Assembly Line

Do you want erotic roleplay toward a Bad End, as a foregone conclusion? But also want to squirm, struggle, and resist, with *just enough* success to provide some false hope? Or possibly even a real prospect of escape? Assembly Line has you covered--best not to ask with what.

The basic premise is that the main character, herein the MC, will face progressive degradation, conditioning, corruption, or alteration, by some horny and persistent adversity, here referred to as the Corruptor. It might be a pervasive influence of the environment, or a horde of mooks, or an evil mastermind, but the adversity will beset the MC, who has little but non-zero power to resist.

Actions

Resistance takes the form of rolling dice for one of four basic Actions:

- **Gratify:** satisfy an aggressor. This can let you get them off faster, or get off on or in someone else, or more generally redirect their aggression by pleasing them.
  - Danger: decrease Shame or Inhibition, Corruptor's choice.
- **Resist:** hold your composure against an attack on your Stats. When something or someone would reduce your Shame, Defiance, or Inhibition, you can hold it off, at least for now.
  - Danger: provoke a different avenue of degradation or alteration.
- **Fend Off:** briefly rebuff an advance or attack, or put up token resistance to bondage or other confinement. This is generally how you defend yourself from anything physical.
  - Danger: decrease Defiance.
- **Endure:** try to withstand the drugs, magic, or large sexual or surgical insertions and withdrawals. For things you can't sensibly prevent or that have already happened, this is how you hold your mind together.
  - Danger: decrease a Stat or advance a Countdown, Corruptor's choice.

Each of these Actions describes its Goal as the outcome you get from success, and the Danger as a mechanical or narrative result. Whenever the MC does something in-character to get one of these Goals, the Action happens, and the player should roll dice for it.

Specifically, roll a six-sided die for the Goal, and a second one for the Danger (or more, for plural Dangers). Then, assign your dice among the Goal and Danger(s) to determine the results:

- For the Goal of an Action:
  - 1-2: the Goal fails, and you can't try this Action again unless it's for a new, different event. The Corruptor describes the bad outcome the Action tries to prevent.
  - 3-4: the Goal only partially succeeds. The opportunity remains, but you have to narrate your character doing more, greater in-character stakes or brazenness, or else do another Action to secure success.
  - 5-6: the Goal succeeds completely. Describe it.
- For each Danger of an Action:
  - 1-2: the Danger comes true immediately. The Corruptor describes what the results are like.
  - 3-4: the Danger *may* come true, and lingers. On your next Action, roll an extra die for this Danger, in addition to that Action's normal Danger.
  - 5-6: the Danger does not come true. Describe averting the risk.

As an example, if you Gratify someone and roll a 5 and a 3, this means you can either place the 3 in the Goal to partially Gratify them (redirect an aggressor by pleasing them), and place the 5 in the Danger to have no risk of "decrease Shame or Inhibition". To secure success, you'll have to narrate more risk or stakes in in-character terms, or make a second Action.

Or, you can place the 5 in the Goal, placating the aggressor, but leaving the 3 for the Danger, meaning your next Action will use *three* dice, including one for the lingering risk of "decrease Shame or Inhibition". If the next Action you make is to Resist an attack against your Shame, you might even lose *two* points of Shame, if the Goal for Resist fails, and the lingering Danger from Gratify comes true with a 1-2.

Since you assign the dice after rolling, you can usually choose between succeeding with consequences, or failing with safety, to at least some degree. Sometimes this will mean partial headway at a serious cost, and sometimes it will even mean failure *and* lingering Danger.

When deciding on and resolving an Action, both players, of the MC and the Corruptor, can name an additional Danger not covered by the Action in use. This can allow the Corruptor to represent extra situational hazard or difficulty, and also allow the MC to risk or suffer harms or complications that the existing rules don't account for.

