

Scholars & Swashbucklers

by Daniel Bazinga

Introduction

Scholars and Swashbucklers is designed to be played during the late renaissance around the turn of the 17th century. It is inspired the pulp adventures of Dark Agnes and Solomon Kane by Robert E. Howard.

This game uses d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20 and d%. If you are told to increase or decrease a die, do so in that order. Low rolls are better. Only the lowest roll is ever counted, except when rolling for damage.

Setting

Good King Henri IV rules in France. Constantly, religious fanatics conspire to take his life for promoting religious tolerance. Bandits roam the countryside and pirates the Mediterranean and Channel. Powerful plots are brewing in the courts of France as nobles bid for the favor of the Habsburg rulers or Spain and the Holy Roman Empire.

Stamina and Dice

STAMINA represents how fit and healthy a character is. Your stamina is the number of dice you get to roll each turn. When your character takes damage they lose STAMINA, reducing the number of dice you get to roll.

If something costs half your dice, you round the cost down.

If something costs a die, that means you have to discard that die and don't get to roll it that turn. So if something costs one die, that means you have to spend at least two dice but you only get to roll one.

When rolling multiple dice, only count the lowest roll.

Grit

GRIT is how serious damage has to be before it wounds you. It is calculated using the following chart. If you take any damage to TOUGHNESS, be sure to increase your Grit.

| TOUGHNESS | GRIT |
|-----------|------|
| d4 | 1 |
| d6 | 2 |
| d8 | 3 |
| d10 | 4 |
| d12 | 5 |
| d20 | 6 |
| d% | 6 |

Skills

Skills show how good your character is at certain things. They are

represented by a die size. The lower the die size, the better. To succeed at something reasonably challenging, you need to roll 5 or under. To succeed at something pretty difficult, you need to roll 3 or under. To succeed at something almost impossible, you need to roll a 1.

COMBAT

Fighting, Shooting, Grappling etc.

CUNNING

Stealth, Perception, Survival, Ropework, Sleight-of-Hand, Climbing, Dodging, Jumping etc.

INFLUENCE

Persuading, Lying, Disguising, Commanding etc.

MEDICINE

Healing, Forensics, Identifying plants and animals etc.

SCHOLARSHIP

Knowledge, Navigation, History, Legend, Arcana, Reading etc.

TOUGHNESS

Lifting, Pulling, Shoving, Breaking, Athletics, Damaging etc.

TECH

Disabling traps, Lock-picking, Repairing, Crafting etc.

VEHICLES

Riding, Driving, Flying, Carting, Sailing, Cannoning etc.

Movement

All characters are assumed to be jogging during combat and walking out of combat.

Jogging will carry you one Distance and costs half your dice for that turn, rounding down. Sprinting carries you two Distances and costs all your dice for that turn.

Distance

The only part of the battle that really matters is the part where the characters are. Distances are relative to your character. The distances are:

Engaged – you can attack the enemy with a melee weapon.

Assault range – you will have to jog to engage the enemy, or you can attack them with an assault weapon or a polearm.

Missile range – you will have to sprint to engage the enemy next turn, or you can attack them with a missile weapon.

Long range – you might be able to hit with a missile weapon.

Extreme range – you just might hit with a missile weapon if you're skilled enough.

Out of range – there is no way to attack this enemy. You will have to

jog to get to extreme range with them or sprint to get into long range.

Weapon Range

Melee weapons can only be used when engaged.

Polearms can be used at assault range or when engaged.

Assault weapons can be used at assault range without penalty. They can also be used while at missile range or when engaged, but doing so costs one die. They cannot be used at long range or beyond.

Missile weapons can be used at missile range without penalty. Each range closer or further away costs one die to use, so long range and assault range cost one die but engaged and extreme range cost two dice. They cannot be used when out of range.

Order of Battle

Battle is messy business. There is no set order in which characters and enemies act. Instead, the GM should decide the order of battle based on what flows best. It is a good idea to let a player spend some of their stamina dice, then come back to them later. Keep going round the table until everyone is out of dice.

The Element of Surprise

If one group ambushes the other, then the other characters are surprised. Any characters who are surprised lose half their dice for the first turn, rounding down.

Attacking

You can put as many dice as you want (equal to your stamina) into one attack or you can divide them among multiple opponents. Roll your dice, and if any rolls are equal to or under 5, you hit. Unless...

Defence

If you've just been hit by an attack, you can spend dice to defend yourself by parrying, blocking, dodging etc.—as many dice as you want. You need to roll equal to or lower than your opponent's lowest roll to block the attack. For melee and polearm attacks, you roll your COMBAT die type. For ranged attacks, you roll the die type of the nearest cover you can dive behind. If there is no cover close by, you can still drop prone. You can't spend dice on movement to reach cover during an attack. (See *Cover* at the end of p. 2)

Damage

Once you've gotten through your enemy's defences, you roll your

weapon's damage dice. If you rolled 3 or less, multiply the number of dice by two. If you rolled a 1, multiply the number of dice by three. These are called critical hits. If you're using a melee weapon or polearm you also get to roll one TOUGHNESS die. If you are attacking unarmed, apply critical hits to your TOUGHNESS die instead.

