

Transformations

A transformation means a character can have more than one form, each built with the same number of points as characters start with. It is designed by first designing each form, then noting how many points are spent differently. If one form, for example, has *Strength* [4] and *Agility* [7] while another has *Strength* [7] and *Agility* [4], the second form spent 18 points differently. Note that changing a disability adds to this total difference, it does not subtract! Each form then needs the *Transformation* ability for the other form. If the character has more than two forms, each will need the ability for each form it can turn into. For example, a robot character that can turn from humanoid to car or plane needs an ability for each transformation, and both the car and plane form needs an ability to change back. If it can change directly from car into plane or the other way, it also needs an ability in car form to become a plane and vice versa.

When transforming, the player rolls for the ability once per second in the game world, noting how many good dice are rolled. Once the total of good dice rolled is equal to or more than the number of points that are spent differently between the two forms, the transformation is complete. For each form a character has, the rolls are made at -1. So a character with 4 different forms would be at -4 when rolling for transformation, no matter what it is transforming from or to.

If the character transforms carefully, the process is easier. Rolling only every 2 seconds gives a +1 to the roll, while rolling every 4 seconds gives +2, each doubling of time adding a +1. For very slow transformations, the narrator can allow slight rounding off, like 30 seconds (rather than 32) giving +5 or x1000 time meaning +10 to roll. So a character with 12 forms changing between forms with 120 points difference would have -12 to each roll, but if it only rolls every 4000 seconds (about an hour), it gets +13 to the roll and does not need the same high transformation ability. Transforming at a specific speed can be a specialization!

What a character can do while transforming is up to the player and narrator to decide, possibly based on how the transformations in that setting work. The typical answer is that the character can do very little, or nothing, while transforming, and is very vulnerable!

Purpose

The basic reason for transformation is fairly obvious, since you get multiple forms, even if the ability to switch between them can be costly. In addition to this, it allows for disabilities to be connected to only one form, meaning you can decide when to be burdened by a flaw and when not, even if many of your abilities may also go away when the disability does. In game terms, it is like being able to swap characters on the fly.

However, anyone delving deeper into transformations, especially if the setting is deeply grounded in them, can find a long list of things to do with them. If exotic abilities are involved, that list grows even longer, as the more bizarre parts of a setting may be tied closely to certain forms that characters have!

Note that any number of purposes can, at least theoretically, be combined. The narrator has the last say.

Superforms

Some forms have to be that way because they are too demanding to be how the character constantly is. Activating some great power within oneself can awaken incredible abilities, or incredible levels of normal abilities, but only for a time, or under the right circumstances. This can be designed as a form that has one or more really harsh disabilities, meaning it gets the points from them for powerful abilities, but they will break the character if it stays in the form for too long. Strain from using any of the powers is a good example, much like the magic system described in the core rules. If the form is based almost entirely around such powers, this is all the character can really do, and therefore anything done means the character is worse off! Once the superpowers are no longer useful, or when they simply become too risky to keep using, the character has no choice but to change back. Living weapons are a good example of this, their weapon form being so destructive to themselves that they may become more a curse than a blessing...

A superform may also have an unwilling transformation back, such as when the body deems it necessary.

Transitional forms

Because transformations take time and leave the character vulnerable, there is a lot to be said for forms that only go part of the way. If a character has a form that changes even just 35 points, those seconds to transform may be the difference between life and death! So what if there was a form that did the same, but only 15 points of it? The character can change into that form first, make sure everything is okay, and if still needed, change from that into the full form, which is now only another 20 points away, assuming the middle form has no other changes. This can be especially useful if there are closely related forms and the character needs to decide which to take. Maybe that increased strength is the first step, an in-between form, and the finished form can either be a quick, devastating fighter, or a slow, heavy brick that is hard to harm. Changing into the stronger form is a no-brainer, and once you check your situation afterwards, you can pick between fighter or brick.

Merging forms

A form might not be just its own thing. It might be something that is useful to

others. This could be as simple as turning into a weapon or tool that others can use, or some attachment that grants extra abilities, or it could mean becoming a full body part in some bigger, combined form!

