



# CHANNEL 2 THE GAME SYSTEM

As explained on the previous channel, much of what happens in *Cartoon Action Hour* is driven by narration and good old-fashioned common sense. That's what separates RPGs from other types of games. However, there are times in which the rules should come into play in order to heighten the excitement of the story's various scenes. On this channel, we'll teach you everything you need to know in order to play the game.

## ★ ★ Foundations of the Game ★ ★

There are some important concepts that must be understood before treading further into this section. They were mentioned briefly in Channel 1, but we'll go into more detail here.

### The Series

A series in *Cartoon Action Hour* is just like a retro-toon series, in that it has its own concept, back story, setting and cast of characters (both heroic and villainous). You and your group can create your own series in which to play or you can use a series published by Spectrum Games. Either way, the series is analogous to a campaign in other roleplaying games.

### Episodes and Scenes

Just as with the cartoon series of old (and new ones as well, for that matter), a series in *Cartoon Action Hour* is divided up into separate episodes. For the most part, a single episode tells one full story, though multi-episode storylines aren't uncommon.

An episode is comprised of any number of scenes. A scene is best defined as a situation that occurs in one place, though some scenes – such as chase sequences – can span multiple locations. The most common example of a scene would be a fight between the heroes and the villains.



It's entirely possible for several scenes to be happening at one time. In such cases, the GM would have to periodically cut back and forth between the different scenes until they are concluded.

### Seasons

While a season of a network retro-toon series averaged 12 or 13 episodes and a season of a syndicated retro-toon series leaned toward 65, a season in *Cartoon Action Hour* is 6 episodes. After each season, characters can be improved or changed altogether.

## Types of Characters

There are two main types of characters in *Cartoon Action Hour*.

### Player Characters (PCs)

Player Characters are the stars of the series and are controlled by (as their name implies) the players. Generally speaking, each player controls one PC.

### Game Master Characters (GMCs)

Any character in the game world not controlled by the players is known as a Game Master Character. Guess who controls them. That's correct – the Game Master. Huge shocker there!

GMCs are sometimes referred to as either *Ally GMCs* or *Enemy GMCs*. Ally GMCs are on the same side as the PCs – teammates, friends, relatives, etc. Enemy GMCs, on the other hand, are against the PCs.

## Understanding Characters

Characters are defined, in game terms, by their stats; this goes for both PCs and GMCs alike. These stats are recorded on a bio-file, which can be found on page XX. If you were to look at a bio-file right now, you'd likely be a bit confused as to what it all means. So, let's go about fixing it so that you'll know what you're looking at.

### Traits and Trait Ratings

Traits are the most important stats in the game. They illustrate what your character can do and how well he can do it.

#### Traits

Each Trait represents a skill, ability, knack, talent, power, resource, companion, weapon, vehicle or alternate form the character has at his disposal. There is no definitive list of Traits in the game. Instead, you make up your own. We'll get more into that on Channel 3. We'll give you a few typical Traits, just to give you a feel for what they are: MOVES LIKE LIGHTNING, HOTSHOT PILOT, PERCEPTIVE, ARM-MOUNTED CANNON, FEATHERED WINGS, etc.

The game system doesn't concern itself with things the character is average or poor at. Therefore, if a character's Traits don't cover a certain area of training, ability or skill, it can be assumed that the character is average at it.

Traits are always written in capital letters for easy distinction.

### Trait Ratings

Every Trait has an associated rating that measures exactly how effective it is. The higher the rating, the more potent it is. Ratings are broken down into three Tiers.

• **Human Tier (ratings 1-4):** As the name suggests, a Trait with a Human Tier rating is within the realm of normal human achievement or capability.

• **Superhuman Tier (ratings 5-8):** This Tier is reserved for Traits that go beyond human potential.

• **Cosmic Tier (ratings 9 and up):** Beyond even what superhumans can achieve!

### Special Rules

In many cases, Traits are straightforward and require nothing except a rating to make it function the way you want them to. In other cases, however, you may need to define a Trait a little more. That's where Special Rules come into play.

Special Rules modify how a Trait works in the game. You can find the list of common Special Rules on pages XX – XX.

### Qualities

Every character has at least three Qualities that can either help or hinder them. We'll discuss how they work a bit later in this section. There are two types of Qualities, both of which are explained below.

#### Signature Quality

The first Quality listed on the character's bio-file is the character's Signature Quality. It always has two boxes beside it. The Signature Quality is essentially the character's tagline or descriptor; something that you might see beneath his name on the action figure package ("Master of Weapons," "Laser Trooper," "Evil Henchman," "Mighty Warrior," etc.).

### Standard Qualities

The other Qualities are the character's Standard Qualities. They always have one box beside them. Standard Qualities tend to be narrower in scope than the Signature Quality and focus on aspects of the character's personality, background, quirks and so forth.

### Star Power

In the retro-toons, there was always a very distinct hierarchy when it came to characters. Rank and file goons seldom stood much of a chance against primary heroes, nor did they receive the same breaks that more important characters did.

In the game, each character has a Star Power score (ranging from 1 to 4) that reflects his place in the pecking order.

