

## RULE 68A - by Supplement Four, for the Citizens of the Imperium Forum

( <http://www.travellerrpg.com/CotI/Discuss/showthread.php?t=14517> )

### INTRODUCTION...

Many Traveller players believe that Classic Traveller does not have a task system of its own. I've made statements to this effect myself in days gone by. But, whether the claim came from me or from another Traveller fan, the declaration is incorrect. CT *does* have a task system. What the game doesn't have is a *structured* task system.

Unlike meticulous, confined task systems of many rpgs, the system put forth in Classic Traveller is one where the GM is left to his own devices. With the CT system, the referee is charged with using his own judgement to create appropriate throws as needed in his game. The best description of CT's system is written by Marc Miller, appearing on pages 28-29 of the **Traveller Adventure**.

The designers at DGP saw the lack of structure as detrimental to the game. Making up task throws on-the-fly during a game and hoping that those Ref judgements were both **good** and **consistently fair** was seen as a precarious endeavor. Thus, the popular **Universal Task Profile** was born--a *structured* task system originally designed for Classic Traveller, then used in MegaTraveller as that edition of the game was published.

I have studied task systems for many years. I've created several. (The **Universal Game Mechanic**, a structured task system designed specifically for Classic Traveller, can be viewed here by clicking on the link in my sig.) And, I'd wager I know more about task systems than several "game designers" writing for rpgs today (judging by the systems that I've seen in print).

For those of you who still see the **charm** of the **Original Traveller Task System** and crave the creativity involved in designing a "good throw" on-the-fly, I present to you...

### RULE 68A.

What is **68A**? It's not a task system, and it doesn't change the system presented in Classic Traveller by one iota. What it *does* do is aid the GM in creating Classic Traveller task throws. It's a *guideline*, a rule-of-thumb, that Ref's can use, easily, quickly, during the ruckus and heat of a game to create fair and consistent throws.

In other words, it's a method of adding *structure* to the structureless Classic Traveller Task System.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

Simple. Whenever a throw is called for during a game, the Ref decides on the throw difficulty. The three Difficulty Levels each have a base target number assigned to them.

Difficulty	
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Easy	6+
Average	8+
Difficult	10+

Note the name of the Rule. **68A**. This is Traveller hexadecimal notation for 6-8-10. You'll never forget the three base difficulty numbers.

Once the base number is decided upon, the GM should fine tune the difficulty, up or down, by one point, if necessary.

And...we're done. See how simple that is? If the task is "Difficult", the target number is 10+. If the GM thinks the Difficult task is harder than usual, then the target number is set at 11+. If, on an Easy task, the task is particularly easy, then the task is set at one point lower than 6+ (so, it's a 5+ throw).

### Two Things to Note:

First, most CT skill descriptions also include sample tasks. GMs are encouraged to use these sample tasks as guidelines when creating throws that involve that skill.

Second, about 75% of the throws presented in Classic Traveller materials *do not* reference the character's attributes. Most throws rely on skills (only) for DMs. For those throws that do require a characteristic component, **Rule 68A** can easily be used, in a slightly different way, by the GM when deciding on which level of stat is required before a bonus is used on the task.

When using characteristics this way, Refs should simply decide what level of the appropriate stat would be beneficial on an Average Task Throw. If it's likely the stat will *Easily* influence the task roll, then chose Stat-6. If the stat would influence the throw on *Average*, then pick Stat-8. If the stat is unlikely to influence the throw (it would be *Difficult* for the stat to influence the throw), then the choice is Stat-A.

As with difficulty numbers, the Ref should simply raise or lower the base stat number by one point should fine-tuning be necessary.

## EXAMPLES...

Reviving passengers from low berth is typically a routine process for the experienced ship's medic. Easy Difficulty is 6+, but since this process is so common, the GM fine tunes this number down by one point. The throw to revive passengers from low berth is 5+ (see pg. 50 of the Traveller Book).

It's relatively difficult to maintain control on one's position and movement while floating around in zero gravity. This is a Difficult throw. 10+. (See pg. 48 of the Traveller Book).

By the same token, the **68A** rule is used to determine what level of DEX will be beneficial to those trying to maintain control in zero G. The GM decides that both an average DEX and a high DEX would be beneficial. He tweaks each up one point due to the difficulty of swimming around in zero G. DEX-8 is fine tuned to DEX-9 for the first bonus. DEX-A is fine tune up one point to DEX-B for the second, bigger, bonus. (See pg. 48 of the Traveller Book).