To do this, give each merging character a form that has a selection of the abilities that the final form will have. One character may provide the physical things like strength and agility, one provides the fighting skills, one provides the social skills, and so on. If it makes sense, the abilities should be provided by the one who physically fits. If three robots merge into one, the one that forms the torso should probably provide the strength, because everything else is attached to it. The final say is, as always, up to the narrator. Note that unless it is highly illogical, abilities from different members of the merger can still stack, even though no two parts can provide the same actual ability! Also, remember that if one part handles something like *Strength*, other parts need not have any. If they want, they can have a specialization for just that part, like someone becoming a leg having its own *Strength* for kicking with that leg, which stacks with whatever the main *Strength* is! Each part needs to retain some level of *Intelligence*, though, unless it is fine with being mindless while being used. For example, a robot that turns into a gun with *Intelligence* [0] is just a completely mindless tool in that form, until its user makes it transform back. It takes at least *Intelligence* [2] to make decisions about whether or not you want to be used to, for example, shoot someone, or if you'd rather refuse and transform back or otherwise stop being used that way.

Aside from that, it should be made very clear who makes the decisions! The two most likely answers is that one character continues to control the new, merged character, or that things are done by group agreement. Unless a rule says otherwise, any member can usually detach and take the abilities they provided with them, should there be serious disagreement!

Note that if the merged character is damaged, that damage should be assigned to individual merged characters either at random or based on logic with how and from where the damage was dealt.

Splitting forms

There are different ways that a character might split in practice, but in theory, it tends to be either a true split, with the character effectively becoming two or more roughly equal parts, or a bigger character ejecting one or more smaller ones. In numbers, each resulting part is its own character and needs its own abilities. So splitting into two means each one needs to be designed with its own *Strength*, *Agility* and so on, including the ability to transform back into the complete form. Each part does not, however, get the full number of points that character starts with! Instead, the points of all parts must total that amount. So if the character is made with 100 points, the split form has to share their 100 points.

It is important to note that a split form does not mean every part is independent!

The parts are still one mind, so even if a character splits into five parts, they only get, for example, one attack per turn, as per usual. Damage done to each part should be noted for that part, but when transforming back into one whole again, the damage adds up, and the player should make a *Health* check like in combat, once the transformation is complete!

It is also possible for one form to have a companion, made from one character splitting into two or more. See the *Companions* section for details!

Disposable forms

One variant on the splitting form is when a character that is damaged or trapped or otherwise in a dire situation can simply eject its core part and leave an empty shell behind to be destroyed or otherwise lost, or simply eject its outer, most damaged shell. This is done as a normal transformation, from one form with all the points into another form with all its own points. The second form, however, needs some level of the *Discard Damage* ability, in addition to the *Transform* ability. When transforming, roll for *Discard Damage*. The number of good dice rolled is how much damage will be discarded, meaning how much of the damage taken that was absorbed by the disposable parts of the character. The higher the ability level, the better the character is designed to let the disposable parts absorb the damage! Of course, no more damage can be discarded than has been taken.

The issue with a disposable form is how to get it back. In most cases, this is just like a normal transformation, the *Transform* ability just means the discarded shell is rebuilt, rather than the character actually transforming. The major difference is that the character can be designed so that someone else rebuilds it, meaning it does not need the ability itself! However, this takes ten times as long, so it is more likely to be done in a workshop than in the battlefield. Do note that normal transformations can technically also be done by someone else, putting the burden of the ability needed on them rather than the character. This could be technicians refitting the robot character to perform differently, or it could be a shaman reassembling the character's chakras, or some other outside help. The two can even be combined, with the character handling as much as possible form inside and someone else assisting from outside.

Single-use forms

A less typical type of transformation is the one that takes place only once. Animals molt or metamorph into different or entirely new things, but they do not transform back again, ever. This might be a goal or some normal evolution, or some kind of ascension. In game terms, it mostly means only the early form has the *Transform* ability, so there is no way for the later form to change back. The point value of the later form might also be greater than the early form, as it might take a while before the character is ready to transform. The later form can be given some points to grow

in preparation, or the transformation might only be possible once the early form has roughly the same amount of points, to make sure the player neither cheats or is cheated out of their character's points! Alternately, the new form could have far more points, being something to strive for, and every player gets a similar chance for a leap in points!