For example, the Corruptor exposes the MC to 'mysterious fumes', requiring the MC to Resist losing Inhibition. The player of the MC can add a Danger of "have to use their clothing as a face-mask", in addition to the Goal of retaining Inhibition, and the normal Danger of "a different avenue of degradation or alteration".

As another example, the MC ventures through a tangle of sticky vines, **Fending them Off**, with a Danger of decreasing Defiance. The player of the Corruptor can add an extra Danger of "creatures in the vines", which can afflict the MC even if the MC stays untangled and keeps their Defiance.

Stats

Actions mainly risk your Stats: Shame, Defiance, and Inhibition, which measure how far your character has fallen internally:

- **Shame** preserves your personhood, against the general degrading, dehumanizing, or otherwise corrupting influence of the forces against the MC. When the MC loses the last of their Shame, resignation takes over: no more shock at nudity, or indignation at insults, or insistence on 'normalcy'. "This is what I have to do."
- **Defiance** measures your resilience against coercion and force, against efforts to undermine your identity, and against any recognition of your attacker as superior. When the MC loses all Defiance, they no longer resist degradation or abuse. "Just don't hurt me?"
- **Inhibition** keeps you from descending into depravity and debauchery, when tempted with gratification or prompted to indulgence. When the MC loses their Inhibition, they pursue pleasure and ignore consequences. "I'll show you who's the slut!"

As a default, each of these Stats starts at 3. The Corruptor can explicitly target one of these Stats with an attack, a hazard or pitfall, or other narrated, in-character event. And similarly, the MC's Actions have Dangers that jeopardize these Stats.

As a Stat decreases, the MC should progressively display the effects in their actions, words, and thoughts, and similarly the Corruptor should describe the world and side-characters in a way that aligns with the MC's mental state. When a Stat reaches 0, the MC should reflect the final erosion of this facet of their psyche and self.

However, by default the MC can *keep playing*, and can still take Actions! An MC who has no more Shame may still have enough Defiance to resist being used as a sex toy, and an MC who has no Inhibition may still feel Shame at what they want to do, or what is done to them, even if they enjoy it.

Assembly Line best supports short and self-contained scenes of corruption or transformation, and for this, three mental Stats each with three ranks should provide a reasonable number of in-character beats before the MC can no longer endure the Corruptor's attacks. For longer arcs of degradation, six ranks per Stat gives a more fine-grained descent, but you may want to add the optional 'supplemental' Actions discussed later.

Countdowns

Where Stats measure the MC's descent into degradation in a general manner, losing their sense of self and ability to resist the Corruptor's attacks, Countdowns track specific forms of body alteration, mind control, conditioning, or other effects in store for the MC.

Similar to Stats, each Countdown should feature three ranks, for a short and self-contained scene. Each Countdown starts at 0, and when it reaches 3, the associated conditioning or change reveals its full effect on the MC, usually of a powerfully debilitating nature. Having three to four Countdowns will provide a good variety of ominous outcomes, and a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty. This is especially important for Countdowns leading to results that leave the MC unable to resist any further.

The players of the MC and the Corruptor should come up with these three to four Countdowns together, expressing the range of dire fates and degrading ends that appeal to them and for the MC to be trapped between. To give an example of a Countdown and its progression:

Oral Addict:

- 0: completely normal, with no fixation or compulsive thoughts.
- 1: if assaulted or accosted, the MC will opt to offer their mouth first.
- 2: the MC is thinking about giving oral if there's any ambiguity.
- 3: the MC looks for opportunities to give oral.

The MC may still feel Shame, Defiance, or Inhibition as they succumb to 'Oral Addict', but the Countdown bypasses their mental resistance Stats. When the Countdown finishes, even if the MC still has *all* of their Shame, Defiance, and Inhibition, they can't resist giving oral sex if they have the chance to.

As another example to illustrate physical changes, the following demonstrates progressive alteration of the MC's body in stages:

Alien Assimilation:
- 0: fully human, with no aberrant features or traits.
- 1: altered proportions and build, making some clothing fit poorly, but passable as human.
- 2: removed hair and shiny skin, changed features, visibly transforming.
- 3: elongated tongue and enlarged genitals, physically fully changed.

