of Drowning and Falling is a mist-choked fantasyland of dark moors and verdant forests, craggy crags and crumbling castles. There is magic, and there are monsters - monsters that can make you fall! Or drown! But for the hearty souls who seek adventure, there is also treasure!

Fighting monsters

Monsters, like drowning and falling challenges, are rated as easy, difficult, or awesome. They always accompany drowning or falling challenges and cannot be encountered alone, because that wouldn't make any sense.

Easy monsters inflict a -1 penalty to character's chances of success during the challenge.

Difficult monsters inflict a -2 penalty to character's chances of success during the challenge.

Awesome monsters inflict a -3 penalty to character's chances of success during the challenge. That's serious business!

A monster fighting example

Johnette's character Gwarl is crossing a raging stream guarded by a pirate skeleton! This is a drowning challenge (in this case, difficult), and for her first test, Johnette, her left-hand neighbor, and the challenge creator work out her target number - an 8. The skeleton, being an easy monster, inflicts a -1 penalty, so Johnette must roll a 7 or less to succeed. Gwarl emits a foul dwarfling battle-wind and plunges into deadly combat!

The Monster Cyclopedia

You are free to make up monsters to throw at the adventurers. There are countless manuals stuffed with monsters that were designed for other games. Clever players of The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game can easily repurpose these and make them even better.

Note that not all monsters are, technically, monsters. Despite this unassailable fact, they are still monsters.

Easy Monsters

These monsters are -1 to player tests.

Jenny Green-Teeth is a hideous river-bank witch!

The Maiden is a pretty girl who yearns for love!

Skeletons are dead men made of living bones!

When the nuts and berries run out, blood squirrels turn to flesh!

A friendly cat is always purring underfoot, threading figure eights around your ankles...until you fall!

Your big brother (or big sister) is an age-old nemesis that will trip you and then point and laugh, calling you a weakling. This tends to be bad for the helpful traits. Often entire rival adventuring parties comprised of older brothers and sisters are encountered.

A blob is a pudding-like amorphous beast of terror.

Difficult Monsters

These monsters are -2 to player tests.

Beware of cave monsters - hodags, imps, and goblins that like to hang around deep pits!

Giant clams are mollusks with malice on their minds! They travel in packs.

The dreaded gorgons lurk on cliff ledges! They will use your head to grind their corn!

Tripping knights are sworn to make passer-by fall!

Elves and scorpions travel together to sow chaos!

The Princess is a not-so-pretty girl who demands love!

Beware what lurks below the surface when venus fly kelp are about.

Sirens lure adventurers to their doom - flashing lights and blaring noises can distract you - beware! Where was that pit again?

Cliff Sharks are relentless, carnivorous fish that lurk in nests above narrow cliff ledges, waiting for doughty adventurers to slip to their doom! Even their droppings can cause a deadly fall - or drowning! Cliff Sharks is also a seller of quality used automobiles with financing plans for any adventurer's budget.

Part Two: Underworld and wilderness adventures

Awesome Monsters

These monsters are -3 to player tests.

Metagorgons are gorgons composed of living gorgons!

Dragons are giant fire-breathing lizards of legend. If you are unfamiliar with dragons, you are not allowed to play this game. Seriously, just put it down.

The kraken is a many-armed monster of the briny deep seeks to drown anyone who hunts for it's treasure!

Lava monsters are terrible creatures of yore that live in low-viscosity flows of molten rock, such as pillow lava!

You'll run anywhere just to get away from the hideous visage of Medusa, boss of the gorgons - even into a pit of boiling oil!

Like the kraken but unlike the maiden and the princess, the queen is a many-armed monster of the briny deep who seeks to either drown anyone who hunts for her treasure - or make them her king!

Getting treasure

Everybody loves treasure!

If a challenge with a monster attached is overcome, the group gets treasure. The amount of treasure is equal to the die penalty of the monster, so an easy monster (-1) gives up one treasure and a awesome monster (-3) gives up three, total. These must be divided among the player characters in any way that seems equitable. Work it out among yourselves. Clerics may wish to steal treasure at some point.

When you get treasure, immediately state what it is - a pair of magical pants, an ancient sword, a vest of bones, a pile of gold, or whatever you like. Write it down on a post-it and keep it handy. Somebody will probably want to steal it at some point. If another character dies, the survivors may divide up the dead guy's now-abandoned treasure in any way they see fit.

Treasure is awesome. A treasure can be used to re-roll a single die in every challenge. If you have three treasure, you get three re-rolls. Describe how your treasure is helping you overcome the challenge! To be clear, a treasure can be used once in every challenge, and if you have more than one treasure, you can take advantage of multiple re-rolls during each challenge!

One of the appendices is a treasure generator, in case you need inspiration. Hooray for treasure!

