

This document expands upon the implementation of Characters Systems as presented in the Frontiers Overview.

It also offers a few Variants and Alternatives for those who want a different version or different resolution system entirely.

Like the core Release document for this version of Frontiers, this Expansion is modular by design. Designers may adopt, modify, restructure, or discard sections as needed to serve their intended genre, tone, and balance goals.

What a Character Is

Every Character in Frontiers is constructed from three foundational elements:

1. **Origin** — your fundamental nature
2. **Background** — your formative experience
3. **Archetype** — your path of growth

These are not cosmetic labels.

Each is intended to provide mechanical value and narrative grounding, and each serves a different design purpose:

- Origin establishes what the character is at baseline.
- Background establishes what the character did before play began.
- Archetype establishes what the character actively becomes through progression.

A system built on Frontiers may rename these layers, merge them, or split them further, but the engine's default intent is that characters have: (1) identity foundation, (2) lived history, and (3) a progression vector.

Origin

Origin represents what you fundamentally are.

It describes inherent nature, biological, cultural, constructed, mystical, or existential.

Origin answers questions such as:

- What is your physical or metaphysical form?
- Where do you come from?
- What innate traits shape you?

Origin is intentionally broad. It is meant to carry high narrative weight while staying mechanically lightweight and consistent across many genres.

Origin may represent:

- Species or lineage
- Region or culture of birth
- Magical source or mutation
- Artificial construction
- Planar origin
- Societal caste or engineered purpose

What Origin Typically Provides

Origin typically provides:

- **Base + Health Pool contribution (often ranging from 1-10)**
- Minor Attribute influence (optional, system-defined)
- **Innate** Abilities, traits, or features (optional, system-defined)
- Thematic narrative grounding

Origin does not scale by default. If an Origin scales, the system must explicitly define how.

Origin Design Guidance (Default Intent)

When designing Origins for a system:

- Keep Origins broad enough that players can express personal variation inside them.
- Avoid making Origins “mandatory builds” through large numeric bonuses.
- Prefer small, identity-defining traits over long lists of mechanical perks.
- Treat Origin as “baseline physiology / metaphysics” rather than “training.”

Good Origin design creates character identity without replacing Background or Archetype.

Practical guidelines:

- If an Origin grants an Ability, it should usually be simple, always-on, or low complexity.
- If an Origin modifies Attributes, keep it small and consistent (or treat it as an optional system dial).
- If an Origin grants Competencies, justify it as an innate or cultural baseline, not professional training.

Background

Background represents lived experience before the story begins.

It reflects training, hardship, profession, social role, and formative events.

Background answers questions such as:

- What did you practice?
- What shaped your worldview?
- What skills did you develop before becoming extraordinary?

Background may represent:

- Former professions (soldier, artisan, courier)
- Social positions (noble, exile, revolutionary)
- Academic or mystical study
- Survivor histories
- Criminal or underground experience

What Background Typically Provides

Background typically provides:

- **Base + Health Pool contribution (often ranging from 1-10)**
- Starting Skills
- Equipment familiarity or Competencies
- Narrative leverage within specific contexts

Background does not scale by default. If a system wants Background to remain relevant long-term, it should do so through narrative leverage or small persistent hooks, not large scaling bonuses.

Background Design Guidance (Default Intent)

When designing Backgrounds for a system:

- Background should express what the character did repeatedly enough to be trained.
- Background is the most natural place to grant Skills and Competencies.
- Background should create gameplay texture: contacts, obligations, reputations, situational leverage.

Practical guidelines:

- If a Background grants Skills, they should reflect repeatable expertise (not one-off experiences).

- If a Background grants Competencies, they should reflect operational familiarity (weapons, armor, tools, systems).
- Background is a good place to define “starting kit” or starting access to gear, if the system wants that.

Background should not replace Archetype. Background makes you competent; Archetype makes you extraordinary.

Archetype

Archetype defines what the character actively becomes.

It governs progression, specialization, and access to extraordinary capability.

In other systems these are most similar to “Classes.”

Archetype answers questions such as:

- What role do you fill now?
- What defines your method of impact?
- How do you grow stronger?

Archetype most often determines:

- **Base + Health Pool scaling (read Vigor)**
- **Access to Abilities**
- Resource growth (≠Energy, etc.)
- Combat or narrative specialization
- Scaling features across levels

Each Archetype is intended to contain **10 levels**.

At every Archetype Level, the character should gain a meaningful benefit or improvement to their gameplay (for example: Abilities, Competencies, Skills, scaling features).

Archetype Design Guidance (Default Intent)

Archetypes are the engine’s primary long-term differentiation tool.

When designing Archetypes:

- Ensure each Level grants something that matters in play.
- Avoid “dead levels” unless the system is intentionally slow-growth.
- Make sure Abilities are distributed in a way that creates a clear identity early, then deepens it.

