



**CORE RULES
VOLUME 1
OF THE
PLAINLABEL
GAME SYSTEM**

**BOB PORTNELL
GUY MCCLIMORE**

**Based on the
PlainLabel
Game System™
by Greg
Poehlein**



SIMPLY™ ROLEPLAYING!

UNIVERSAL ROLEPLAYING GAME RULES



MICROTACTIX

SIMPLYTM ***ROLEPLAYING!***

CORE RULES • VERSION 2.0

The All-Genre Roleplaying Game System

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**Volume I of the PlainLabel Game SystemTM
by Greg Poehlein**

Dedication:

**from Bob: to "Taj", "Althea", and "Gabriel" - Thank you for that first game and
all the games since. Who'd have thought they'd lead here?**

from Guy: to Barbara, always, for endless patience, inspiration, support and love.



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■■■■■■■■■■ **Simply ROLEPLAYING!** ■■■■■■■■■■

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Some Conventions of Presentation

We'd better define some of these terms we're using! (From here forward, when you see a word underlined and in italics, it is a game term. You'll find a specific definition in the Glossary.)

The players and gamemaster are the participants in the game. The players create player characters, alter-egos in the fictional world. The gamemaster serves not only to create the fictional world, or to adapt one for game play, but also as referee, storyteller and stand-in for everyone and everything else in the world.

The gamemaster describes the situation in which the characters find themselves. The players then tell the gamemaster how their characters react to the situation; the gamemaster assesses those actions and describes how they change the situation; the players describe their character's new actions... and so on and on and on. (You can see how this works in the examples on pages 41-43.) Before long you'll have experienced a complete story (an adventure) or a long series of adventures (a campaign).

Using the rules is very, well, simple. Almost every roll in the game requires rolling 2D10 and adding them together. When you want your character to do something, this is a test, contest, or special check roll and you want *lower* totals on the dice. When you are rolling for damage or some other effect, you usually want the totals to be *higher*.

Looked at another way, you want the character's traits (Stats & Skills) to be *higher* so it will be easier to roll "under" them — that is, easier to roll lower than the trait's value. But you won't have enough resources of character to have high values in everything! So you'll have to choose what the character will be best at, and then act accordingly. A nuclear physicist isn't likely to be charging headlong into a gun battle, nor is a huge muscleman likely to be successful at repairing an antique pocket watch.

But all this is leading us into character creation, so we may as well get started. A few words about the design and writing of the book, first:

We'd like to note that we use the male pronoun generically throughout the rules (he, his, him, etc.) This in no way reflects a gender bias on our part. By using the male pronouns, we save space when trying to get a concept across. If the English language offered a good gender-free pronoun, we'd use it.

These icons mark special passages:



When you see this icon, it means the text which follows explains some of the "why"s behind the rules.



This icon marks a example specific to a given game world — usually one of the three we develop throughout the book.



This icon highlights changes from the first edition of the rules. (Pertains to rules only, not to reorganized sections.)



Where you find this icon, you find the main ideas about to be presented.



This icon accompanies information which help a gamemaster customize his game world.



Finally, this icon marks special comments related to integrating this game with other **PlainLabel Game System** products.

And now, on with the game!



Or: the players will be members of a Special Investigations Division of the Boston police. Set in the present day, the adventures will revolve around this crew of mavericks as they face the really unusual crimes and the really entrenched traditional police culture.



Armed with the character's background (which can grow as new ideas come along), the character's personality comes easily. What are his goals? How does he treat others? How will he react to certain situations?

Does he have any odd personality traits or phobias? Answering these questions will give the player a good idea of how to play the character.

These things can change over time but will still provide a base to build upon.



Crissa deKentos, the young pilot, has the wanderlust bug. Traveling is great, the further the better. She's slowly working her way toward a lead pilot posting, but has no real interest in command. She doesn't form relationships easily, and becomes very uncomfortable in large crowds.

'Grasp' (the only name he's ever revealed), on the other hand, loves crowds, and the bigger and noisier the better. He's kept his background a complete mystery (allowing the player or GM to expand on it at will during play), but he's always scrupulously decent to his friends and to the downtrodden.

Jason Decker is obsessed with puzzle-solving, and crimes are the best kinds of puzzles. When not on a case, Jason is active in his suburban Boston community, volunteering for several charities. He also keeps fit — he's obsessed with maintaining his 'fighting weight,' in the event that somebody at the Bureau comes to their senses and offers him his old job back.