Stealing treasure

Sometimes adventurers will not agree on an equitable division of treasure. They may wish to steal it from their peers between scenes, which is encouraged. This is what you get for drowning in greed or having a falling out with the rest of the party. The whole thing is tremendously counterproductive but, in the interest of maintaining realism, rules have been provided.

Every character may attempt to steal one item between each scene, so even if you get ganged up on, you have a chance at recovering some of your property.

Stealing treasure becomes an additional challenge for the potential victim, who will be furiously beating off his light-fingered fellow adventurers. If one person wants to steal from you, it is an easy challenge. If two person want to steal from you, it is a difficult challenge. Three or more - awesome. If you win, you keep your treasure. If you lose the challenge you must fork over one treasure for each thief. They choose from among your hoard in descending order of cool.

Note that damage and lost levels from treasure-stealing attempts are par for the course.

Exploring

The player with the most gaming materials within arm's reach goes first. This player states a direction that the party will explore - straight ahead, left, or right.

If they choose left or right, the player to their left or right announces which of the challenges they have crafted the party has encountered. If straight ahead, the person most directly opposite them does likewise. Lay down the post-it note adjacent to the last one played, creating a map of the adventure as you progress. This process may fray at the edges if people insist on going in circles.

Picking challenges and running out of options

You must play easy challenges, or challenges with easy elements, if you have them. If you have no easy challenges, you must play difficult challenges. This creates a de-facto escalation during the game, and ensures that all the characters will be killed by a dragon, kraken, or other enormous monster at the end of the game, rather than the beginning.

As players use up their challenges, certain options become impossible - you can't go left if the player to your left has no more challenges. You can't go that way - pick another direction, until you face your final doom - the most rough and tough monster in the gorgon pits. If, for some reason, a character survives the final challenge, an exit to the surface inevitably beckons.

Part Two: Underworld and wilderness adventures

A final word about winners and losers

Role-playing games are all about imagination, and camaraderie, and telling stories together. It isn't about competing, it is about collaborating.

When the dungeon and its monstrous denizens and savage dangers have finally been bested, take stock - who ground up the least number of characters? Who emerged with the most treasure? These players win.

Who lost the most characters? Who emerged with the least treasure, or tried to slip some immolation in? These players lose. Whoever the majority feels did the worst job is responsible for providing snacks - good snacks - the next time The Drowning and Falling Role-Playing Game is played.

Appendices and notes

Appendix A: Sample campaign settings

Gorgon hunters of Gorgon Island

*"Can you see? Can you hear?
Can you feel your fate will be to fall?"*
- GORGON, Back Street Killer

The Gorgon hunters on Gorgon Island are cold-hearted killers - they have to be. They are the brave men and women who go down the gorgon pits to slay gorgons.

Why hunt gorgons? Because they are a blight, an evil canker upon the green and fecund land above. Are you brave - and foolish - enough to enter the gorgon's lair and give them the whipping they deserve? It is a ren-faire-like land of peace and good will, with jolly kings and smiling peasants, marred only by the stinking gorgon pits that dot the landscape within easy reach of every village. Beneath the very feet of the good people of Gorgon island are gorgons and their hated minions - cliff sharks, skeletons, and the mighty kraken itself!

What path will you choose? The path of war leads like an elf-arrow straight into the heart of the gorgon pits, but the path of adventure will take you on a rollicking roller coaster of thrills that ends in the dreaded pits of the gorgons themselves!

This campaign setting should be heavy on the gorgons. It should also include a lot of falling and drowning.

The Edge

By Joshua BishopRoby

"We're living on the edge!"
- Aerosmith, Living On the Edge

The world is flat and the old sailors live upon its ragged Edge.

Oceans of water are constantly pouring off over the side, creating waterfalls and torrents and collecting in swift rivers and even some ponds and lakes where the crags jut out far enough to trap the water. Of course the edge is tectonically active, and gouts of lava pour out of lava tubes and suchlike. There are deep, water-filled craters, caused by the magic rockets of angry wizard and undead meteors. Also there are scary castles with moats and ramparts.

The Edge was originally populated by crews of sailing ships that went over the edge of the world and managed to crash on the steep slopes below. Since that time, however, the sailors managed to find themselves some women and have prospered and multiplied. They farm terraced gardens and loot the remains of underground dungeons that get brought to the edge of the world through tectonic action. Of course, their lives are in constant danger -- constant danger of drowning, and of falling.

Appendix B: A torpid emo ballad

For drowning in angst, what can be more appropriate than unleashing a torpid emo ballad? Anyone who sings this song immediately gains their character a level if they can complete it without interruption. Ukulele accompaniment and/or lethargic dancing earns an extra level.