Practical guidelines:

- Early levels define the core loop of the Archetype.
- Mid levels expand tactical breadth or reliability.
- High levels introduce rule-bending, survivability shifts, or strong specialization.

Archetype should be the main source of high-impact Abilities.

Frontiers uses **Level-based progression**.

By default:

- Each Archetype contains 10 levels
- Characters may combine Archetypes or extend beyond 10 based on system design
- A soft cap of 20 total levels is recommended

Level advancement should feel significant. Characters should not gain all progression benefits at once.

Frontiers supports structured milestone progression through **Vector Advancement**.

Vector Advancement

Characters progress through **Vector Marks**, representing focused growth decisions.

Upon gaining 3 Vector Marks, the character advances one Level.

A Vector Mark cannot be selected more than once per Level.

Vector Marks (Default Set)

- **Attribute Mark**
Increase two different Attributes by 1 (respecting Attribute caps).
- **Skill Mark**
Gain one additional Skill.
- **Ability Mark**
Gain one new Ability with Level $\leq$ (Provider Level + 2).
“Provider Level” is the Level granted by the source providing the Ability (typically an Archetype Level).
- **Energy Mark**
Increase maximum $\nearrow$ Energy by 1.

- **Additional Mark**

Gain a system-specific mechanical benefit decided by System Designers.

Vector Marks are modular. Systems may add, remove, or redefine Mark types to fit genre, lethality, or pacing.

Multi-Archetype Progression

A Character may take Levels in multiple Archetypes.

When advancing:

- Select which Archetype receives the new Level.
- Gain benefits of that Archetype Level only.
- Total Character Level increases regardless of distribution.

Total Character Level is used for engine-wide comparisons such as:

- Equipment Level interaction (above-Level equipped items reduce maximum $\nearrow$ Energy)
- Any system rules that reference “your Level” generically

Archetype Level is used to determine:

- Which features you gain from that Archetype
- Which Ability lists or tiers you have access to through that Archetype

Systems may impose restrictions on multi-archetype progression, but the engine default is permissive.

Starting Values (Default Recommendation)

At Level 1, characters typically begin with:

- **10 Attribute Points**
- **3 $\nearrow$ Energy**
- **3 Skills**
- **2 Abilities of Level 3 or lower**

Systems may modify these values or their restrictions to match tone, lethality, balance goals, or genre expectations.

These values are a reference baseline, not a mandate.

This procedure is recommended but not required. It demonstrates intended structural logic and helps designers communicate a clean creation path to players.

Step 1 — Establish Concept

Define:

- Core identity
- Intended playstyle
- Narrative tone

Concept precedes mechanics.

Step 2 — Choose Origin

Select or define Origin.

Apply:

- Base ☒Health Pool contribution
- Any innate traits or features (if used by the system)
- Any Attribute influence (if used by the system)

Step 3 — Choose Background

Select or define Background.

Apply:

- Base ☒Health Pool contribution
- Starting Skills
- Starting Competencies
- Any starting narrative leverage hooks (if the system uses them)

Step 4 — Assign Attributes

Distribute starting Attribute Points per system baseline.

Attributes exist on a 0–10 scale.

After assignment:

- Calculate Attribute Modifiers.
- Recalculate Derivatives immediately.

Step 5 — Choose Archetype

Select starting Archetype and gain Level 1 benefits.

If starting Abilities are granted:

- Select Abilities within the allowed Level range for Level 1 characters.

Step 6 — Finalize Core Resources

Calculate or confirm:

- $\oplus$ HP (including Origin/Background contributions and Vigor rules)
- $\nearrow$ Energy maximum
- Defense values and other Derivatives
- Carrying Capacity
- Any Archetype-defined additional resources

Step 7 — Advancement Procedure

When a character gains enough Vector Marks to Level:

1. Increase total Character Level by 1.
2. Choose which Archetype receives the new Level.
3. Gain that Archetype Level's features.
4. Reassess any Vector Mark choices earned along the way (if the system grants Marks independently of Level-up moment).
5. Recalculate affected Derivatives (Attributes only if the change is permanent).
6. Recalculate maximum $\nearrow$ Energy reduction from equipped items, if applicable.

Leveling does not automatically restore $\nearrow$ Energy unless a system explicitly defines restoration on Level-up.

The following rulings clarify ambiguous interactions in Character construction and advancement. These apply unless explicitly overridden by a system built on Frontiers.

1. Attribute Marks and Attribute Caps

If an Attribute Mark would increase an Attribute beyond the system's defined cap (default 10):

- The increase cannot exceed the cap.
- The second Attribute increase must still be applied to a different Attribute.
- If no legal Attribute exists, the Mark cannot be selected.

Attribute increases apply immediately and trigger immediate Derivative recalculation.

2. Derivative Recalculation on Level-Up

When a character Levels up:

- Recalculate any Derivatives affected by permanent Attribute changes.
- Recalculate maximum $\nearrow$ Energy if Energy Marks were selected.
- Recalculate Equipment Level interaction if total Character Level changed.