The third stage of any Countdown represents the specific corruption or alteration having fully run its course. But bear in mind, the MC may manage to stall or halt a Countdown before its completion, and conversely, a Countdown may finish its course with any 'final result' the players see fit. For instance, the 'Alien Assimilation' Countdown above may result in an MC who does not fully resemble one of the unspecified aliens, but instead something different from them, which the aliens may well have intended from the beginning.

Normally, loss of the MC's Stats is independent of any Countdown: losing Shame does not make the MC more of an 'Oral Addict' or further their 'Alien Assimilation'. However the MC may lose the last of a single Stat, and yet an Action will call for lowering that Stat further still, below zero.

For a specific example, if the MC has to **Fend Off** an advance or attack, they face a Danger of "decrease Defiance". If they have already lost all of their Defiance, then as written, this Danger would have no meaning.

You may plan beforehand what to do in such a scenario, according to the nature and inclinations of the Corruptor. But failing this, the Corruptor may either lower a different Stat, or choose to advance a Countdown, reflecting that the MC has not only suffered trauma already, but that the corruption or transformation bearing down on them has increased its pace.

Whether you plan in advance, or decide on the fly only when the event occurs, the player of the MC should *know* before rolling dice for an Action what Stat they may lose, or what Countdown will advance. The MC player might waive this right, but they should have the opportunity by default.

Example of play:

Alice is playing Melody, the MC, and Betty will play as the Corruptor. Together they choose a premise: Melody and her roommate Nora (an NPC) find a curious book in the university library, the 'Bimbonomicon'. Nora reads a passage, sexy apparitions manifest, and Melody's troubles begin!

Alice and Betty plan on a fairly short arc for Melody, with quick changes that aren't especially drastic, so Melody has the default Stats of: 3 Shame, 3 Defiance, 3 Inhibition.

Alice wants Melody to stay mentally aware and horrified at what happens to and around her; she doesn't care much about changes to Melody's body or physique; but she really likes the *aesthetic* of 'become a bimbo', wardrobe, jewelry, piercings, tattoos, and others' expectations and assumptions.

Betty and Alice come up with three Countdowns and give them three ranks apiece:

- **Appearance:** this defines Melody's look,
    - 0: Melody's normal casual attire
    - 1: wardrobe becomes skimpier and tends to malfunction
    - 2: bangles, high-heels, impractical earrings, and chokers with demeaning messages spontaneously appear
    - 3: piercings, degrading tattoos ('My Name Is Melody' on her exposed upper buttocks, 'Pearl Necklace Please' above her cleavage), garish permanent makeup
- **Expectation:** independent from her appearance, others will treat Melody according to,
    - 0: no special expectations or attitude, Melody is just like anyone else
    - 1: strangers make unprompted advances or proposals
    - 2: acquaintances make snide or suggestive remarks
    - 3: loved ones assume Melody just has, or is just about to have sex
- **Circumstance:** separate from others' treatment, fate conspires against Melody,
    - 0: relative normalcy in Melody's surroundings and things she interacts with
    - 1: cars, computers, phones, and other complex devices or equipment break down, as if she can't operate them
    - 2: lurid and suggestive toys, restraints, and other paraphernalia appear, convenient for those so inclined
    - 3: contrary to all reason, if Melody goes anywhere unfamiliar, she will encounter a sexual scenario

Alice sets the scene in Melody and Nora's dorm room. Melody has opened the Bimbonomicon and Nora has read a passage from it. Suddenly, eerie sexy specters materialize, calling to the two to descend into mindless lust, prompting Alice to try to escape. The best way for her to do this is to **Fend Off** the seductive specters, and try to leave through the door.