"drowning And falling"

By ancient committee

your language cuts like violence
your violence cuts like razor blades
your razor blades will shave my dignity
my dignity is your language aid
the language of sorrow
(chorus)
falling (into the sea)
drowning (into the sea)
the sea is drowning (into the sea)
the sea is falling (into me)
you climb my back like cliffs and daggers
hearts, like sharks, they jump away
you broke my platter with loving patter
but you stole my heart today
but tomorrow
is sorrow
(chorus)
(chorus x 4)
(acoustic breakdown of chorus)
(chorus)

--Dev PerKayastha, from "Ancient Committee is an Emo Band", his excellent Game Chef 2006 entry.
Check out the game here:
http://www.1km1kt.net/rpg/Ancient_Committee_is_a_n_Emo_Band.php

Appendix C: Treasure generator

If you ever get stuck for a cool treasure, fall back on this set of tables. Each magical treasure is composed of two parts. Roll two dice to determine the first sub-table and component, and repeat for the second sub-table and component. For example, if you rolled 2,6 for the first part, that would be sub-table one (Fancy Stuff), and the sixth entry - a necklace. For the second part, if you rolled 4,3, you'd then have a totally boss Necklace of Blessed Wonder.

First roll

- (1-2) Fancy Stuff
 - 1. Ring
 - 2. Rod
 - 3. Staff
 - 4. Wand
 - 5. Orb
 - 6. Necklace
- (3-4) Fashion Stuff
 - 1. Boots
 - 2. Girdle
 - 3. Cloak
 - 4. Pants
 - 5. Vest
 - 6. Gauntlets
- (5-6) War Stuff
 - 1. Helm
 - 2. Shield
 - 3. Armor
 - 4. Sword
 - 5. Axe
 - 6. Spear

Second roll

- (1-2) Magic Stuff
 - 1. Flying awesomely through the air
 - 2. Ghostliness
 - 3. Fish breath
 - 4. The flaming eagle king
 - 5. Lightning bullets
 - 6. Kraken-Strength
 - (3-4) Holy Stuff
 - 1. Saint Carl's holy bones
 - 2. Sacred frass
 - 3. Blessed wonder
 - 4. Holy laser spikes
 - 5. Evil
 - 6. Immaculate rainbow power
 - (5-6) Old Stuff
 - 1. Elvish delight
 - 2. The dwarfling matriarchs
 - 3. Unholy destruction
 - 4. The gorgon emperor
 - 5. Ancient mystery
 - 6. The haunted meteor
-

Designer's notes

Thank you for reading Drowning and Falling. I hope you play it, enjoy it, share and expand it, and give ORBIS some money, too.

Drowning and Falling sprang to life from a comment made by Andy Kitkowski, who mentioned using "rules for falling and drowning" as a game design benchmark. In his own words:

"...'falling and drowning' is my summary for the gamut of World Dooms: falling, drowning, poisoning, electrocution ... And further from there, things like 'bullet tumbling effects', 'blunt weapons with piercing nubs on them', 'shock due to internal trauma', etc.

Some people don't consider a game a game unless it has specifically defined how these things should work. I think it's a combination of "All Games Have this Stuff" and "All Games Should Model Reality at least a Little".

I think the litmus test for this is hearing about initiative in the game FVLMINATA: Slaves and Workers and Soldiers defer to Patricians in rank and all social and economic status, therefore Patricians always "have initiative".

Some People: Ooh, that's interesting!

Some People: Ooh, that's fucking retarded!

People in the second group tend to put a high mark on having the game rules model 'reality'.

In the end, it's not bad design unless you include those rules in a game that has nothing to do with drowning or falling, or if you don't include those rules in a game that clearly has lots of those sorts of events."

I willfully misread this and took it as a design challenge, setting out to craft a game that was focused on nothing but drowning and falling with the tenacity of a pit bull. Others - lots of others - saw the fun in this and enthusiastically chipped in. To my utter amazement, half a dozen fantastic indie comic artists agreed to illustrate the game. The pressure increased a hundredfold as I tried to make the actual design worthy of their art. What emerged is an affectionate love letter to the first RPG I ever played, which came in a white box and changed my life for the better.

DROWNING & FALLING

CHARACTERS RECORD SHEET

GUY #	ONE	TWO	THREE	FOUR	FIVE
NAME	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
CLASS	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
LEVEL	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
ALIGNMENT	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
HIT POINTS	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

THE HELPFUL TRAITS

BRAVE	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
COOL	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
MYSTERIOUS	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
BLESSED	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
FAST	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
AGILE	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
ALERT	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
SMART	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
TOUGH	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
STRONG	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

THE HARMFUL TRAITS

PATHETIC	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
UNLUCKY	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
CLUMSY	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
OBLIVIOUS	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
WEAK	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

TREASURE

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SPELLS/ PRAYERS

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