

Universal Game Mechanic

TRAVELLER

*Science-Fiction Adventure
in the Far Future*

The Universal Game Mechanic was written by Kenneth Beardon
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Introduction

The *Universal Game Mechanic* (UGM) was first developed and posted on the Citizens of the Imperium (CoTI) Discussion Forum at www.travellerrpg.com.

The UGM is a task system for *Classic Traveller*. It's designed to be used without changing official *Classic Traveller* rules. Just put it into your game when you need a character to attempt a task.

The Universal Game Mechanic is a very simple task system that will be very familiar to *Classic Traveller* players. To resolve a task, the player simply rolls 2D, adds DMs, and succeeds if the throw is 8+.

The UGM also brings a unique *Traveller* mechanic for incorporating character attributes into tasks. It solves the issue of someone of Education 9 being treated the same for most tasks as someone of Education 5 - which is what happens in the Universal Task Profile (UTP) system in *MegaTraveller*. The difficulties outlined below use *MegaTraveller* UTP labels where the difficulty is equivalent to a UTP difficulty level.

The UGM is a *Classic Traveller* centric and intuitive task system. I hope you find it useful in your games.

To succeed: 8+ ... on 2D	DMs for task difficulty			
	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>DM</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>DM</i>
	Easy	+4	Challenging	-4
	Routine	+2	Formidable	-6
	Standard	0	Insane	-8
	Difficult	-2	Impossible	-10

Procedure

- i. Roll 2D.
- ii. Conduct *Natural Ability Check* (page 5) and apply DM as appropriate
- iii. Add DMs for Difficulty, Skill and Situation
- iv. Task succeeds if total is 8+.

Task Descriptors

UGM task descriptors are written in the format *Appropriate Skill / Governing Attribute / Difficulty DM (Situational DMs)*. Example 3 below would be written as follows: *Medical / EDU / +3*

That is, it's a task roll using the character's Medical skill and Education attribute, and there is a +3 DM on the roll.

Example 1: make it up on the go

A player wants his character to use extra tubing from the ship's fuel system to rig up a still for the PCs to drink some home brew. The GM can think for a second, and comes up with a roll: maybe Mechanical skill and +1 DM for Difficulty.

Example 2: reference an existing Classic Traveller roll

Avoiding loss of control in Zero-G is a roll of 10+ according to the Traveller Book. This is the same as a UGM task with a -2 DM for Difficulty.

Example 3: Medic reviving Low Berth passenger

A ship's medic is attempting to revive a low berth passenger. The GM decides this is a task of Routine difficulty, which means the ship's medic receives a +2 DM to his revival roll (not counting other DMs that may apply).

But since the ship's medic does this job every two weeks for several passengers and he is very familiar with the equipment, the GM decides that the revival roll is a task of Routine difficulty with a +3 DM instead of a +2 DM. In effect, the task is "a little harder than *Easy*" and "a little easier than *Routine*".

The medic's roll will be: 2D+3 for 8+. Other appropriate DMs, such as Medical skill, not important to this example, would be used as well.

On page 50 of *The Traveller Book*, the roll to revive Low Passengers from berth is a roll of 5+, plus DMs - exactly like this example.

Natural Ability Check

Immediately after the natural 2D roll is thrown, before any other modifiers are applied, check the natural roll against the character's natural ability.

When the throw is equal to or less than the *Governing Attribute* (as written in the Task Descriptor), apply a +1 DM on the task throw.

The UGM Natural Ability check is ignored if a character's stat is referenced in any other way.

Example 4: combat in Classic Traveller

Combat in *Classic Traveller* references DEX for gun combat and STR for brawling combat. The Natural Ability check is not made on UGM combat rolls since the task's governor stat is already referenced.

Example 5: other throws in Classic Traveller

The Zero Gravity throw (page 48 of *The Traveller Book*) references DEX - the UGM Natural Ability check does not apply. On page 22 of *The Traveller Book*, a throw is given for operating an Air/Raft which does not reference an attribute. The UGM Natural Ability check applies.

Example 6: A Mechanic's task

Dunci is attempting to bore out his Auto Pistol, physically changing the weapon so that it can accept ammunition obtained locally of non-standard calibre. Dunci's UPP is 784A86, and he has Mechanic-2. The GM decides this task is: *Mechanical / DEX / -1*

The Task Roll

- i. Roll 2D: 2, 5
- ii. UGM Natural Ability check. Roll of 7 is less than Dunci's DEX-8, so Dunci receives a +1 DM on the roll.
- iii. Add modifiers: +2 Mechanical, +1 Natural Ability. -1 Difficulty.
- iv. After all modifiers, the final result is 9. The task succeeds.

