The Setting

Four Colors al Fresco is a roleplaying game of pulp-style adventure, set in an alternate Renaissance. The basic setting is Renaissance Italy – as it might have been. Had there been fantastic, pre-industrial advanced technologies in the hands of a few. Had the Black Death never come. Had the remnants of highly-advanced civilizations been scattered around the world. Had reality been governed by mystical Forces instead of scientific laws. Had there been maniacal geniuses constantly plotting to take over the world. And, most importantly, had there been superheroes to thwart them.

But these are not the superheroes of our times, or even our parents' times – these are the superheroes of our grandparents' times, the action heroes of the pulps. Before the term "superhero" was coined. Before spandex costumes. When a man with a maniacal laugh, a pair of six-shooters, and the sole power to "cloud men's minds" had the power to send villains scurrying for their holes. Pulp heroes are only slightly better than the rest of us, not the breed apart of the modern superhero. They may laugh in the face of an armed man, but it is not because they are unthreatened. They may operate outside the law, but only because the authorities have chosen to allow it. And they rarely have the luxury of existing outside the norms of society for more than an evening at a time. In short, while they have exceptional powers, pulp heroes are not so powerful that they may ignore the rest of society.

The style of this roleplaying game is one of action and adventure in a morally-clear world. The villains are Evil, and the heroes are Good, and rarely is there any doubt as to which is which. Doing good doesn't result in unintended bad consequences, and the bad guys are not just misunderstood or misguided. Your characters are the heroes of this world, people gifted with extraordinary gifts and driven by moral principles.

The world, as well as all those within it, is governed by five mystical Forces, the interactions of which determine everything that happens and exists. Much as our own world is governed by the forces of electricity, magnetism, gravity, and the nuclear forces, which together can explain why everything is the way it is, and why everything happens the way it does, the world of Four Colors al Fresco is governed by five Forces. Dynamic, Static, Lost, Known, and Passion are the Forces that govern the existences and interactions of this world.

Every action, every happening, every thing in the world is caused by the interactions of these 5 forces, but, generally, one or two of the forces so strongly govern a particular activity that the rest are overshadowed. When the Dynamic Force holds sway, the rock falls. When the Static Force holds sway, it stays put. Throughout most of the world, they provide a sort of balance – some things and situations are governed more by one Force or another, but on a broad scale everything balances out. But a few exceptional individuals are not in harmony with the world. The Forces do not pay equal attention to them. Some of the Forces pay them more heed, while others seem to give them short shrift, and still others apparently just overlook them on occasion. These are the Omegas , individuals who have been forgotten by one of the Forces, and thus defy the normal laws of nature in some small way. It is these Omegas that are the villains and heroes of this world.

The Forces

Known Governed by Mercury, Patron of Discovery, the Known is the Force of science and deduction and the rational world.

Passion Governed by Venus, Goddess of Passion, Passion is the Force of emotion and feeling and will.

Dynamic Governed by Mars, God of War, Dynamic is the Force of motion and action and change.

Static Governed by Jupiter, the Eternal Ruler, Static is the Force of stability and the status quo.

Lost Governed by Saturn, the Mystic, the Lost is the Force of faith, the mystical and magical, and the forgotten.

This is just a brief introduction to Four Colors *al Fresco*. Find out more at <http://www.tiltingatwindmills.net>.

The Rules

The rules are based on 3 basic concepts: Descriptors, Planets, and Storypath cards. Descriptors make up the bulk of a character's description, and resolve the bulk of actions. Descriptors are purely descriptive, with no numerical or other "mechanical" component. Utilizing them is a narrative affair, involving the Storyguide and players agreeing on how they apply.

In the event that Descriptors can not resolve a situation, the Planets may be employed. The Planets correspond to the Forces, and determine to what degree each Force affects a character. To use them, you "roll the Planets", which involves rolling the dice for all of your character's Planets, and then ordering them according to results. This forms the Hierarchy, with the smallest result at the top, in the Dominant position. Successively larger results are further down the Hierarchy, occupying, in order, the Major, Minor, and Weak positions. If a Force favorable to the action lands high in the Hierarchy, the action is successful, while if a Force opposed to the action ends up near the top of the Hierarchy, it fails.

The Omega Die can be swapped with any one other Planet die before the roll is made, thus eliminating that Force from the results, in favor of the Force associated with the Omega's Ω Planet.

