Hanging by a Thread

A micro-rpg by the Spiderqueen GM

Characters: Choose the following for your character, noting a brief description of each on your character sheet:

➢ **Virtues x2:** Two facts about your character that they rely on in sticky situations.

  Examples: Steadfast friend; outrageous flirt; ruthless assassin.

➢ **Vices x2:** Two facts about your character that derail their endeavors (note: these can be positive character features).

  Examples: Alcoholic; technophobe; never turns a blind eye to injustice.

➢ **Purpose x1:** The character's core drive, the long term goal that defines them, and drives them to distraction. This is the heart of the character.

  Examples: Find the man who murdered my father; kill the jabberwocky; emancipate the workers.

Characters also start with two Fate points, and any equipment agreed to by the GM, according to their background. Use dice or tokens to represent your Fate.

Actions: When the characters risk something on an uncertain outcome, the GM may call for an **Action Roll**. The acting character rolls three six-sided dice (3D6). If they roll 9 or under, the action straightforwardly succeeds; if the total is 12 or more, the action fails, and they suffer the consequences. A total of 10 or 11 means that the action succeeds with a complication; the GM should introduce a new detail that makes the situation more interesting or difficult.

If the action directly relates to one of the character's Virtues or their Purpose the player may **Intervene**, spending 1 Fate to reroll 1 die, potentially turning the action from a failure into a success.

If doubles are rolled, the outcome **Hangs by a Thread**; the acting character rolls an extra die and adds it to the total rolled. The acting character can instead choose to spend I Fate to Intervene, regardless of the relevance of their Virtues, rerolling one of the doubles and using the new total instead, potentially averting failure. Only the initial doubles rolled count towards Hanging by a Thread; subsequent doubles do not add and roll over.

Example: Anna rolls 4, 4, 2, totaling 10. She chooses to spend 1 Fate to reroll a 4, getting a 2. Her new roll is 2, 4, 2, totaling 8; success (the new pair of 2s doesn't trigger a reroll). If she hadn't spent Fate, she would have had to roll another die to add to her original total of 10, likely causing her to fail.

The Mission: At the start of the game, the GM should outline the characters' **Mission**. This is a concrete goal that draws the characters together. (NB: Characters' Purposes should align with but not overlap with the Mission.)

Fate and Setbacks: A player can attempt to recoup Fate by claiming a **Setback**. To do so, they must indulge one of their Vices or pursue their Purpose in a way that complicates or obstructs the group's pursuit of their Mission. If the GM deems the setback satisfactory, the character regains 1 Fate. A character can never have more than 3 Fate at any given time.

Injury and Death: If a character suffers some form of harm, the GM can detail an **Injury** that they suffer – write this on their character sheet. Injuries can be physical ("broken arm"), but can also be more abstract ("damaged ego"), as well as contextual ("bad reputation with nobles"). When an injured character makes an Action Roll, they add +1 to the roll for each *relevant* injury sustained, making failure more likely.

If a character risks death, the GM should call for a **Deadly** Action Roll. The GM is obliged to tell the character that an action is potentially Deadly before they act, to allow them to change their mind. If a character fails a Deadly roll, they die unless the player spends 1 Fate, in which case the character automatically survives – their job is not yet done.

The GM may still choose to inflict Injuries on a surviving character for failing the initial roll. (NB: Players can choose to Intervene in Deadly rolls in the same way as normal ones, in which case a failure on the reroll still means death).

Player Notes: Try to be specific in outlining your character. Have your virtues and vices show the character's aspirations and values, not just their skills (e.g.: "chivalrous knight" or "competitive sport-fighter" instead of "warrior").

Your virtues and vices should not overlap. E.g.: don't take "unrepentant lothario" as a Vice and "audacious flirt" as a Virtue; you shouldn't be able to gain and spend Fate by doing the same sort of thing except by playing to your Purpose. This restriction makes your characters more well-rounded, and makes their Purpose more central.

GM Notes: The GM's job is to present abundant opportunities for the characters to get in their own way by pursuing their vices. Be open and negotiate with the players about what constitutes a good Setback. Don't give Fate for actions that further the Mission, even if they fall within a character's Vices; these aren't true Setbacks.

If you want a little more meat for **Contests** and **Combats**, give enemy NPCs Fate Points and Virtues of their own; enemies can spend Fate to interfere in player rolls by Intervening, and to negate Deadly harm inflicted on them by the players. Be super-specific with NPC Virtues, so the players can figure out how to bypass them. (This framework is flexible enough to work for diverse situations such as navigating in particularly hostile terrain, or picking a particularly difficult lock.)

The game is built for swashbuckling or pulpy adventures, where the characters' drives and personalities are more important and drive the story more than their raw skill set. Above all, encourage playing to character, and have fun.