High Natural Ability

Characters with attributes of 13+ are considered to have high natural ability. Tasks governed by these high-level attributes are eligible for an additional bonus.

When the Governing Attribute 12+, there is an automatic +1 DM on task rolls. Where the Governing Attribute is 13, 14, or 15, there is an additional +1 DM (for a total +2 DM) when the natural roll is equal to or less than the level of the attribute minus 10.

Attribute Level	Governing Attribute Bonus
13	+2 DM when the task roll is 3-; otherwise a +1 DM
14	+2 DM when the task roll is 4-; otherwise a +1 DM
15	+2 DM when the task roll is 5-; otherwise a +1 DM

A character with high natural ability will draw on his natural ability when he needs it most: when his natural roll is low.

Critical Success / Critical Failure

When the natural UGM Task roll is a double one ("snake eyes") a Critical Failure *may* result.

When it is a double six ("box cars") a Critical Success *may* result.

UGM Critical Success or Failure Check:

Roll 3D to be less than or equal to (Attribute + Skill + Difficulty)

Add the character's attribute, skill level and the difficulty modifier for the task. Roll this amount or less on 3D to avoid a Critical Failure result. Roll this amount or less on 3D to achieve a Critical Success result.

Characters with higher attributes and skills will be more likely to achieve a Critical Success and avoid Critical Failures. Conversely, those characters with lower attributes and lower (or no) skill level those characters achieve less Critical Successes and avoid fewer Critical Failures.

On tasks of easier difficulty, it is easier to avoid Critical Failures and obtain Critical Successes. On more difficult tasks, it is harder to avoid Critical Failures and achieve Critical Successes.

UGM Governing Attribute Chart

This chart reflects the effect a character's attribute has on the task roll.

The left column shows a natural 2D throw. Across the top, we see *Classic Traveller* attribute values ranging from 1 to 15.

The body of the chart shows the adjusted throw once the UGM Natural Ability Check modifier has been added.

Notice how the UGM provides differentiation between each attribute level.

Level:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
2D roll:															
2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4
3	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5
4	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6
5	5	5	5	5	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	11	11	11	11	11	11
11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12	12
12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	13	13	13	13

The effect of the Natural Ability Check in the UGM is to reward lower level attribute scores by making simpler tasks more likely to succeed and reward higher level attribute scores by also making more difficult tasks more likely to succeed.

UGM Examples

Example 7: an alien computer

Trasc's (UPP 7A9DA8) is attempting to understand the workings of an alien computer with Computer-3 expertise.

The GM has decided this task is: *Computer / INT / -3*

The Task Roll

- i. Roll 2D: 2, 1
- ii. Natural Ability Check: High Natural Ability passes.
- iii. Add/Subtract modifiers: +3 Computer, +1 automatic Natural Ability, +1 High Natural Ability, -3 difficulty.
- iv. After all modifiers, the final roll is 5. The task fails.

Example 8: Critical Success

Frenhe (Engineering-1; EDU-6) has just rolled a natural 12 for the task *Engineering / EDU / -1*

Frenhe is the engineer on the far trader *Joyston's Luck*. The Jump Drive has been damaged (note the standard Classic Traveller Book 2 roll of 9+ to fix the drive).

Frenhe may have rolled a Critical Success. The check is calculated by adding Frenhe's Engineering-1 skill to his EDU-6 and his UGM difficulty -1 DM ($1 + 6 - 1 = 6$). If Frenhe throws 6 or less on 3D, Frenhe has achieved a *Critical Success* for this task. If the 3D roll is 7+, the task is completed normally.

Example 9: Air/Raft Chase

Da Bien-Hua (9AA655 Grav Vehicle-1) is involved in an Air/Raft chase, fleeing some Vargr pirates (in their own grav vehicle).

Looking at *The Traveller Book*, page 22, a throw is published for this situation, and the GM decides to use the UGM version of this task.

The Traveller Book says to roll 5+ with these DMs: +1 per level of skill and -1 if gunfire is involved in the chase.

The UGM version of this task is: *Grav Vehicle / DEX / +3* (Situational -1 DM due to gunfire and the chase).

The Task Roll

- i. Roll 2D: 3, 6
- ii. Natural Ability Check: Succeeds
- iii. Task DMs: +1 Natural Ability; +1 Grav Vehicle; -1 Situational DM (gunfire chase); +3 Difficulty.
- iv. Task succeeds on an 8+: This task succeeds with a total of 13!