Temporary Attribute penalties do not trigger retroactive recalculation of permanent Derivatives (per Attributes & Derivatives rules).

3. Multi-Archetype Ability Legality

If a character gains an Ability through an Ability Mark:

- The Ability's Level must be $\leq$ (Provider Level + 2).
- Provider Level refers to the Level in the Archetype granting access to that Ability list.

Total Character Level does not override Provider restrictions.

If Archetype access is lost (system-defined), legality must be re-evaluated.

4. Level Decrease (System-Defined Events)

If a system effect reduces a Character's Level:

- Remove the most recently gained Archetype Level.
- Remove any features granted at that Level.
- Recalculate total Character Level.
- Recalculate Equipment Level interaction.
- Do not retroactively remove previously selected Vector Marks unless the system explicitly defines that behavior.

Level reduction must clearly specify whether it affects: - Total Level - Archetype Level - Or temporary access

5. Energy Mark Timing

If an Energy Mark increases maximum $\nearrow$ Energy:

- The maximum increases immediately.
- Current $\nearrow$ Energy does not automatically increase unless the system defines it.

If a Level-up removes a maximum $\nearrow$ Energy penalty (from Equipment): - Maximum increases immediately. - Current Energy remains unchanged.

6. Reassigning or Replacing Archetype

If a system allows retraining or Archetype replacement:

- Remove all benefits granted by the replaced Archetype Levels.
- Recalculate Derivatives.
- Re-evaluate Ability legality.
- Re-evaluate Equipment Level interaction.

Frontiers does not define retraining rules by default.

Variants adjust how Characters grow or are structured while preserving the core triad:

Origin + Background + Archetype.

Milestone Advancement Variant

Replace Vector Marks with pure milestone leveling.

Characters gain a Level when:

- A major narrative goal is completed.
- A system-defined milestone is reached.

Vector Marks are removed.

Level-up benefits are granted immediately.

Impact: - Simplifies tracking. - Reduces granular build decisions. - Increases narrative pacing control.

Energy, Equipment interaction, and Ability legality remain unchanged.

Expanded Mark Economy Variant

Increase Marks required per Level from 3 to 4 or 5.

Alternatively:

- Grant minor benefits at each Mark.
- Grant major Level benefit at final Mark.

Impact: - Slows progression. - Encourages incremental growth. - Makes build identity more gradual.

Requires pacing recalibration.

Attribute-Light Variant

Reduce Attribute Marks to:

- Increase only one Attribute per Mark.
- Or require two Marks to increase one Attribute.

Impact: - Slows raw numeric scaling. - Emphasizes Abilities over stats. - Reduces derivative inflation at high Levels.

Single-Archetype Lock Variant

Characters may not multi-archetype.

All Levels must be taken in the starting Archetype.

Impact: - Stronger thematic identity. - Cleaner scaling math. - Reduces build complexity.

Recommended for highly focused genre systems.

Background Scaling Variant

Allow Background to scale at specific Level thresholds.

Example: - At Levels 5 and 10, Background grants additional Skill or narrative benefit.

Impact: - Keeps early identity relevant. - Encourages story continuity. - Must be kept mechanically modest to avoid overshadowing Archetype.

Alternatives substantially reframe Character structure.

Adopting these requires recalibration of Ability access, Energy, and progression pacing.

No Archetype Alternative

Remove Archetypes entirely.

Characters progress through:

- Attribute increases
- Ability acquisition
- Skill acquisition

Abilities are purchased or unlocked independently of class structure.

Impact: - Fully open build freedom. - Requires strong Ability balance framework. - Removes structured role identity.

Energy interaction must be recalibrated.

Two-Layer Alternative (Origin + Path)

Merge Background and Archetype into a single scaling Path.

Character structure becomes:

- Origin (foundation)
- Path (progression)

Path provides both starting training and scaling Abilities.

Impact: - Simplifies identity layers. - Reduces redundancy. - Works well in tightly themed systems.

Requires rewriting Mark distribution.

Skill-Driven Alternative

Replace Archetype scaling with Skill-based advancement.

Characters Level by:

- Increasing Skills
- Unlocking Skill thresholds
- Gaining Abilities tied to Skill ranks

Impact: - Emphasizes training over class identity. - Removes class rigidity. - Requires full recalibration of Ability access rules.

Narrative Role Alternative

Remove numeric Level entirely.

Characters advance by:

- Unlocking narrative permissions.
- Gaining role-based authority.
- Expanding story impact.

Attributes and Abilities may remain static or grow minimally.

Impact: - Strong narrative focus. - Minimal numeric escalation. - Requires full system pacing redesign.

Origin-Dominant Alternative

Make Origin the primary scaling component.

Background becomes flavor. Archetype becomes optional.

Origin provides:

- Tiered traits
- Evolution stages
- Transformation milestones

Impact: - Works well in species-evolution or transformation genres. - Shifts identity from profession to nature. - Requires significant Ability redistribution.