Alice rolls 2d6 and gets a 6 and a 2, which could let her reach the door and leave the dorm, but only at the cost of one point of Defiance! Alice thinks it's too early for Melody to lose her resistance to the advances she's soon to receive. So instead, Alice places the 2 into the Goal, failing to **Fend Off** the apparitions and leave through the door, and placing the 6 in the Danger and thus keeping her Defiance intact for now.

Betty informs Alice that there's still a way out of the spirit-haunted dorm room: Melody can **Resist** her natural fear of falling to climb out of the window and down a convenient but dubious raingutter. If she doesn't, the spirits will quickly siphon away a point of Inhibition, as they whisper, caress, and lick with ectoplasmic touches.

With Melody's precious Inhibition at stake, Alice rolls again, with a Goal of making it out of the window in time, and a Danger of "provoke a different avenue of degradation or alteration". She rolls a 3 and a 5, letting her either partly succeed with "greater in-character stakes, or another Action", and definitely no "different degradation or alteration"; *or else* she can definitely leave the window with her Inhibition intact and a lingering risk of some new form for her troubles to take.

Alice assigns the 5 to the Goal, and describes Melody slipping out of the window and grabbing desperately on the raingutter while Nora looks on, and she shimmies down--while Betty, ever the watchful Corruptor, describes what form this lingering Danger will take. As she clambers down the raingutter, her jeans snag on one of the bolts holding it in place, ripping up the seam and starting a fraying tear. Will any passers-by turn to see at just this moment?

Betty states this risks the start of Melody's Appearance Countdown. So far, it's only mundane damage to her normal jeans, but from here, if the Countdown advances, her clothing will quickly take on a mind of its own. The next Action that Alice rolls for will require *three* dice: one for the Goal, one for the normal Danger, and a third for this advancing Appearance Countdown. And indeed, the next Action may risk Melody's Appearance on its own as well, creating the potential to advance the Countdown *twice* from a single Action.

Betty's job as the Corruptor is to constantly confront Melody with increasingly fraught and sexual situations for her to resist, avoid, and ultimately fall to. Alice will describe what Melody does, and try (or 'try') to delay and defray the loss to Melody's Shame, Defiance, and Inhibition, and the mounting effects of her Appearance, Expectation, and Circumstance aligning to trap her in the life of a sexualized slut.

Other Alterations

Assembly Line provides a very minimal set of mechanics to use for a doomed struggle against corruption or transformation. In the event that even adding a 'missing' Action still doesn't suffice for your needs, especially for wider-ranging or longer-running arcs or stories, one or more of the following, more foundational changes may help.

Supplemental Actions

The standard Actions available to the MC serve best to represent a helpless captive, a test subject, the target of disembodied forces, or other victims of an implacable, inescapable Corruptor. But if such an emphasis on helplessness, victimhood, and inevitability feels too constrained, you can include one or more additional Actions to allow the MC to do something more than protest the inevitable.

- **Do Something Useful:** a generic Action to handle any tense or uncertain effort that may bring a cost or complication, but not specified by any other Action. This can mean fleeing a burning building, deceiving or persuading someone, mixing reagents into a compound, or any other task that would have an 'interesting' result *whether it succeeds or fails*, and which poses an interesting risk in making the attempt.
  - Danger: a cost, complication, or harm, as appropriate to the specific 'something' the MC does. *The Danger may not ever contradict a successful Goal.* Common choices might be to lose something, suffer injury, or attract unwanted attention.

This 'blank template' Action can work as a short-term substitute for a more specific Action, if you find you need the MC to do something unanticipated, and simple failure or success seems unsatisfying. Note that Actions exist not just to create unpredictable outcomes, but to give a sense of impartiality and legitimacy to those outcomes. Also note that the existing Actions all pose a *risk* independent of success or failure, which means that an MC even *trying* a task can cost them. Accordingly, only use Actions when both success *and* failure would prove interesting, and when the complications sound fun.