One option for this is to have the *Transform* ability start out low, even [0], and allow for, or require, points being used to grow it, until it reaches a point when starting the transformation is possible, or at least practical. This turns growth from a sudden event into something to build up for. If there are transitional forms, it could be an ongoing evolution of the character. Or it could be a horrifying existence of regular and massive changes, accepted only because they are needed. It could even be another case of discarded damage, as per disposable forms, with the character changing into a whole new person or being when badly damaged, just to survive!

Unwilling forms

It has been assumed that a transformation is something the character attempts willingly, but that may not always be the case. Werewolves and experiments gone wrong are almost cliché at this point, but any kind of transformation described could be against the will of the character and player! If so, make the *Transformation* ability a disability, instead, and give it a fitting trigger. Be careful to avoid abuse, but remember that transformations are not always simple things, and neither are disabilities. If a character has a peaceful form and a fighter form that is triggered by fights, it might seem like just a way to get more points for fighting skills. But the unwilling fighter form still takes time to transform into, leaving it open for damage, and it could be triggered by even slight provocations. Turning into a vicious killing machine whenever some drunk takes a swing at you might not make life that much easier!

Another issue is changing back, since the disability is only the change into the other form. Changing back can be a disability, too, making transformations a curse for the character! But if the unwilling form has the *Transformation* ability to turn back into the original, or some other, form, it should be restricted. The unwilling form is not just a transformation, it is a loss of control, and until that control is somehow regained, turning back should not be an option.

And yes, unwilling forms count as a form when determining the penalty for number of forms, and yes, that penalty does apply to the unwilling transformation, as well. And finally, note that once the unwilling form begins to take over, the transformation must usually be completed. For more complicated unwilling transforms, which may allow resisting the change or changing to something else, a concrete rule should be made to govern it.

Source

How the transformation works is one thing, but why there even is a transformation in the first place is quite another. It is impossible to cover all mechanisms for transforming, but these should give a good start, and anyone designing a completely novel idea of transformation can lean on them for an idea of how to explain it!

Robots

The idea of transforming robots is nothing new, and is perhaps even the one most imagined when talking about transformations. Any complex machine can need to change its physical configuration to handle different tasks, allowing it to use only the energy it needs for that task and not everything it is capable of doing. It need not even be humanoid, but could be a sentient vehicle that changes from a fast road vehicle to a slow or even immobile war machine when it needs to take down something armored. This will be done by having parts move and swivel around to retract unused ones and expose used ones, meaning the overall machine is not getting any heavier or lighter, unless some kind of cartoon physics is involved.

Do note that if the point of transformation is also disguise, the stealthy form will need an ability for that, usually a specialization of *Stealth*. If this ability is above [5], it can safely be assumed that it would take a close inspection of the disguised robot to realize it is not a car, plane, hot dog stand or whatever it is pretending to be. Different forms may even have different such disguises, which should count as different abilities when counting points changed!

Spirits

In a setting that has spirits, ghosts, demons or the like, having them possess a character, or in some other way letting them in, is another kind of transformation. Unlike robots, there is no need to worry about physical movement of things or weight or the like, spirits just give the character superpowers, but only under the right circumstances and in specific bunches of abilities. A shaman might gain, or give someone, the powers of the bear, or eagle, or some other animal, and it will be a very specific combination of abilities and disabilities. Or a god or clearly defined demon could enter the body, letting the character use their powers as long as they agree about what they are used for. While an unwilling form is perfectly possible, it is more likely that these forms will have unwilling transformations back, the spirits leaving the body if not respected. Disposable spirit forms are not impossible, but they would be very unusual and need good clarification.

It should be noted that spirits need not be such traditional things as described, the notion of some intangible being taking over a person can be used in many ways. Alien psychic spirits, artificial intelligence entering someone's neural cybertech, even complex split personalities can work in much the same way. A massive change in skills

can seem almost like a change in physical body, and some transformations are not even about the body, but about how a character behaves or what they know. The character could look no different from the outside, but be a completely different person from the inside!

