

Example of Play

This extended example demonstrates how *Duskara* plays at the table, showcasing the interplay of fiction, mechanics, and collaborative storytelling.

The Setup

GM: "You're standing on the observation platform at the top of Aetherion' central spire. The wind is strong—steady at about 60 kilometers per hour—and you can see storm clouds gathering on the day-side horizon. Kaelen, you've been scanning the thermal signatures all morning. What do you see?"

Kaelen's Player: "I'm using my Thermal Sense to check if the mining drones are still operational out in the day margins. Have they sent back any signals?"

GM: "Good question. Let's frame that as: 'Can you detect the thermal signatures of the drones through the storm interference?' You've got your Thermal Sense Skill, so that's a Chance Die. But there's storm interference building, which adds a Risk Die. Go ahead and roll."

The Roll

Kaelen's Player: "Okay, so one Action Die and one Chance Die minus one Risk Die. That's just the Action Die." (*rolls a 4*) "I got a 4."

GM: "Yes, but... You do pick up the drones' signatures—three of them are still active and broadcasting their positions. But the fourth one, the deep-salvage unit, has gone dark. Either it's offline, buried, or something else is interfering. What do you do?"

Kaelen's Player: "That's the one with the high-value salvage. I need to go out there and check on it. I'll gear up and head out."

Scene Transition

GM: "All right, you're suiting up in the airlock. Zhiren, you notice Kaelen preparing for a day-side run. What's your reaction?"

Zhiren's Player: "I'm going to stop them. 'Kaelen, you know what day-side conditions are like right now. The storm's about to hit, and you've already been Psychically Drained from yesterday's Weather Working. You need rest, not a suicide mission.'"

Kaelen's Player: "I look at Zhiren and say, 'The salvage contract pays enough to keep our water systems running for three months. We can't afford to lose that drone. I'll be quick.'"

GM: "Okay, this sounds like a social question. Zhiren, are you trying to convince Kaelen to stay? Frame it as a closed question."

Zhiren's Player: "Can I convince Kaelen that this mission is too dangerous right now?"

GM: "Let's build the pool. You've got a Relationship with Kaelen—you taught them thermal sensing—so that's a Chance Die. But Kaelen's Goal is tied to proving humanity can reclaim what was lost, and their Motive is strong. That's a Risk Die representing their determination. Also, the settlement's water situation is a factor—that's another Risk Die. Roll it."

Social Conflict

Zhiren's Player: *(rolls 1 Action Die + 1 Chance Die - 2 Risk Dice = just the Action Die)* "I got a 2."

GM: "No... Kaelen, Zhiren's argument doesn't sway you. You're too focused on the mission and what it means for the settlement. Zhiren, you see the determination in their eyes—they're going."

Kaelen's Player: "I nod to Zhiren. 'I'll be back before the storm hits. Keep the weather spire active—I might need you to clear a path home.' Then I head into the airlock."

Day-Side Expedition

GM: "Okay, Kaelen, you're now outside in the day margins. It's blazing hot even in twilight's shadow, and the temperature is climbing as you move toward the salvage coordinates. You're in the Day Side zone now, so that's an automatic +2 Risk Dice to all physical actions. Your Heavy-Duty Thermal Suit reduces that by 1, and your Thermal Suit Operation Skill gives you a Chance Die. What's your first move?"

Kaelen's Player: "I'm using Thermal Sense to track the drone's last known position. Can I find it through the thermal noise?"

GM: "Good. Frame the question."

Kaelen's Player: "Can I locate the disabled drone using Thermal Sense?"

GM: "Let's build it:

- 1 Action Die
- Thermal Sense Skill: +1 Chance Die
- Survival (Day Side): +1 Chance Die
- Heavy-Duty Thermal Suit: +1 Chance Die
- Day Side zone: +1 Risk Die (reduced from +2 by your suit)

- Overconfident in Their Abilities (Frailty): +1 Risk Die (you're pushing too hard)
- Net pool: 1 Action Die + 2 Chance Dice"

Kaelen's Player: *(rolls three dice: 5, 4, 3)* "I got a 5."

GM: "Yes... You locate the drone. It's half-buried in a thermal vent collapse, about 200 meters ahead. The salvage container is intact, and you can extract it. But the heat is intensifying—you estimate you have maybe thirty minutes before your suit's cooling system is overwhelmed. What do you do?"

Kaelen's Player: "I move toward it and start digging it out. Can I recover the salvage container before my suit fails?"

Escalation

GM: "That's the critical question. Let's zoom in a bit. First, can you reach the drone without overheating?"