Example 10: Skipping the Natural Ability Check

Sir Bromley Riieve (8889AB Vacc Suit-1) has donned his Vacc Suit and is attempting to shove off from his own vessel towards a disabled craft in an asteroid belt.

According to *Beltstrike*, a 10+ roll is needed to maintain control. DMs are: +2 for forward movement; -2 for making a free jump; +0 for moving at Speed 1; -6 for making a long range jump; +1 if DEX 9+; +2 if DEX 11+; +4 per level of Vacc Suit skill.

In UGM terms, this task is: *Vacc Suit / DEX / -2* (Situational DMs: +2 for forward movement; -2 for making a free jump; +0 for moving at Speed 1; -6 for making a long range jump; +1 if DEX 9+; +2 if DEX 11+; +4 per level of Vacc Suit skill)

Note that Bromely does not meet the DEX requirement. Also note that, since DEX is referenced in the throw, the UGM Natural Ability check is skipped on this task.

The Task Roll

- i. Roll 2D: 2, 3
- ii. Natural Ability Check: Skipped on this task throw.
- iii. DMs: +4 Vacc Suit; -2 Difficulty; +2 Situational DM (forward movement); -2 Situational DM (free jump); -6 Situational DM (long range jump).
- iv. Task succeeds on 8+: This task fails as Bromely's task totals only 1.

Bromely goes spinning out of control, free-falling in space, having missed his jump completely.

Example 11: a task "on the fly"

Dexter Bryte (E6AB58 Medical-4), owner/operator of the far trader *Adroit Pursuit* is providing medical care for one of his injured crewmen, Klue Gagarrin,

the ship's gunner, who was injured when the turret was hit during the battle (space combat under Book 2).

Klue's physical stats of 6A5 have been reduced to 620. He's been knocked out and burned a bit. Dexter has dragged him out of the gunner's station, across the corridor into one of the ship's staterooms. There, Dexter was able to grab an emergency medkit and see to Klue's wounds.

According to *The Traveller Book*, page 47, Klue has been rendered unconscious, sustaining a minor wound. As Dexter tends to Klue's injuries, the rule says to raise Klue's stats halfway between their wounded level and their max.

Klue's stats are now raised to 662.

In 30 minutes, as Dexter treats him, Klue will be fully recovered from the blast that knocked him unconscious in the gunner's station.

But, the crew of the *Adroit Pursuit* doesn't have 30 minutes (that's 240 personal combat rounds!). The *Pursuit* is being boarded, and Captain Bryte needs every able hand to repel the boarders.

The player playing Dexter says, "Hey! My character's got Medical-4! Can't he slap some stims into Klue and get him up and moving faster?"

The GM thinks a moment and says, "Well, normally it takes 30 minutes for a minor wound to fully recover, according to the CT rules. Here's what we can do in this specific situation..."

Dexter will make a Medical task roll. If the roll is successful, the difference will be subtracted from the 30 minute time period. On the other hand, if the roll fails, the difference will be added to the time period (the healing time required could be longer than 30 minutes 30 min being an "average").

The UGM task: *Medical / EDU / +0*

The Task Roll

- i. Roll 2D: 3, 5
- ii. Check Natural Ability: (Roll of 8 is less than Education of 5)
- iii. DMs: +4 Medical
- iv. Task succeeds on 8+: This task succeeds with a total of 12.

The result is: it will take Klue 26 minutes to fully heal all of his damage (12 is 4 points over 8. $30 - 4 = 26$ minutes).

Example 12: Using a default skill

Russlin Suvarrii (324A76) is a common sight in startown. He was injured during the Fourth Frontier War, but passersby don't remember that. Most of them refer to him as "the cripple".

From time-to-time, Russlin makes a little extra cash just by keeping his ears open as he frequents the multitude of bars and pubs that infest the startown quadrant. When he overhears something he thinks might be worth some credits, he waddles on down to the warehouse district where there are those that are interested in such tit-bits of information.

The GM had decided that Streetwise is the skill needed for Russlin to find someone to sell his information to. The problem is: Russlin does not have the Streetwise skill.

This is no matter, though. Streetwise can be considered a default skill. Everybody has this one, even if it is not written on a character's sheet. All characters have default skill at Level-0.

The UGM task to find a buyer for Russlin's info: *Streetwise* / INT / +1

The warehouse district is so infested with people that deal in this type of "trading" information that the GM decides this is a *Routine*. Under the UGM, this means a +2 DM on the task roll.

But the GM thinks that's a bit "too easy". The docks aren't *that* infested with criminals. So, the GM decides to use the +2 DM for a ROUTINE task as a starting point, then lower the difficulty by a point to make the roll a tad harder. Thus, the +1 DM for difficulty is listed in the task above.