Upgrades

Cybernetic parts, magical energies, elixirs or medication, psychic mind boosts, there are many ways a character might get "upgraded" either permanently or temporarily. Some of the more dramatic ones are essentially transformations. This could be someone whose full capabilities are locked to protect those around them, or needs something to activate, or do things to them when activated. But when everything is just right, this locked power can be unlocked, and they essentially transform into a better version of themselves, at least in some ways. In game terms, this is likely a transformation that grants certain significant abilities, but also has some hefty disabilities attached, or drains away other abilities, or both. Someone gaining super senses and sudden access to massive knowledge, but in the process becomes so disfigured it wipes out all *Charm* and even causes some disabilities that involve others being scared or revolted is an example. Other examples might bring similar advantages, but make the character forced to obey some controller or push back something that will try to control them. For a moment, they have great power, but it comes at great cost.

The big thing about this kind of transformation is not so much the abilities themselves, but what controls them, or what threatens to control them. If gaining magical abilities for a period of time makes you a beacon for demonic powers, you will want to choose carefully when to use those upgrades, so much of the time, you will be carrying around great power that you cannot, or dare not, use.

Biology

A biological transformation can seem a little like a robotic one, but it tends to be more messy and dramatic, not to mention painful for the one transforming. Having a robotic leg extend itself is no big deal, but having bones and muscles stretch and maybe even break to reshape themselves is something taken straight out of classic horror stories! A biological transformation is therefore usually either subtle or supernatural, or very, very slow. It can be caused by a disease, by natural and perhaps alien processes, by some kind of science fiction or magical elixir, or anything else that can affect the body. How much it needs to be explained, and how realistic it needs to be, depends on the kind of game being played.

Gear

There is no reason that a transformation has to be something inside the one transforming. While most equipment is common enough to simply be something to buy,

a character in the right kind of setting might have something so unique that it makes more sense to design it as a transformation. This could be an enchanted suit of armor, a brain-controlled spaceship, or even some spiritual being or power that resides in a certain place until the user comes and equips it, whatever that means for a spirit. The important part is that this other form is something separate from the character. A suit that just pops up from inside the user is technically a piece of equipment, but in game terms, it is still a part of the character. True gear can be detached and placed somewhere until it is needed.

To make a transformation actual, detached gear, give the form that is equipment the disability *Needs Equipping*. At [1], it is basically a part of the character, but can be removed or lost, like a ring or bracelet worn most of the time. At [4], it can be brought along, but cannot be constantly carried, like a small vehicle that needs to be parked somewhere or a machine that fits in a large suitcase that can be left in a hotel room if you are not near your own base of operations. At [7], it needs to be in a facility designed for it, like a high-tech warehouse or a temple to a certain god. Above that, the requirements just increase, like [10] being a huge facility, like a big containment compound, and almost impossible to place anywhere else without extreme efforts. The disability essentially symbolizes the difficulty in handling the equipment when it is not in use, and whenever it needs to be stored somewhere new or something changes about where it is stored, roll for the disability. The more good dice rolled, the more problems are faced with storing the equipment!

It should also be noted that stored equipment can theoretically be stolen, or be the victim of some accident, like the base that stores a super suit being hit by a flood. Wiping out the form just out of spite is not recommended, but rolling for the disability might show how bad problems with getting to it or dealing with the consequences are.

Information

It is easy to see transformations as something physical, or at most, psychological. But some transformations are not so much about what you are made of as they are what others make of you. Such a transformation could be about who people think you are, what society lets you do, and so on. The actual explanation for the transformation can be hacking a bunch of official computer systems to create your second identity, activating the local hypno-towers to infect people's minds, or whatever. Once you change, you become that person entirely. The time to change could be time spent getting the hack or towers to switch all the systems around or for it to affect people or the like. As either form, you have ranks, status, friends and enemies, which the other you does not have. Either form might also have the secret that you are someone else, a disability with the trigger being people who know your other identity and the reaction being that you are in danger!

Information forms can be a bit hard to keep straight, because why would playing a

part make you a completely different person? There might be some disguise work involved, to make you look like the local lord and not the bandit leader that is your other form, but this kind of transformation is more rooted in settings that have very deep information networks, whether those are internet or spirits or even gods that share information. Switching between your forms is about what those networks will tell others about you. The more those networks matter, the greater the effect of this kind of form!

Extras

There will always be new ways to twist transformations and create new ones. These are some of the things that may be twisted.