These represent the briefest possible treatments of these characters; it's easy to write for pages and pages: episodes from childhood or early career, feelings on family or co-workers, opinions on matters ranging from politics to food. If you the player feel the urge to do this, enjoy! It can only help. But if not, that's fine too. You'll need a certain minimal amount of information in order to make choices about the character, but after that... 'winging it' is a time-honored tradition in adventure gaming, and *Simply Roleplaying!* is designed to support plenty of improvisation.

Once you have the "vision" of the character in hand, whether detailed or basic, you're ready to start applying game terms to the character.

The Character Definition Process

That sounds scary, doesn't it? But it's just a bunch of long words to say "the steps you need to take to define a character for play in *Simply Roleplaying!*" Each step is short, to the point, and builds on the steps that came before. Keep your idea about the character firmly in your mind's eye as you follow these steps, and you'll have the character write-up finished in no time!

You'll need a writing tool and some scratch paper (or a copy of the *Character Record*); or you can use the online form at the **MicroTactix Games** website.

The steps in defining a character for play are:

- 0) Make a character concept. (We've already done that — some of the info needs to be copied to the Character Record.)
- 1) Decide the character's age.
- 2) Choose the character's Stats.
- 3) Select the character's *Abilities* and *Disabilities*.
- 4) Choose the character's Gear & Special Features (like spells or powers).
- 5) Pick Skills & *Skill Levels* for the character.
- 6) Note *Adjusted Stats* caused by Weapons, Armor, Equipment or Features.
- 7) Calculate *Minor Stats*.
- 8) Calculate *Skill Ratings*.

1) Decide the character's age.

You don't actually have to determine how old he is in years. Rather, we'd like you to think about him in terms of the following age categories:

Category	Typical (Human) Ages
Adolescent	less than 17
Young Adult	17-30
Adult	31-45
Mature	46-60
Elder	61-80
Aged	81-100
Ancient	over 100

Older characters will have more skills, but will have fewer Stat points due to aging. While this table gives specific ranges for humans of the early twenty-first century, the categories can be applied to any era, or to any race.

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Throughout this chapter we'll follow the development of Jason Decker, the police officer and former FBI agent we spoke of earlier. FBI agents routinely have college educations, and Jason served in the Bureau for a few years. This means he'll be over 30 years of age, and so in the Mature category.

2) Choose the Character's Stats

Each character has 4 basic *Statistics* (usually referred to as *Stats*):

Strength (S) includes physical strength, stamina, and power.

Coordination (C) is both the hand/eye coordination and whole-body dexterity.

Intellect (I) is not just how smart the character is, but also how well he can learn skills and notice things.

Health (H) indicates both how well the character can resist diseases, poisons and shocks and helps to determine the amount of damage the character can take before dying. Unlike the other Stats which can be measured on an open-ended scale, Health always ranges from 1 (weak and sickly) to 10 (perfectly fit). Health can never be higher than 10.

The average human has around 5 points in each Stat. The lowest possible value for each Stat is 2; the highest possible for normal humans is 10.

Assigning Stats

Most characters start with a total of 22 Stat Points. (The gamemaster may decide on a different starting total, but starting Stats should range between 20 and 24.)

The starting Stat Total is then modified by the character's age:

Category	Stat Pool Adjusted by
Adolescent	1
Young Adult	0
Adult	-1
Mature	-3
Elder	-5
Aged	-7
Ancient	-9

The Stat Total might then be further modified by any racial traits. The final Stat Total is split up among the four Stats.



Many settings feature characters who are of intelligent species that are other-than-human. These are usually referred to as 'alien' or 'fantasy' *aces*. The Elves of epic fantasy, the Morlocks of science fiction, and the comic book Kryptonians all count as different races and will have different limits on their Stats

For example, fantasy elves (in some game and fictional settings) are noted for being physically slighter than humans, but much more dexterous. They also tend to be more specialized than humans, focusing on one pursuit over their long lives.

We describe a race's Stats in this way:

	S	C	I	H	Adj
Humans	2(10)	2(10)	2(10)	2(10)	0

The first digit under each Stat is the lower limit; the number in parentheses is the maximum value for that Stat. The Adjustment value indicates when a race should have more (or fewer) total Stat points than the norm.

We could then describe Elves thus:

	S	C	I	H	Adj
Elves	1(9)	3(12)	2(10)	2(10)	-1

The Elf would also be subject to Age-Based Adjustments, but since elves in your game world may live longer and mature slower than humans, use the Maturity Level column as your guideline rather than the actual age brackets. (Gamemasters may provide different age brackets for each maturity level for different races, if they wish.) Thus, an elf may remain an 'Adolescent' until she is 30, and perhaps not be considered 'Mature' until the age of 150 or so.