Most people can spot forgeries fairly easily. The **68A** rule says that Easy tasks require a throw of 6+. The Ref decides not to fine tune this number. (See pg. 23 of the Traveller Book).

The description of the ATV says that it is quite reliable. It's unlikely they'll break down. So, success on a Difficult task is needed if the ATV does break down. The Ref fine tunes this by one point. A throw of 11+ is needed for the ATV to break down. (See pg. 22 of the Traveller Book.)

## THE EFFECT OF SKILLS...

Most tasks in Classic Traveller (about 3-in-4) are modified by a character's expertise (skill) only. And, about the same percentage of those tasks are modified at a DM of +1 per skill level.

Please note that there is still a large cross-section of tasks that gain **more** than one point DM *per level of skill* on task throws.

For example, the Forgery skill provides a -2 DM (to the throw being made to spot the forgery) per level of skill. Those characters skilled in Administration will sometimes gain a +2 DM *per level of skill* when making certain throws. Those characters with Vacc Suit expertise gain a +4 DM *per level of skill* when avoiding dangerous zero G situations.

Good Classic Traveller GMs will be familiar with the CT skill descriptions and be able to create task throws in the spirit of the rules-of-thumb described therein.

## ANYTHING GOES!

Remember, **Rule 68A** is only a guideline! It's meant to help a GM come up with a throw, fast, during a game (and keep his throws consistent and fair). **68A** is NOT meant to over-structure the CT task system and hem the GM into a corner.

There are several examples in CT of all sorts of rolls that can be created during a game. Not all are 2D +DMs for a Difficulty Number or better (most CT throws are of this nature).

If a GM thinks a particular throw is a better fit than what is indicated by **Rule 68A**, then he should implement it without hesitation.

Marc Miller, in his description of Classic Traveller Tasks on pages 28-29 of the **Traveller Adventure**, suggests all sorts of methods for using dice to determine uncertain outcomes during the game.

The throw needed for a character to throw a blade is: Roll 2D for 18+. DMs include + entire DEX level, + Blade Skill, - Evasion DM. (Page 43 of the Traveller Book).

When reviving low berth passengers, a character with Medic-2 *or better* is granted a +1 DM (and a +1 DM is all that can be gained from the Medic skill). (Page 50 of the Traveller Book.)

A throw of 7 *exactly* is required to indicate a fatal error is writing into a computer program. (Page 22 of the Traveller Book.)

Reaction numbers (the number thrown for NPC reaction on the Reaction table) can be used as the throw required for the NPC to help the PCs (see pg. 28 of the Traveller Adventure).

For quick, random difficulty numbers, simply throw 2D and use the result as the number needed for success on the next task roll (see pg. 29 of the Traveller Adventure).

Two characters, working together to force open a stuck hatch, may add their STR scores together, and throwing the total or less on 3D indicates the hatch is opened (I just made that one up).

One character tosses an autopistol to another character. The Ref rules that the character making the toss needs to throw DEX or less on 2D. Failure means there is no chance for the opposite character to catch the pistol. The character trying to catch the pistol will throw *the result of the throwing character's 2D throw*, or less, on 2D, in order to catch the weapon, but he also receives a -3 DM if his DEX is higher than that number. So, Fred tosses to Thomas. Fred's DEX is 10, and the result of the 2D throw is 5. Thomas' DEX is 8. So, in order to catch the pistol, Thomas must throw 2D -3 for 5-. Or, in other words, he's throwing 2D for 8- in order to catch the pistol. Thomas' ability to "catch" the pistol is based on the quality of Fred's throw. (I just made this one up too...to give an elaborate example.)

The good Classic Traveller Ref should never forget these types of occurrences and never use **Rule 68A** exclusively.

### Further Commentary:

These days, even with all the task system studying/creation/fixes/implementation that I've done, I find myself attracted, more and more, to the structureless CT system. There's just something about it that intrigues me--always creating a throw, on-the-fly, in the heat of a game. It appeals to my GM's creative side.

It keeps me *interested*.

I love the UGM. I think it's an example of some of my best work. But, you know, I find myself using it less and less during Traveller games.

*...The ship's Jump Drive has been hit in a Space Combat encounter....* The players want to diagnose the problem. Instead of being generic (and spouting off that it'll take a standard 9+ roll to fix it), I play along with them (*That's what gaming is all about, yes?*).

Off the top of my head, I tell them it's a control unit issue. One of the control sensors governing power to the J-Drive blew, caused by a huge power surge when the ship was hit by the enemy's laser.