- **Hurry:** outrun a pursuer or chase down quarry, grab something quickly, or otherwise rely on speed for success.
  - Danger: lose or drop something, suffer an injury in haste, or find yourself stuck at the destination.

Given that **Hurrying** can abstractly cover any instance of "relying on speed for success", and not simply "moving your legs quickly", the Danger may sometimes be similarly abstract: one could lose 'the initiative', or grab an object only to have one's hand trapped around it.

- **Attack:** use violence, threats, intimidation, or other force to harm or coerce others or to destroy things to accomplish your goals.
  - Danger: suffer harm or injury, cause unintended damage, attract unwanted attention.

While an MC notionally has very little power to oppose the Corruptor, some corruption or transformation arcs may still feature some prospect of violence or force, or at least allow for an MC to use violence despite its futility.

- **Persuade:** when you use wits, charm, lies, or bribery to get what you want. The Goal is to entice someone else into believing or doing something they normally wouldn't.
  - Danger: they may demand a bribe or payment, or they may react differently to your persuasion from what you expect.

Normally **Gratify** should at least approximately suffice, for simple and desperate efforts to sway an adverse character. **Persuade** is more nuanced and broad-ranging.

If you choose to include any of these supplemental Actions, or Actions you create inspired by these, then they work exactly like the normal Actions by default: roll two six-sided dice, and both players can name additional Dangers not usually featured in the Action.

GM Points

The role of Corruptor is usually decided in advance of play, and assigned to a single player. With GM Points, players can *alternate* narrating events as the Corruptor, with enduring such events as MCs.

First, choose a Corruptor and MC, as normal, and start each player with zero GM Points. The Corruptor describes scenery, side-characters, and events, and the MC player rolls for Actions as normal. Every time the MC player assigns a 1-2 die to the Goal or a Danger of an Action, they gain a GM Point. At five GM Points, the MC should conclude their scene, set their GM Points to zero, and the MC player should take over as the Corruptor, and narrate for the other player's MC.

Both players have and use their MC characters, and the current Corruptor can even have their own MC take Actions within scenes, but the Corruptor must roll for these Actions as normal, and will gain GM Points as normal. This expressly will shorten the time that the current Corruptor's MC can spend being victimized during their next turn as the MC.

The current MC can *remove* one GM Point per scene, if they take up narration duties opposing the other player's MC, giving her a chance to squirm and struggle. As an example of use:

Alice and Betty both start with zero GM Points, and Betty is the Corruptor. Betty narrates the events resulting from the Curse of the Bimbonomicon, and Alice (playing Melody) takes Actions within the story. Betty plays Nora, mostly as a side-character. But as Alice gains GM Points from Melody's Actions, she decides to narrate a cursed effect of the Bimbonomicon falling on Nora (Betty's MC).

Alice removes one GM Point, meaning that Betty narrates longer in the role of Corruptor. If Nora's Action rolls a 1-2 in the Goal or Danger, Betty will earn a GM Point, even during her turn as the Corruptor, which will shorten Alice's turn as Corruptor.

A limit of five GM Points before changing roles should suit for a fairly fast but reasonable pace of alternation, intended for scenarios in which both players' MCs will appear in the same scenes and work together (or against each other), against the same in-story corrupting influence. A larger limit will allow longer scenes, better suited for MCs who seldom or never meet, while a faster pace of alteration would support MCs trapped in the same encounters, with the players merely alternating which MC to *primarily* focus on.

Detailed Twists, Challenges, and Countdowns

These three mechanics provide much more detail, tone, and progression for more specific kinds of alteration, degradation, or transformation. Where the standard Assembly Line Countdowns suit short, self-contained corruption as a foregone conclusion, these systems assume that *some* change is inevitable, but only through a steady variety of different transformative threats. Due to that variety, the wording will assume you'll also use one or more of the Supplemental Actions earlier, providing sufficient diversity of Actions to interact mechanically.