That would complete the Elf's Stats. But races are not solely differentiated from humans by Stat values. We'll return to the discussion of races very shortly.



The gamemaster informs us that player characters begin with 24 Stat points. Since we know Jason is an Adult, we have to adjust that by -1 to give Jason 23 Stat Points to divvy up. A cop needs good Coordination and Intellect, and at least average Strength and Health. So we assign Jason's Stats in this way:

S 5 C 6 I 7 H 5

3) Select ... Abilities and Disabilities.

Abilities are special characteristics that set one person apart from another, but which can't easily be assigned numbers. Abilities can be special physical capabilities such as ambidexterity, acute hearing, or enhanced resistance to disease. They can also be special mental advantages like a photographic memory or the ability to speedread. Sometimes Abilities represent situations or opportunities relating to the character which affect his ability to deal with some situations (like great wealth or a special sponsor). Once the character is created, existing Abilities will rarely change and new ones cannot usually be added. Abilities cannot be learned or taught; this is what separates Abilities from Skills.

Disabilities work like Abilities but are their direct opposite. Again, Disabilities can be purely physical (like a limp, a severe allergy, or poor night vision) or mental restrictions (such as a phobia, a compulsion, or a short attention span), or restrictions of opportunity or resources (hidden enemies, dangerous secrets or financial restrictions). Certain Disabilities can be overcome in time and removed from the character, or advanced science or magic may make the banishment of a disability possible.

Sometimes a character changes, trading one Disability for another. (Your gamemaster will say more about this if it comes up.)

Ability/Disability Point Values

Abilities and Disabilities are ranked by value, from zero to three points each. Obviously, the higher the number the better the Ability (and the worse the Disability). One-Point Abilities and Disabilities will be fairly common, while three-pointers will be very rare.



Gamemasters should allow the use of two- and three-point Abilities and Disabilities *only* when the character's basic concept demands them and the game campaign's concept is not endangered by them.

Balancing Abilities and Disabilities

In campaigns where characters are supposed to be real people in a realistic world, gamemasters should require that characters balance their Ability and Disability point totals exactly. A character with a single three-point Ability (for example) is balanced if the character also has a three-point Disability, one two-point Disability and one one-point Disability, or three one-point Disabilities.

In campaigns with less demand for realism, where Hollywood-style movie action is more important than taut drama, Ability and Disability point levels need not exactly balance. In such a larger-than-life campaign, player characters (and major foes) might be allowed to have, say, 2 points more of Abilities than Disabilities. Minor villains and non-player assistants for player characters would be permitted 1 point more Abilities than Disabilities. Other characters must have Abilities and Disabilities in balance.

In campaigns where reality doesn't count, like those featuring comic-book heroes or adventures based on Hong Kong action films, PCs and major adversaries would be allowed to balance with 4 more Ability points than Disability points. Minor villains and helpers would be permitted to balance at 2 points more; other characters would still need to be balanced exactly.

In the other direction, an exceedingly 'dark' campaign where characters are hard-luck cases struggling against impossible odds, the players might be required to balance with 2 points more Disabilities than Abilities. This might also work in a light-hearted campaign where characters are supposed to be somewhat hapless and overwhelmed.

While it is necessary that excess Abilities be balanced off, it is perfectly acceptable for the character to voluntarily carry unbalanced Disabilities, if the player really feels it appropriate and the gamemaster permits. Working with such a character would be a fine challenge indeed.

The balancing level is entirely up to the gamemaster and the kind of campaign he wants.

Zero-Point Abilities and Disabilities

Some Abilities and Disabilities grant only the most minor of benefits (or impose only the mildest limitations). These have point values of zero (0) and are more for character ‘color’ than potent play effect.

Zero-Point Abilities do need to be balanced amongst themselves. A character may have a single Zero-Point Ability or Disability without fuss. If a character wishes two Zero-Point Abilities, he must also take one or two Zero-Point Disabilities to offset the Abilities. Likewise a Characters may have two Zero-Point Disabilities, but must take one or two Zero Point Abilities to match. A character may have no more than two each of Zero Point Abilities or Disabilities (unless your gamemaster says otherwise).



Naturally, some Races have different Abilities and Disabilities than humans and than each other. These are included in the race’s description, including any special game effects the Abilities may have. Racial Abilities and Disabilities are never required to be balanced for points. This is just part of a Race’s nature, more like a Stat than an individual gift.