"What about backups! There's got to be backups for something that important on a starship!" My players are crafty ones. They'll hit me with things like that--things that make sense...things I hadn't thought of on-the-fly.

But, I don't miss a beat, "Oh yeah, there are backups all right. Three of them, to be exact, on this model J-Drive. The problem is, the power surge was so strong it *blew through all THREE of the backups!*

Oh, frack!

That's right, baby. Now, we're gamin'.

Players: "So...whadda we gotta do to fix it?"

And, this is where I'd normally throw in a UGM task. Blah, blah, blah..."it'll take an Average roll to fix the J-Drive"....because...blah, blah, blah.

See...

The CT system is actually more *interesting* for the GM. The roles aren't the **same** each and every game.

**Like each and every individual incident, EACH is looked at individually, by the GM, and a roll is created SPECIFIC to the situation.**

There's something very appealing about that.

That's something about it that's *addictive*....

So, instead of applying the UGM to the task at hand (above), I might get a little more creative about it.

I think to myself...hmmm...let's make the players work together on this. The guys on the bridge will monitor the computer while the actual physical work of replacing or bypassing or jury-rigging the control unit will be done at the access hatch on the J-Drive itself.

"Do we have spare parts?"

I think that's likely. Using **Rule 68A**, I quickly say, "Let's see. Engineer, roll 6+ to have a spare control unit on hand."

"But," the player playing the Engineer says, "Didn't we just have our annual overhaul a couple of game sessions ago? Wouldn't we restock things like that?"

"You're right," I say, "I forgot. Make that a 5+ roll (Fine-Tuning **Rule 68A**).

OK. So, what needs to happen is this (I'm thinking to myself, quickly, as the game proceeds). A - The control unit needs to be physically replaced in the J-Drive, and B - the power differential needs to be monitored from a computer terminal (and, since they're in combat, this will be done from the bridge).

The ship's pilot and navigator are on the bridge. The navigator will monitor the power differential, and his instructions will guide the physical installation of the control unit.

I'll have the navigator make a throw, reflecting his performance in monitoring the power differential read-outs *and* his ability to relay that information to the engineer, who is installing the control unit.

The navigator's job is easy. Using rule **68A**, I'll fine tune a 6+ throw needed to a 5+. Navigation-1 allows the throw to be made (no DMs). But, if the navigator also has Computer skill, he can use that skill as a positive DM on the throw.

Our navigator has Navigation-2 and Computer-1. So, he's throwing 2D +1 for 5+. He throws an 8, for a grand total of 9. Not bad.

Now...I want the engineer to be *guided* by the Navigator's direction. So, the Engineer's throw will be **based on** the Navigator's result.

The higher the Navigator's throw, the easier it will be for the Engineer.

Since our Navigator threw a 9, I'll make that the target number for the Engineer. The Engineer will have to throw 9- on 2D to succeed.

As for DMs on that roll, the process (I decide) is easier for a skilled mechanic. I decide that Mechanical skill will help the roll at a total of 2 points per level. If the Engineer doesn't have Mechanical Skill, he can still use his Engineering skill, but only at 1 point per level.

Our Engineer has Engineering-2 and Mechanical-1. So, it's a wash. Either skill will provide a beneficial -2 DM to the roll.

Now, the roll is made to install the control unit. The Engineer has to roll 2D -2 for 9-.

He rolls. Oh no! He rolls boxcars!

It's the only result that would make the Engineer fail. And, he did.

As GM, I say that he just shorted out the control chip. It's now no good.

"What about a second spare?"

"You rolled 5+ last time. Since you had one, I'll make this easy. Roll 4+ for 1-6 additional spares on-hand."

The roll is bricked. A "3" is rolled. No more spares.

"Alright," I say, "What are you going to do now? You've used up your supply of control chip spares. Plus, 15 minutes have gone by, and we're into a second space combat round."

The Engineer has a bright idea. "Hey! How about trying to scavenge parts from the four busted control units in order to make one good one?"

"I think that's a great idea," I say. "Here's what we're going to do..."

See how the CT Task System is **addictive?**

It's more personal. It's more organic. It just fits the game better.

**Rule 68A** gives me a starting point, but my imagination is the limit as I take into consideration all the elements of the problem at hand and devise a rule.

I almost hate to admit it, but I'm actually becoming a **retro** fan of the CT structureless system. **Rule 68A** gives me all the structure I need...

...and, to be honest, as a GM, I find the game more enjoyable when I'm involved with it, in this depth, from this aspect.

I've always liked structured task systems, but my tastes are changing.

Out is "one-size-fits-all". In is the retro "individual basis creative thing".