Twists

At heart, a Twist is just a Danger on an Action. What makes it a Twist is the fact that normally, the MC would never need to deal with it as a Danger, and now they do--possibly all the time. Twists fall into three broad categories, but they all work the same. The categories depend on "how bad an effect does it have" and "how often does it happen".

Minor Twists

A minor Twist only applies to a single Action, or can affect any Action but only under some narrow circumstances. It would have to have drastic effect before such a rare hindrance could be anything but 'minor'.

Examples:
- When you **Fend Off** in the Pollinated Steam Grove, your faster breath gets you drugged by the pollen.
- When you **Attack** with a Haunted Sword, it's devastating, but you want to keep cutting.
- When you **Endure** while wearing the Dark Sorceress' armor, the messages to submit ring in your mind.

When to use: minor Twists reflect locational, circumstantial, or other situational risks or hazards as Dangers. Using risky artifacts or drugs, coping with environmental threats, or the beginning stages of some corrupting influence, all work well with a Twist that adds some special Danger onto a normal Action until the condition no longer applies.

Moderate Twists

A moderate Twist affects several Actions (like physically involved things like **Hurry** and **Fend Off**, or mentally involved like **Resist**), or the Twist comes up infrequently but has a very harsh effect. When it starts affecting a lot of Actions, or has a devastating effect when it happens, it's no longer just moderate.

Examples:
- When you do anything but **Hurry** or **Fend Off** in the slugsnake mating nest, a slugsnake can snare you.
- When you **Persuade** while wearing a Hospital collar, you instinctively want to offer your body to your **Persuade**-ee.
- When you **Research** in the Holy Ruins, the dormant guardians can wake up and begin indoctrinating you immediately.

When to use: moderate Twists serve best for serious antagonists or resistance, effects from direct attacks designed to have such effect, or sunk-in and established corruptive effects. Usually a moderate Twist reflects "this is why this was a bad idea", or else "this is exactly why we have to fix this". Anything that follows a character around and imposes a moderate Twist is probably a priority for them to **Hurry**, **Research**, or just **Persuade** their way into fixing it . . . unless they start to like it.

Major Twists

Major Twists affect almost every Action with something minor but troublesome, or else affect several Actions with a very serious risk. A character dealing with a major Twist has probably either entirely fallen under hostile control (such as captivity or brainwashing), or soon on their way to being so (such as a parasite infestation or curse).

Examples:
- In the Dread Warlord's camp, any Action risks getting used by a soldier for her quick gratification.
- While wearing a Hive mask, doing anything but **Resist** risks fixating you on the Hive's instincts until you can free yourself.
- In the last stages of the infestation, **Hurrying**, **Attacking**, or **Enduring** all risk tendrils emerging from you to lash you in place as an incubator.

When to use: major Twists work best at the end of the line, or, if your character can somehow turn it all around, the gripping climax to this arc of their story. In principle, an MC can carry on under the burden of a major Twist, but as you can see, it won't come easily. Have a new character in mind to play.

Twists as Injury

If you like playing rough, then ordinary injuries and sickness essentially constitute a Twist. Sprains, burns, fevers, can all work as minor Twists, if you could sleep it off or take a medicine for it. Maimed limbs, poisoning, or effects that will readily worsen if you don't keep them managed, make for decent moderate Twists. Punctures to vital organs, deadly toxins, or anything that you should treat with a tourniquet or gas mask just to stay alive, would be major Twists.

Challenges

While Twists represent some external factor simply hindering your normal Actions, a Challenge is a normal Action--except it covers doing something that should be automatic. Challenges are more nebulous than Twists in the sense that they don't so neatly sort by severity. However, all Challenges represent taking away something normal your character could do easily, and making it risky and uncertain.