Circumstance dice can also modify the results of the Hierarchy. These are never based on the characters' Descriptors, but reflect external situations. They sit outside of the Hierarchy.

Storypath cards are used to shift the balance of power from Storyguide to player. When a player uses a Storypath card, she gains complete authorial control over the game (except for other players' characters) for a little while. Storypath cards that are played to the group's detriment earn the player an immediate draw of a new card.

The Title is the comic book series that contains the characters' exploits. All those characters that are regular members of the current Title are considered Main characters, while any others are Guest characters. A Title also has Storypath cards associated with it. The Storyguide hands out these cards as play progresses, and the player of any Main character of that Title may use them at any time. They are not replenished automatically, like players' Storypath cards are.

Planet Die	Main Character Descriptors	Guest Character Descriptors
d3	*5 Traits*	*3 Traits*
d4	4 Traits	2 Traits
d6	3 Traits	2 Traits
d8	3 Traits	1 Trait
d10	2 Traits	1 Trait
d12	3 Traits; at least 1 Flaw	1 Flaw
d16	4 Traits; at least 2 Flaws	1 Flaw
d20	3 Traits; at least 2 Flaws	2 Flaws
d30	2 Flaws	2 Flaws
d50	*3 Flaws*	*3 Flaws*
Ω	1 Power, 1 Weakness, & 1 Quirk	

Character Creation

Once you have a concept for your character, there are 3 steps to realizing her in game terms.

First you need to rate her Planets. For 4 of the Planets, you will simply rate how strongly that force influences the character. You assign each of her Planets a die, which is what you roll for that Force when resolving an action. Low rolls are better, so the smaller the die-type, the more strongly that force rules the character. You must get Storyguide permission to use the die-types on the chart that are in italics.

One of the planets is not rated. It is designated with an Ω, and is a force that doesn't govern the character normally. She is "out of the sight of" that planet. It is from this Force (or rather, its lack) that her powers stem. Every character has a Power, a Weakness, and a Quirk associated with the Ωed Planet. Usually, the Power and Weakness are related – often the Weakness is something that negates the Power – but this is not necessary. The Quirk helps to define exactly how the Force of that Planet doesn't affect the character.

Once the Power, Weakness, and Quirk have been determined, detail the character's Traits. For each Planet with a die rating, consult the chart to determine how many Traits that Planet grants, and any limitations on how they may be used. Every Trait must be somehow related to the Force that the Planet governs.

One special kind of Trait is the Power Stunt. This is a specific special use of the character's Power, which is practiced and thus just as reliable as the character's Power itself. Another special Trait is a Flaw. As the name implies, a Flaw is primarily negative, and limits the character in some way. Power Stunts and Flaws should be labeled as such, but otherwise abide by all of the same rules as any other Trait.

As finishing steps, you should record the color of the die you are going to use for each planet, and draw your Storypath cards. Each player begins play with a number of Storypath cards equal to the number of rated Planets her character has. Decide on a name, and record the character's Title(s), and you're ready to play.

Glossary

Crossing Over The act of appearing in an Issue of a Title other than your own. An Omega who is Crossing Over becomes a Guest Character, and thus has access to fewer of her Descriptors.

Descriptors Everything, besides the Planet scores, that expresses your character in game-mechanical terms; essentially everything on your character sheet except for the Storypath cards and Planets (and Name). Some have special names, such as Traits, Flaws, Powers, etc.

Dynamic The Force of action and movement and change. Governed by Mars, God of War.

Flaw A special kind of Trait. Flaws are Traits that are almost always negative in effect, and thus a detriment to the Character. A Flaw is something that the Character would like to be rid of.

Guest Characters All of the Omegas other than the Main characters. Usually, there are one or more villainous Guest characters in an Issue, and there may also be heroic Guests, who are not part of the Main characters, but are Crossing Over (q.v.). They are almost always played by the Storyguide. Guest Characters have fewer Descriptors.

Hierarchy The ordering of the dice, and thus their corresponding Forces, when they are rolled. It is the Hierarchy that determines the outcome of an in-question action. The smaller the number on the die, the higher it is in the Hierarchy. The top position (lowest number), which may only be occupied uniquely, is labeled Dominant. The next highest position, or highest if the lowest number is tied, is labeled Major. The lowest position, which again may only be occupied uniquely, is labeled Weak. The final position, above Weak and below Major, is labeled Minor. The Dominant and Major positions are favorable, and indicate success if Favored Forces fall into them. The Weak position is unfavorable, and indicates failure if a Favored Force falls into it.