**Star Power 1 (Goons):** Characters with Star Power 1 are the lowest on the proverbial totem pole. In fact, they're so low that they don't represent a specific character – they represent small groups of a given character type. For heroes, they are the nameless allies that fill out the ranks of the forces of good (greenshirt soldiers, the kingdom's guards, etc.). For villains, they are much the same – nameless mooks, evil robots, creature minions, etc. Goons have additional rules, found in their own section later in this document.

**Star Power 2 (Supporting Characters):** Characters with Star Power 2 represent the bulk of the heroes and villains found in the retro-toons. For heroes, they are the standard allies of the PCs; their teammates and comrades. For villains, they are usually the main henchmen of the master villain.

**Star Power 3 (Action Stars):** Characters with Star Power 3 are focal points of the series; they are characters with a lot of screen time and often have the spotlight shining on them. For heroes, they are the PCs; the primary characters of the show. For villains, they are the lieutenants and

generals of the series' master villain; the ones he depends on to carry out important tasks.

**Star Power 4 (Icons):** Characters with Star Power 4 are the bigshot movers-and-shakers of the series, often held with reverence (or fear) by the rest of the setting's denizens. Heroes almost never have Star Power 4, unless the series has only one central protagonist. For villains, only the master villain has Star Power 4.

Star Power affects numerous things in the game, as we'll discuss later.

## Oomph

Oomph is a pool of points that can be spent to help your character out when things get prickly... which is a common occurrence in the retro-toons. GMCs do not have Oomph of their own. They rely on a pool of Oomph awarded to the GM on a per-scene basis.

This section of the bio-file is divided up into three sub-sections, as described below.

**Starting Oomph:** This is the amount of Oomph the character begins each episode with.

**Current Oomph:** This is where you keep track of the amount of Oomph your character has during an episode. When you spend it, make note of the remaining Oomph here.

## Proofs of Purchase

When a character has unspent Oomph at the end of an episode, it's recorded here and can be spent to improve your character between seasons.

## Making Checks

Here's a challenge for you. Name an episode of any retro-toon series that doesn't contain characters attempting risky or daring feats. Go ahead. We dare you. Before rack your brain (or scour the Internet), please allow us to save you the trouble by declaring that such episodes simply don't exist. Every episode of every cartoon of the 1980s is rife with heroes and villains performing actions in which success or failure will carry great narrative weight within context of the story. Games of *Cartoon Action Hour* should be no different.

Whenever the GM feels that the outcome of an action or situation would be made more interesting by adding a random element, he can require a check. A check is simply a roll that must be made to determine success or failure.

## Making Checks

To make a check, roll a d12 and add the most appropriate Trait rating to it. If the result is equal to or higher than the Difficulty Number (or DN), the character's action is successful. How is the DN determined? It depends on what kind of check it is:

### Opposed Checks

When the action is directly contested by another character, the contesting character chooses an appropriate Trait and makes a check with it. The result is the DN for the acting character. Alternatively, the GM can just add 6 to the Trait rating to get the DN.

**EXAMPLE:** My character is attempting to push open a door that's being held shut by a GMC named Mekanikus. The GM rolls a die and gets a 9, adding Mekanikus' ROBOT STRENGTH 5 to it, for a total DN of 14. That's a formidable DN, to say the

least! Sweating bullets, I roll a die and end up with a paltry 4. Adding my character's ABLE-BODIED 3 to the roll, my total result is 7, which isn't equal to or higher than the DN of 14. Thus, my character valiantly struggles to force the door open, but falls short in the end.

### Normal Checks

When the action isn't directly against another character (jumping over a chasm, lifting a boulder, etc.), the GM chooses an appropriate base difficulty number and adds it to the roll of a die to determine the DN. Alternatively, the GM can just add 6 to the base difficulty number to get the DN.

Base Difficulty:	Description:
0	Moderate
2	Challenging
4	Hard
6	Very Hard
8	Extremely Hard
10	Nearly Impossible
12	Beyond Comprehension

**EXAMPLE:** I decide that my character is going to leap from the rooftop onto the escaping villain's personal helicopter. The GM figures that the action is rather tough to pull off, so she goes with a base difficulty number of 4. She rolls the die and gets a 7. Adding the base difficulty of 4 to it, the final DN is 11. You roll a die and come up with a 6. After adding your character's AUGMENTED AGILITY 6, your final result is 12. Since it is equal to or higher than the DN, your character bounds into the air and lands on the helicopter's landing gear, ready to thwart the bad guy!

## Who Rolls First?

It has been established that the reacting character establishes the DN in an opposed check. Similarly, the GM establishes the DN for a normal check. Does this mean that the individual who sets the DN has to roll first so that the DN is established first?

That's the default way to do it, yes. However, if everyone agrees, all parties can roll simultaneously or the acting player can even roll first. Some of the dynamics may change as a result, but it won't "break" the game.

## GMCs and Checks

In most cases, it's perfectly acceptable to forego rolling checks for GMCs. Just do what's best for the story! This is especially true for opposed checks against other GMCs or normal checks. This speeds up game play and ensures that an unimportant die roll doesn't jeopardize the drama of the episode. In general, you should consider only rolling for GMCs for crucial checks and when you think it's a dramatically important moment. In short, it's your call!