Examples:
- Whenever you're alone with someone, you have to **Resist** to avoid infecting them with the infestation.
- When you encounter any stranger, you have to **Persuade** them that the Dark Sorceress' brand you wear is harmless and you're not one of her spies. (Even if you really aren't.)
- When hobbled in the Dungeon, even staying on your feet or moving around constitutes a **Hurry** or **Endure**.
- After attending the Professor's 'lectures', you have to **Persuade** yourself that the emotions you feel aren't from your newly-studied philosophy.
- After being broken in by the Dread Warlord, even asking a close friend to do something for you is **Attacking** as far as your mind is concerned--especially the risk of injury.

When to use: Challenges generally result from some drastic or traumatic change or prolonged abuse or conditioning. In essence, something has crippled your character mentally or physically, compared to their normal abilities. And like with Twists, this can also represent mundane injury, such as having to **Hurry** in order to even crawl if you've lost a leg, or having to **Endure** against blood loss or pain.

In general, a Challenge can help you keep playing your character after what you might consider a Bad End, in which a story might normally leave your poor protagonist to their fate. Instead, by continuing to play your character, Challenges let you reflect why a story might fade to black, and also show off just why you *won't*. Whether your character finds a way to undo the damage, or simply finds a way to survive it, make sure both players enjoy the story!

Countdowns

The sample Countdowns provided above give a template for simple, straightforward, and especially *fast* alterations or changes. If you want wider-ranging, more diverse situations for your MCs, you might need more structure to govern their degeneration, submission, or assimilation. The following gives more detailed construction for Countdowns, as a good way to model gradual, progressive, or other postponed or deferred consequences to immediate events, to pace out changes over plural sessions of play.

Detailed Countdowns all have the same basic structure:
- The 'type' of tick: winning rounds, buying time, or ironclad deadline
- How many ticks in total
- How much 'time' each tick represents
- What happens on each tick that passes
- What finally happens after the last tick

Type: a Countdown can have three basic 'end conditions':

- Rounds you can win: each tick of the Countdown prompts an Action. Successful Actions add toward a good end for whatever the Countdown represents, while failed Actions lead to some unfavorable outcome. Generally 'winning' a majority of these rounds should suffice, but you should still play the Countdown out to its conclusion, even if you've succeeded (or failed) at a majority of the ticks' Actions.
- Buying time: for an open-ended or variable condition, each tick of the Countdown prompts some Action, with success postponing the end of the Countdown, and failure usually prompting some worsening or degeneration of the condition. This suits well for corruption one can fight against, but which one can't reverse easily. By buying time, an MC could pursue some cure or reversal.
- Ironclad deadline: reserved for truly fateful conditions, the ticks of an ironclad deadline Countdown do not offer any reprieve, but instead serve for the MC to barely keep hold of themselves as the condition progresses. Counterintuitively, this also works well for recovery from an injury, whenever recuperation is assured but the process might be interesting to play out.

Number: a Countdown has some definite number of ticks, phases of its progression, after which the Countdown concludes. Consider the number of distinct phases or milestones that an MC's condition would present if left unchecked, and give an according number of ticks. Usually, six works well to start from, for longer or more diverse stories.

Time: the amount of in-story time between ticks has enormous effect on the progression and feel of a Countdown. The shortest you could sensibly use is "each Action provokes a tick", for something covering mere minutes or an hour. Still extremely fast, "a tick happens after each scene" might represent a condition covering one night or a few days. More likely, you'll find use for "each in-story day" (or several days). You can also tie ticks to events, such as touching an artifact, encountering a cursed person, or even failing to **Persuade**, with each such (likely recurring) event provoking a tick on the Countdown.

Action: each tick of a Countdown provokes some kind of Action. Bracing against mental corruption or Enduring against physical changes make for good defaults, which cover most obvious or likely conditions for which you'd use a Countdown. However, you could use **Persuade** to represent a struggle against maddening, whispering spirits, or you might **Attack** your shadow as it slips the bonds of your feet each sunset. Any sort of Action can work, but decide what Action at the outset.

Outcome: every Countdown ends eventually. Define what happens after that if left unchecked. It might be "transformation into a creature", or "mindless servitude", or "hatch abominable spawn", or even "receive divine enlightenment". After the MC has done an Action for each elapsed tick, narrate this outcome, especially if, like with 'winning rounds', the outcome would potentially vary.