Balancing is nice for fairness, but it’s not mandatory. Many alien races in fiction are more competent than human; some are less.

Our improvised fantasy elves might have Acute Hearing, Immunity to Aging, Eccentricity: Nature Lovers, and Compulsion: Hate Dwarves and Goblins.

It is possible, however, that a singular member of a race may lack a Racial Ability or Disability. A character who lacks a Racial Ability is considered to have chosen a personal Disability of the same point value as the Ability. In the same way, a character who lacks a given racial Disability is treated as if he had an Ability of the same point value. These adjustments must be balanced in the same manner as any other individual character Abilities of Disabilities.

The Abilities and Disabilities list for the Core Rules is on page 22; the descriptions begin on page 24. The list is also found in the Instant References booklet.



Jason Decker works in an information intensive field, so we give him both Speedreading (0) and Photographic Memory (1). His contacts in the Bureau count as a Minor Sponsor (0). To balance the 1-Point Ability, we need a 1-Point Disability — we decide the Compulsion (Crime Solving) is appropriate. We also have two Zero-Point Abilities and must take at least one Zero-Point Disability to balance them. This is where we note his Eccentricity (Fitness Nut).

4) Choose ... Gear & Special Features.

It wouldn’t be right to send your character out into the cold cruel world without a change of clothes or a place to stay, and in some game worlds it might be downright dangerous to send him out without weapons or protective gear! This step would also include choosing special powers (for comic book heroes or sorcerers), but we don’t include those in the Core Rules.



Characters should have all the equipment that is reasonable and justified within the character’s role in the story and the fictional society.

Equipment from the Roleplay Perspective

A character who has a skill at Capable level or better would own tools or special equipment relating to his job. A computer technician usually has at least one computer at home or perhaps a laptop for field work, plus an assortment of specialized tools and software. A mechanic would have his own very large toolbox.

A character with skill at Professional level would have the physical resources to be able to go into business for himself. A Professional level Rider will probably own one fine horse and several good ones. A character with a Professional weapon skill will own several different versions of that weapon, including one well-made one which is his favored armament.

A character with skill at Expert level would have all of the above, plus specialized research materials, esoteric tools, multiple versions of the subject matter in a number of styles... and probably plenty of people calling to ask his opinion and advice.

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Notice that all of these are independent of any financial Abilities or Disabilities. One can own a fine microscope, but still have to scrape to make ends meet, and odds are it won't be long before that microscope will have to be sold...



When choosing or requesting starting equipment, don't expect to receive anything too specialized or unusual, or to have the best and most capable example of everything — unless your character has the financial wherewithal to insist on the best. If you want to be detailed about what you have, fine. But remember that detail will then be fixed and can't be changed later when it's become inconvenient. If it's reasonable for your character to carry a seventeen-blade Swiss Army knife, and you want to bother to list all the blades and functions, fine. On the other hand, if you just say that your character has a pocket knife, the gamemaster may rule later that it indeed does have a corkscrew when you really need one, even if you didn't specify it.

Beyond this, a character may have spending money and other assets. This amount does depend on the degree of the Wealth Abilities (or Poverty Disabilities) taken during character creation. If you took none of these, you are considered to be at the "Working Man" level. Those with Financial Independence, Wealth or Great Wealth will have more loose cash; those with Financial Restrictions or Poverty may have to scratch just to avoid bankruptcy.

Armor

Armor can protect a character from damage. The Armor Table below lists an assortment of armor types from ancient, modern and futuristic sources.

Each type of armor has a damage modifier (dmg mod), which is subtracted from incoming damage. If this reduces the damage to zero or less, the armor has completely protected the character from harm.

Some armor types can have different protection values vs. different types of attacks. For example, a modern vest of Kevlar™ or ballistic cloth will have a better protection value against bullets and similar projectiles than against melee attacks. If a character is

wearing a Kevlar vest (a common type of chest armor sometimes worn by police officers), the character may subtract 14 points of damage from any projectile attack that strikes him, but only 4 points of damage from unarmed or melee attacks.

Some Armors have a Minimum Strength (Min S) rating. If character tries to wear this armor, but his Strength is lower than the minimum, then his Coordination is adjusted by the amount shown on the table (C Adj). The powered battlesuit has no minimum Strength, but it's terribly cumbersome. There's a C Adj all the time for powered battlesuits!