Issue A single session (evening/afternoon) of game play. Most Issues contain multiple Pages, and they are often grouped into Miniseries.

Known The Force of science, reason, and the rational world. Governed by Mercury, Patron of Discovery.

Lost The Force of the mystical, magical, and forgotten. The source of faith and magic, and the governing Force for esoteric occult knowledges. Governed by Saturn, the Mystic.

Main Character A character played by one of the Players. They are the characters around whom the stories of every Issue revolve.

Main Title The exploits of the characters are organized in a number of ways. One of those is the concept of Title(q.v.). The Main Title is the Title that includes all of the characters as Main Characters (q.v.).

Miniseries a series of Issues that are all linked together to form a single plot. The Issues of a Miniseries usually are part of a single Title, but this is not necessarily the case, and it's perfectly reasonable for a Miniseries to span as many Titles as it has Issues.

Omega Die Not really a die, but a marker that is associated with your Ωed Planet. You may swap it with any other Planet die before rolling.

Passion The Force of emotions and feelings. Governed by Venus, Goddess of Passion.

Page A series of events that are all tightly tied together and take place in a short span of time in a single location. Essentially, a scene. A Page may be made up of any number of Panels, including none. Depending on the nature of the activities it encompasses, it won't always be divided into Panels. A series of Pages make up an Issue.

Panel The smallest unit of time in the game system. During one Panel, a character may accomplish one simple action, such as making an attack, lifting a sinking ship, or delivering some dialog. More complex actions, such as disarming a complex trap, delivering a monologue, debating a course of action, or laying an ambush, will take multiple Panels.

Planets The dice ratings on your character sheet. They rate how much the various Forces affect your character; Smaller numbers indicate a stronger influence. Also, a metaphorical term for the Forces; each Force is thought to be governed by one of the known Planets.

Power The advantageous special Descriptor associated with your Ωed Planet. Powers generally fall outside the bounds of normal reality in the world. A Power should be somehow exceptional, either in nature or degree, so as to keep it distinct from other Traits.

Power Stunt A special kind of Trait. Power Stunts are special uses of a Power that aren't outside of its purview, but aren't necessarily an inherent part of it, either. A Power Stunt guarantees the ability to utilize the Power in this borderline area.

Quirk The Descriptor that stems from an Ωed Planet which is neither advantageous nor disadvantageous on the whole. Like a Weakness or Power, it should be somehow exceptional or supernatural.

Static The Force of stability and the status quo. Governed by Jupiter, the Eternal Ruler.

Storyguide (SG) The Storyguide is the participant who currently isn't a regular player. It is her job to detail the setting, play all of the extra characters, provide a scenario, and adjudicate actions.

Title The collected adventures of a particular Omega or group of Omegas.

Traits Descriptors other than your Power/Weakness/Quirk. Some of these are in turn given special names, such as Flaws and Power Stunts.

Weakness The disadvantageous special Descriptor associated with your Ωed Planet. Many Weaknesses tie directly to the Power, and either limit it in some way, negate it under some circumstances, or provide a way to counter it. But this need not be the case, and a Weakness could work in any way. What is important is that it be somehow exceptional, either in degree or nature, or it would simply be a Flaw Trait.

Ω (Omega) Someone who is "out of the sight of" one of the Planets, and therefore not limited to the normal rules of the Force it governs. As a result, they have what we would call superpowers, and are often capable of feats well beyond human norms. Nobody knows who first used the term "Ω", but it is suspected that it was someone trying to be clever and show their learning by making a reference to the end of normal laws where these people are concerned.

Mercury - The Known
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Descriptor _____

	Power	Weak-ness	Quirk	Stunt / Power	Flaw
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Venus - Passion
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Descriptor _____

Mars - Dynamic
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Descriptor _____

Jupiter - Static 4
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Descriptor _____

Saturn - The Lost 5
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Descriptor _____

(Each planet row includes the columns: Power, Weak-ness, Quirk, Stunt / Power, Flaw)

Name:
Title:

Power:

Weakness:

Quirk:

Traits:

Flaws:

Storypath Cards:

Diagram nodes:
- Passion — blue
- Known — white
- Dynamic — red
- Static — green — 4
- Lost — black — 5