Armor

Armour reduces the number of damage dice you get to roll by the amount listed. If you still have dice left, roll them. Otherwise, you'll just have to hope you can power through with TOUGHNESS alone. Of course, if you didn't have a weapon to start with, then all you get is your TOUGHNESS die—but armour can still block any extra TOUGHNESS die you got from a critical hit.

Wearing heavy armour will increase your COMBAT die—called a Combat Penalty—while wearing a buckler will decrease it. Steel helmets are almost universally worn, with or without armour.

Wounds

Every damage die (including TOUGHNESS) roll equal to or lower than the opponent's GRIT reduces the opponent's stamina by one point. An opponent who runs out of stamina is incapacitated and can't do anything until they are healed.

Grappling

Grappling is just like making an unarmed attack, except armour isn't applied. Damage is dealt normally, but instead of reducing STAMINA, each wound increases COMBAT by one die. When a character's COMBAT reaches D%, you've pinned them and can now tie them up using the CUNNING skill.

You can leave a grapple by succeeding at a grapple attack with enough dice left to move out of engagement. COMBAT resets to its original value when you leave the grapple.

Death and Healing

Once a battle is over, any incapacitated characters must roll their TOUGHNESS. On a 1, they regain one STAMINA. On a 2 or 3, they are stable but cannot move. On a 5 or 6 they are stable, but they either need to roll again in one minute or someone needs to roll a 5 or less on a MEDICINE check to stabilise them properly. On a 6 or more they are dying.

To save a dying character, someone must roll 5 or less on a MEDICINE roll—the character is then stable. Only one person gets to do this, and if they fail the character dies.

To heal a character, one person can make a Medicine roll once the character is stable. They gain one STAMINA on a 5 or less, two STAMINA on a 3 or less, and three STAMINA on a 1.

At the end of an adventure, if characters have time to rest, they regain all their Stamina.

Chance and Marks

A MARK can be anything you want it to be, as long as the GM agrees. It describes something interesting about your character. To gain CHANCE, use your MARK to make things complicated for your character—if the GM likes it, they'll give you a CHANCE. Once you have some CHANCE, you can spend one CHANCE per action to use a MARK to your advantage. If the GM agrees it's relevant, you get to add another die to the roll.

Weapons

| WEAPON | DAMAGE |
|------------|--------|
| Melee | |
| Dagger | 2d12 |
| Shortsword | 2d10 |
| Rapier | 3d10 |
| Saber | 2d8 |
| Mace | 4d12 |
| Reach | |
| Halberd | 4d10 |
| Zweihander | 3d8 |
| Pike | 4d12 |
| Assault | |
| Pistol | 4d10 |
| Grenade | 5d6 |
| Missile | |
| Musket | 5d8 |
| Crossbow | 3d10 |

Reloading

Pistols, Muskets and Crossbows need to be reloaded each time they are fired. This takes a whole turn's worth of dice.

Cannon

Cannon use the VEHICLES skill to fire. Cannon can be used at any distance without penalty, except when out of range. To hit a ship, castle or formation requires a 6 or less but hitting a single character requires a 3 or less, with a 1 doubling instead of

tripling the damage dice. Normal damage is 6d6.

Fatigue

When you fail at a strenuous activity, such as climbing a cliff, swimming through a storm or sprinting through a hot jungle, increase your TOUGHNESS die by one. If your TOUGHNESS reaches d%, you act with only half your dice for every turn until your TOUGHNESS is restored to its original value. You are now fatigued.

To recover TOUGHNESS, you need to rest for an entire turn. Roll all your dice as one TOUGHNESS roll, and if you roll 3 or less, recover one point of TOUGHNESS. You can't rest if you are still in the situation which caused the fatigue.

Cover Table

| TYPE | DIE |
|------------|-----|
| Drop prone | d20 |
| Sheet wood | d12 |
| Thick wood | d10 |
| Stone | d8 |

Concealment

Concealment reduces the number attackers must roll to hit you, making you harder to hit. These penalties stack, meaning if more than one applied then you add them together and reduce the number by that amount. However, the number required to hit you can never be less than 1.

| TYPE | PENALTY |
|------------|---------|
| Darkness | -1 |
| Fog/smoke | -1 |
| Foliage | -1 |
| Arrow slit | -3 |

Gaining XP

The GM should award around 5 XP every time you do something awesome, like using a Mark or a Skill in an inventive way. Slaying an enemy should grant you XP equal to its STAMINA times 50 divided by GRIT. If you deal the final blow can decide to share XP with the party or keep it for yourself. At the end of the adventure, you can spend your XP using the chart on your character sheet.