In some cases, add-ons or modifications can be made to increase the protection of certain types of armor. (For example, some models of ballistic cloth vest can have inserts of high-impact ceramic or steel added to increase their protective value. Some futuristic armor may be coated with an ablative coating of high-temperature ceramic or a polished reflective material to add protection from energy weapons.) These are shown below the appropriate armor type on the chart, along with the new Dmg Mod, Min S and C Adj that go along with the modifications.

If your character wears Armor, note the type and Damage Modifier in the space on the Character Record.

Shields

Characters can also carry shields to protect themselves from bare-hand, melee and thrown damage.

Shields vary by size and weight; these factors affect how the shield behaves in combat. See the Shield Table below for examples of some combat shields of ancient, modern, and futuristic origin.

The Damage Modifier reduces the incoming damage (because the attack must be worked past the shield, not because the attack hit the shield.) Shields have Minimum Strength ratings and Coordination Modifiers which work just the same way as with Armor.

The Defend Modifier (Def Mod) bonus is added to the Shield Skill Rating when the Shield is used to Defend. A buckler is quick and light and easy to interpose between yourself and an attack, but a buckler is too small to be useful in a Shield Smash attack. The large shield is harder to swing around, but does more damage in a Shield Smash attack. (The maximum damage done by a smash is indicated as "Dmg.")

Modern police sometimes use a clear Lexan™ riot shield which offers a number of advantages over its ancient predecessor. It is lighter and stronger, and its transparency prevents it from obscuring an officer's view.

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It is too light to be effective for a shield smash attack, however.

The Energy Shield (or ‘e-Shield’) serves the same functions as any other shield, and can be adjusted to any size from Buckler to Large. There is no Strength Minimum or Coordination Modifier applied when using an e-Shield at any size, but otherwise it behaves just like a physical shield of the same size. Thus, it enhances the Defend action at smaller sizes, but increases the Damage Modifier at larger sizes. It takes a “Other” Action to change the size of an e-Shield.

Energy shields do protect somewhat against standard melee and projectile attacks, but they are most effective against energy attacks, and tend to be used most often when enemies are likely to be using energy weapons. Unlike standard shields, energy shields of Target or Large size do protect against projectiles and energy weapons.

Should an attacker score a Critical Success when attacking someone who defends with an e-Shield, the shield generator itself (normally worn strapped to the shield arm) is struck by the blow. The target takes damage as normal, and the attacker rolls *1D10*. On a roll of 7 or more, the e-Shield generator is broken in the attack and can no longer function.

Note any shields carried (and any modifier values) in the Equipment section of the Character Record.

Weapons and Weapon Cards

Some pieces of equipment, many vehicles, and almost all weapons in **PlainLabel** games are presented on cards. These may be easily filed by the gamemaster and distributed as needed. (“You find . . . a fine dagger! Here’s the card . . .”) Each card will have all the information necessary to use that piece of equipment in play. It may describe effects on skill use or protection in combat (a leather jacket or other piece of clothing or armor). Weapons will indicate if they require two hands to use, minimum Strengths to use, a damage table, guidelines for range modifiers, and so on.

Most MicroTactix products based on **PlainLabel** carry an assortment of appropriate cards. Gamemasters are free to make up their own as well. This becomes very handy when characters come into possession of objects with unknown characteristics. (“Did I say that was a fine dagger? I’m sorry . . . you’ve just discovered it’s a fine *cursed* dagger — and you have this overwhelming urge to try it out on your companion right away! Use this card, instead . . .”)

Armor	Dmg Mod	Min S	C Adj.
ANCIENT			
Padded cloth	-2	-	-
Hardened leather	-6	4	1
Chainmail	-8	5	1
Plate armor	-12	8	2

MODERN			
Leather jacket	-3	-	-
Kevlar vest*	-14 vs. projectiles -4 vs. all other	5	1
.... w/ceramic inserts	-20 vs. projectiles -6 vs. all other	6	1
.... w/steel inserts	-22 vs. projectiles -8 vs. all other	7	1

FUTURISTIC			
Plasteel Infantry Armor+			
—Light	-15	-	-
—Medium	-20	5	1
—Heavy	-30	6	2
.... w/ ablative ceramic coating	-10 ADDL. vs. energy#	+1	+1
.... w/reflective coating	-5 ADDL. vs. energy	-	-
Powered battlesuit	-55	-	3

* Vests may not use both ceramic and steel inserts at the same time.

+ Any Plasteel armor type may be coated, but armor may not have *both* ablative and reflective coatings.

Ablative coating withstands five energy attacks. It then adds no further protection.