The Task Roll

- i. Roll 2D: 4, 3
- ii. Check Natural Ability: Succeeds.
- iii. DMs: +1 Natural Ability; +1 Difficulty.
- iv. Task succeeds on 8+: This task is successful as Russlin rolls a total of 9.

Example 13: The benefit of High Natural Ability

The Marquis Terran Tukera (4C8AAD Carousing-1) has traveled from his estate on Aramis to the troubled world of Aramanx in an attempt to gather a summit of the world's leaders before the brink of war tips into full-scale conflict.

After he and his retainers arrive at Aramanx (the "powder-keg of the Towers Cluster"), the GM has role-played some interesting and different customs displayed by the high social class of the troubled planet.

The player playing the Marquis Tukera is unable to successfully figure his role in the strange customs, and he asks, "My character is a Marquis! Can't you give me a roll to figure out what's going on with these people?"

The GM replies, "I won't tell you exactly what to do--that you'll have to figure out for yourself. But, what I will do is give you a hint if you are successful on a

task. You'll have to take those hints and role-play with them as best you know how."

So, the GM decides this is a task of Routine difficulty: *Carousing* / SOC / +2

The Task Roll

- i. Roll 2D: 2, 2
- ii. High Natural Ability Check: Succeeds!
- iii. DMs: +1 Carousing; +2 Difficulty; +1 automatic natural ability; +1 high natural ability
- iv. Tasks succeed on 8+: This task succeeds, barely, with the total of 9.

Example 14: The UGM and CT Combat

Dexter Bryte was successful in treating Klue Gagarrin's wounds (*Example 11* above), and Klue's heal time has been reduced to 26 minutes - is still too long! The boarders of the *Adroit Pursuit* have infiltrated the ship. Dexter has left Klue alone in the stateroom--he left to join the others in defending the bridge.

The door to Klue's stateroom crashes open with a kick from a Vargr Corsair. But, Vargr legs are weak, and as the door flew open, the pirate lost his grip on his boarding shotgun.

Klue wasted no time. Without a weapon, the injured gunner leapt to engage the Vargr, hand-to-hand.

This is a straight-out *Classic Traveller* Brawling attack. UGM can be used with CT combat - in fact, it fits perfectly.

Klue's wounded physical stats are: 662. Klue's skill: Brawling-1

Since Klue is recovering from the turret explosion, the GM rules that Klue must act as if he has used all of his Brawling combat blows (which means he's got to use the Weakened Blow DM).

Klue doesn't have a weapon. It will be a straight Brawling attack with his hands. Remember that *Classic Traveller* combat attacks hit on a roll of 8+ (the *Standard* UGM difficulty).

Luckily, Klue's STR hasn't been damaged, and his STR-6 keeps him from receiving the Required STR penalty. The Weakened Blow penalty is -2.

The Vargr is wearing some type of suit equivalent to Cloth armor (-4 vs. hands), and the Short range distance yields a +1 DM. The Vargr has Infighting-1 skill, which will be used with his "parry" of Klue's blow.

Also note that STR is referenced in *Classic Traveller* Brawling combat, so the UGM Natural Ability check is skipped on this task.

The UGM profile for this task is: Brawling / STR / +0 (-2 Weakened Blow, -4 Armor, +1 Range, -1 enemy Parry)

The Task Throw

- i. Roll 2D: 6, 3
 - ii. Natural Ability Check: *Skipped*.
 - iii. DMs: +1 Brawling; -2 Weakened Blow; -4 Cloth vs. Hands. -1 Vargr's parry.
 - iv. Task succeeds on 8+: This task fails with a total of 3.
- Unfortunately, Klue swung but missed, and we go into combat round two....

Example 15: Critical Check

On round two, the Vargr went for his weapon instead of taking a swing at Klue, but the Vargr missed that roll. The boarding shotgun went skittering under the stateroom bed when the Vargr dropped it. Now, it's Klue's turn again (see *Example 14* above). He must hit the Vargr and take him out quickly. Klue's in no shape for a prolonged fight.

Klue swings again. The task is the same as above. But this time, Klue doesn't just miss--he rolls snake-eyes on his attack roll. This is a possible *Critical Failure*. In order for Klue to avoid the *Critical Failure* he must succeed at a check.

Klue's STR is still at a maximum of 6. Klue's Brawling-1 raises this number a point, and the difficulty of +0 leaves the number at 7.

The *Critical Failure* check is: 3D for 7-

3D will be rolled for Klue. If the result is 7 or less, Klue avoids a Critical Failure. If the result is 8+, then the GM will impose some penalty on Klue for rolling a Critical Failure. This doesn't look good for Klue.