Example Corruption

As a new and more detailed example, Alice and Betty want to explore the corruption of Ardella, a virtuous priestess, and Belial, a sassy adventuress. In the course of the story, Belial discovers she has demonic heritage, which is awakened in a profane rite she and Ardella only barely interrupted. Now, to explore and track this corruption, Alice and Betty decide on two Countdowns to represent both her growing demonic nature, and her control over it. They want to make this a long-term arc of Belial's character, to see how she changes, as well as into what.

Belial's Corruption:
- The type is 'buying time': every tick, Belial can **Resist** with Ardella on stalling the descent with prayer.
- Belial has six ticks to start, but since she can buy time, this may give quite a lot of time.
- The Countdown progresses whenever Belial engages with a demon and fails an Action against that demon (but only once per such scene).
- On each tick, Belial feels her body flush with feverish heat, her head pounds with growing horns, and her rump twinges with a sprouting tail--though a successful **Endure** can keep these traits from setting permanently.
- If Belial cannot purge her demonic corruption, she will fully become a demon in body, and will crave corruption and defilement in her soul.

Belial's Control:
- The type is 'winnable rounds': every tick, Belial can take any Action that preserves her sense of self and control in the moment.
- Belial has nine ticks, independent of her 'corruption' Countdown, but assumed to line up with its conclusion.
- The 'control' Countdown progresses each time the 'corruption' Countdown triggers, regardless of whether Belial succeeds or fails at postponing her descent into demonhood.
- On each tick, Belial feels a deep, pervasive desire to sink into sexual abandon.
- Failure at each 'control' Action causes Belial to devolve into a servile succubus, while success develops her into a more independent demon.

Combining these Countdowns, each time Belial confronts a demonic force or entity, she has to approach cautiously: if she makes an Action of any sort against the demon and places a 1-2 result into the Goal, she advances her 'corruption' Countdown, which also provokes her 'control' Countdown.

After the scene with the demon, Belial can **Resist** with prayer to stall her transformation, and can fight the temptation to become a servile succubus with any successful Action that reaffirms her sense of self-determination. Betty can play these scenes out after resolving the scene with the demon, which provoked both Countdown events, for easier narration and focus.

Belial's demonic transformation from the 'corruption' Countdown has potentially indefinite time before it completes, but if she doesn't stop or reverse the transformation, she has six failed Actions total, before the process completes. For the 'control' Countdown, Belial has nine incidents total, which may elapse before or after the 'corruption' Countdown concludes. If the 'control' Countdown outlasts the 'corruption', Belial will still resolve her tics in the same fashion, after failing any Action against a demonic entity or force.

As Belial's Countdowns advance, she will take on more and more visible demonic and infernal features, as her 'corruption' proceeds; she can stall the process, but must pursue a plan to halt or reverse it completely. She will also feel more and more demonic impulses and desires: failing at Actions will make her more docile and fixated exclusively on sex, while success will at least allow her to channel her demonic development into wrath, or manipulation, or greed instead.

Alice and Betty decide on the best way to reflect these changes, should Belial succumb to her corruption or fail to control herself: first, for the 'corruption', a Twist when **Persuading**, a pervasive demonic aura that others can sense; if the 'corruption' completes fully, a Challenge to hide her demonic nature when interacting with mortals.

Secondly, a Twist for every three Actions on which Belial fails when trying to fight her 'control' Countdown, representing a desire and need to let her awareness slip away. If she instead has any three Actions of the same type succeed (eg **Attack**), the Twist reflects a different demonic impulse (such as rage or cruelty, for **Attacking** to keep her sense of self).

Using these two Countdowns within the above framework, Alice and Betty can watch with real suspense and anticipation, as Ardella and Belial struggle against sexy evil, and perhaps ultimately join it.