Split Experience

Usually, experience points are simply given to a character to raise abilities that were used in the game. This can be done for transformations, too, with points assigned to abilities that are either shared between forms or unique to one form. The problem comes with abilities that multiple forms have, but some forms have more of. If one form has *Strength* [6] and another has *Strength* [8], the [6] are shared and not really unique to either form. So how to raise it? If the shared [6] gets raised to [7] by spending 7 points, did the [8] in that form get raised, too? The easy answer is no. The form has to add a point to its [7] to make it [8] and then another point to that [8] and make it [9].. It is still a lot cheaper, but it is not free.

With complicated transformations, this gets more complicated, too. If a game is meant to flow more easily, the narrator may allow certain shared abilities to be specializations, like a werewolf having a regular *Strength* ability, but also the specialization *Wolf Strength* in werewolf form, which stacks with the basic kind. It may not be as useful in very human situations, of course, like arm wrestling or lifting heavy boxes, instead being more animalistic brute force. The details will depend on what the transformation is all about, of course.

For other kinds of transformations, other solutions may be in order. Otherwise, players may need to maintain a fairly clear overview of how points are invested in their characters, depending on how serious the number crunching is meant to be. Ignoring these things and just letting the ability be raised without further debate is also an option, of course, if the numbers are less cunchy!

It should also be noted that spending points on individual forms could cause some forms to be more powerful than others, at least over time! Maybe the character starts out with three forms built on 100 points each, but after a few games, one form is built on 114 points, one is 120 points, and one is 143. this is mostly a numbers issue, not important for play, but some forms may end up being outright neglected. Of course, this could create interesting play, when a character uses a form that has

been left behind for ages, and suddenly has to make do with a weaker form of itself, at least for a while...

Transformation Problems

One interesting disability is one that has the transformation itself as a trigger. These could be very direct risks, like having to roll for the disability to see how much damage is taken during a rather rough transformation, maybe from muscles stretching or other injuries from physical change, or maybe just because you are an old robot and things do not always slip into place just right, so transforming beats yourself up a bit. But it could also be other risks, like showing up on scanners when transforming, or attracting dark beasts when using a transformation magic! Slightly more humorous versions involve being knocked out by transformations, or parts flying out and needing to be reattached, maybe to allow transformation back. Darker options like transformation causing enough heat to start fires or a shockwave that could damage buildings is possible.

Or it could be the world causing problems with transformation! Transforming while wearing clothes, or armor, or powersuit, could be difficult, maybe even impossible without hurting yourself. Certain conditions could prevent transformation, or be needed, like only being able to access your demon form if someone sacrifices a small animal, and not being able to do it near sacred grounds.

Uneven Transformations

The default assumption is that transforming characters have equal amounts of points in each form. This is not a universal rule, though. A character could be created with a lesser, perhaps even weak, form built on only a few dozen points, with an alternate form that is extremely powerful, built on many more points and without using disabilities to even it out! This should be part of the adventure concept, like humble characters hiding their true forms until the moment when they can transform to fight some Greater Evil. Maybe using the form would attract attention from dangerous things, or frighten away the people they need in order to get where they are going. Some of this will be disabilities, but not all, especially if everyone shares the problem equally. The narrator, and likely the players as a group, need to be on the same page if uneven transformations are a thing.

One special case is if a transforming character dies after a long string of adventures, and has a very uneven set of forms at the time. A new character might, if the narrator agrees, be similarly uneven, simply because the player has earned this through play. Again, this is something everyone, narrator and players alike, should agree on before betting too deep into the game itself.

Transformation Insanity

For those with that particular taste, transformations can be used to the point of absurdity. Each character can have dozens of forms, all interlocking with other characters in insane ways, just because it is fun! This need not mean characters with lots of points, since a single character can technically just have a lot of forms that are not all accessed equally. If each form can only transform into one or two others, fewer points need to be spent on abilities to do so, but longer time is needed to transform. Add some transformation problems into that mix and getting to the right form can be a nightmare! Or a character has a central form that is little more than a bunch of abilities to transform into other things. That form would be very vulnerable, but it would make keeping track of forms easier, as they all just need to be able to take that form and then pick which of their many forms to take after that!

This kind of insanity should be allowed only if everyone is on board with it. If the game does not put this in the table, players can freely be restricted to only one or two or whatever number of forms. But for a campaign built on transformation madness, the options are endless!