Note that the UGM check for Critical Failure is a check to *avoid* it; conversely the check for Critical Success is to *obtain* it.

Example 16: Enhancing Natural Ability

Luukhan Pershiire (EDU-7, Navigation-2) is First Officer aboard the tramp freighter *Adroit Pursuit*, and he's had to pull duty lately as the ship's Navigator. The last guy quit when the ship made port at Natoko.

The *Pursuit* is approaching one of the gas giants clustered together in the Patinir system, and Luukhan is attempting a simple Active EMS sensor scan on the area before he zips over an approach pattern to the pilot's console.

The GM allows Navigation skill to be used as Sensor Ops at one level lower, so Luukhan is considered as having Sensor Ops-1 on this task roll.

Normally, this task would be governed by Luukhan's EDU score, but since the ship's computer and sensor systems suggest approach vectors and do a lot of the work for the navigator, the GM rules that the ship's TL can be used in place of Luukhan's EDU score when figuring the Natural Ability bonus.

Note that, since Luukhan's EDU is 7, his player is going to use the ship's TL 13 for the task roll. In using the ship's TL to govern the roll, this task roll becomes a task using High Natural Ability (13+).

The GM decides this is an Easy task (+4 Difficulty), but since a small amount of filtering must be done to correct for the interference created by the gas giant's magnetic field, he penalizes the difficulty one point, making the roll: *Sensor Ops / EDU or Ship's TL /+3*

Something that the GM doesn't tell the PCs is that, if the sensor roll results in a total of 12+, he will alert them to a small, satellite-sized object that is caught in close orbit around the gas giant the ship is approaching. A roll of 8-11 will allow a second check once the ship is closer, about to make orbit around the GG. And a roll of 7- will indicate the object has crossed the planet's horizon, and it will be on the far side of the world until the ship is deeply involved in scooping operations.

The Task Roll

- i. Roll 2D: 2,3
- ii. High Natural Ability Check: Fails (by 2 points)
- iii. DMs: +1 Sensor Ops, +1 automatic Natural Ability, +3 Difficulty
- iv. Task succeeds on 8+: This task is successful with a total of 10.

The roll of 10 indicates Luukhan did not detect the satellite, but he has enough information to send an approach vector over to the pilot, and the ship will begin scooping operations at the GG in a few minutes.

Secretly, the GM will roll to see if the satellite is detected once more before it passes across the world's horizon to the far side of the planet.

Conclusion

In my game, I use two methods for tasks: UGM for tasks that are obviously skill based and plain old Classic Traveller attribute checks for tasks that are attribute based.

I think the UTP system has so heavily influenced Traveller gamers that it is sometimes forgotten that there are other ways to accomplish things.

I really like the free-for-all, easy *Classic Traveller* method of roll attribute or less on a die or three...the GM deciding on the spot what's most appropriate for the situation.

It's not as structured as a UTP system, (it could be, if someone would make up some stat-check rules), but it flows, baby, it flows. The game rolls.

One last example. A character is trying to repair an old, ancient computer. This is obviously a skill based UGM task: *Computer / EDU / -4*

But...let's say the ancient computer is actually encased in stone, and the GM wants to know if the character working on repairing the computer has noticed the uniform notches that have been carved in the computer's stone-box rim. The character may think it's just chips from age...or scratches from wear.

This is more of an attribute based task. This really isn't skill based (it isn't the character's computer skill that will make him more able to notice the scratches...it's his INT score). But Computer skill does come into it, as you will see.

So, while the character performs the computer repair task (UGM task using computer skill and EDU), the GM secretly rolls an INT check for the character.

He rolls 2D for INT + Computer Skill or less.

The "+ Computer skill" on the check is because the scratches on the stone work of the ancient computer are actually in binary code. INT is the most important aspect of this check, but the character's computer skill is added in there to boost up the character's INT due to his computer skill and possible recognition of binary code.

2D are thrown, and if the check is successful, the character, while performing the computer repair, will also notice the binary scratches on the computer's stone case.

Dexter Bryte - owner/operator of the Adroit Pursuit - pulled his injured gunner Klue Gagarrin from the ship's turret.

Klue had been knocked out and burned. Dexter dragged him out of the gunner's station, across the corridor and into one of the ship's staterooms. He grabbed an emergency medikit and saw to Klue's wounds.

But the crew of the Adroit Pursuit doesn't have much time. Pirates are rushing towards the airlocks, and Captain Bryte needs every able hand to repel the boarders ...