Kaelen's Player: "Okay. Same pool as before?"

GM: "Almost. The heat is even more intense now, so add another Risk Die for 'Scorching Heat.' That's 1 Action Die + 2 Chance Dice - 1 Risk Die (net)."

Kaelen's Player: *(rolls three dice: 6, 3, 2)* "A 6!"

GM: "Yes, and... You not only reach the drone, but you find a thermal shadow—a small outcrop that shields you from the worst of the heat. You can work from there, which removes the extra Risk Die. Now, can you extract the salvage container?"

Kaelen's Player: "Let's do it. Can I free the salvage container before the storm hits?"

GM: "You're working against time now. The storm front is visible on the horizon, and the wind is picking up. That's:

- 1 Action Die
- Ancient Technology Skill: +1 Chance Die
- Thermal Lance (Gear): +1 Chance Die
- Scorching Heat: +1 Risk Die
- Storm Front Approaching: +1 Risk Die
- Net pool: 1 Action Die + 1 Chance Die"

Kaelen's Player: *(rolls two dice: 4, 4)* "Two 4s!"

GM: "Two of the same highest value—that shifts the result one step better. You got 'Yes...' which becomes 'Yes, and...' You free the salvage container, and as you pull it loose, you notice something else—a data crystal embedded in the wreckage, partially intact. It looks like it might be from the

Stellar Horizon itself. Do you take it?"

Kaelen's Player: "Absolutely. I grab both and start heading back."

The Return

GM: "Back in Aetherion, Zhiren, you're on the weather spire watching the storm roll in. The wind has jumped to gale force—that's +2 Risk Dice to outdoor actions. You can see Kaelen's heat signature through your comm link, moving toward the settlement, but the storm is closing fast. If they don't get inside soon, they'll be caught in it."

Zhiren's Player: "I'm using Weather Working to push back the storm front, just enough to give Kaelen a window to get through. Can I redirect the worst of the storm for a few minutes?"

GM: "That's a big ask. The storm is massive. Let's build the pool:

- 1 Action Die
- Weather Working Skill: +1 Chance Die
- Positioned on Weather Spire: +1 Chance Die
- Relationship with Kaelen (you trained them): +1 Chance Die
- Gale Force Winds (scene Tag): +2 Risk Dice
- Storm Season: +1 Risk Die
- Psychically Drained (from yesterday): +1 Risk Die
- Net pool: 1 Action Die + 0 Chance Dice (everything cancels)"

Zhiren's Player: (*rolls the Action Die: 5*) "Just a 5."

GM: "Yes... You manage it. The storm front hesitates, pushed back just long enough for Kaelen to sprint through the outer gates. But the effort costs you—you collapse on the spire platform, utterly exhausted. You're gaining the Condition 'Severely Psychically Drained,' which will take days of rest to clear. Kaelen makes it inside as the storm slams into Aetherion' shields."

Resolution

GM: "Kaelen, you're back in the airlock, covered in dust and sweat, but you've got the salvage container and the data crystal. Zhiren, you're being helped down from the spire by other weather workers. What do you both do?"

Kaelen's Player: "I find Zhiren as soon as I'm cleaned up. 'You saved my life. Thank you.' I hand them the data crystal. 'I think this might be important.'"

Zhiren's Player: "I take it, too tired to even smile. 'Next time, listen when I tell you something's too dangerous. But... good work.'"

GM: "The salvage contract will keep Aetherion' water systems running, improving the settlement's Water Status from 'Water Rationing' to 'Water Adequate.' And the data crystal—well, that's a mystery for another session. For now, you've both earned some rest."

What This Example Demonstrates:

- **Fiction-first play:** The story drives the mechanics, not the other way around
- **Closed questions:** Every roll is framed clearly
- **Tag interaction:** Skills, Gear, Frailties, environmental zones, and Relationships all influence rolls
- **Zone modifiers:** The Day Side automatically adds Risk Dice
- **Psychic costs:** Weather Working had narrative consequences
- **Collaborative storytelling:** Players and GM build the scene together
- **Emergent narrative:** The data crystal discovery came from rolling well, opening new story threads

A Note on Scene Narration: In the Scene Transition, the GM said, "Zhiren, you notice Kaelen preparing for a day-side run." This is a common and effective way to present the world. But Zhiren retained full agency—they could have ignored Kaelen, done something else entirely, or reacted differently. The GM describes the world; players decide how their characters engage with it. Alternatively, Zhiren's player could have declared what they were doing first, and the GM would respond. The point is: describing what a character notices is not the same as narrating what they do. Narration of the world is the GM's job. Agency to respond is the player's.

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