Shield	Dmg Mod	Min S	C Adj.	Def Mod	Dmg
ANCIENT					
Buckler	0	-	-	+1	-
Target	-1	-	-	-	6
Large	-2	5	1	-1	8
MODERN					
Lexan Riot	-6	-	-	-2	-
FUTURISTIC					
e-Shield					
... as Buckler	0	-	-	+1	-
... as Target	-4 vs energy -1 vs. other	-	-	-	-
... as Large	-6 vs energy -2 vs. other	5	1	-1	-

Select appropriate weapons or equipment cards for the character. A full explanation of how to read weapon cards, as well as a list of sample weapons from several gaming genres, can be found in Appendix B at the back of this book.



As a law-enforcement professional, Jason wouldn't be expected to own a lot of job-related equipment. However, his professional library would probably be quite extensive (and very useful to him in his role as teacher). His Capable Handgun skill suggests he might own one or two of these; we decide one, the Colt Army 1911 which was his registered sidearm in the Bureau. A Capable Criminal Investigator wouldn't have any elaborate special equipment for that at home — the rules of evidence wouldn't permit it. The gamemaster rules that Jason also has a personal computer, which supports both of his professions. He also habitually carries a pocket tape recorder and a mini-flashlight.

Note that the character pays nothing for this; it is part of the character as created, just like his background.

5) Pick Skills & Skill Levels ...

Skills are the things the character has learned to do over the course of his life.

There are three types of Skills: *Personal Skills* are those that most people possess to one extent or another. (There are, however, important differences between those who use these skills in a trained, knowledgeable manner and those who depend mostly on inborn talent.) Personal Skills can be based on any Stat; in fact, all skills based on the Strength Stat fall into this category.

Different Races may have different lists of Personal Skills; the list given in the Core Rules is for humans.

Physical Skills are those where successful practice is heavily affected by physical ability; so, all Physical Skills are based on the Coordination Stat.

Mental Skills are those where success is affected by a character's memory, intelligence and reason. All Mental skills are based on the Intellect Stat.

There is one additional term used in describing skills. *General Skills* can be of any type, and represent more a category of skills. When you select a General Skill, you must also choose a *sub-skill* which reflects your actual expertise. Each of these sub-skills is treated as a separate skill and each is purchased separately.

Skill Levels

Skills exist at four Skill Levels: Familiar, Capable, Professional and Expert.

If the character is Familiar with the Skill, he can perform an average task at minimum competence. A character who is Capable is quite familiar with that area of knowledge. A Professional level character knows the Skill well enough to teach it. An Expert will know most of what his culture has revealed about the subject.



It is also possible for a Skill to be related to the use of an Ability, though the use of the Skill will still be based on a Stat.

For example, a character who has a superhuman power such as Laser Beam may have a Missile Weapon Skill specialty with that Ability that determines how well he can aim it. In this case, the Skill is related to the Ability, but its use would still be tied to the Coordination Stat.

Other Abilities affect how Skills are purchased. Read the Ability descriptions carefully!

Purchasing Skills

Each character receives a pool of points with which to purchase skills. The number of points in the pool varies with the age of the individual:

Category	Skill Purchase Points
Adolescent	7
Young Adult	10
Adult	14
Mature	20
Elder	28
Aged	34
Ancient	38

A character also receives a bonus 2 *Skill Purchase Points* for each point of Intellect above 5. Likewise, characters with Intellect below 5 *lose* 2 Skill Purchase points for each point of Intellect below 5. {For those of the mathematical bent, the whole thing can be expressed in the formula $SPP = [(2 \times I) + \text{Table Value} - 10]$. From this you can see the easy shortcut: If the character is a Young Adult, $SPP = 2 \times I$!}

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Characters whose Intellects have been improved beyond human limits will have receive additional skill allotments, but those skills are only accessible when the enhanced Intellect power is available. Watch for details in *Simply Superhuman!*

To purchase a Skill, spend the appropriate points for the desired skill level:

Skill Level	Cost
Familiar	1
Capable	2
Professional	4
Expert	8

Write down on the character sheet the skill name (and sub-skill, if required), the skill type (Personal, Physical or Mental), the base Stat and the Level. We'll come back later and figure out the Skill Ratings. The complete list and descriptions for Skills in the core rules begin on page 17; the list can also be found in the Instant Reference booklet.



Non-human races (or races of humans in futuristic or fantasy cultures) might have skills listed as Physical or Mental in our list being reclassified as Personal Skills (or vice versa). For example, a race with natural psionic abilities might consider Telepathy a Personal skill because the use of the skill was a natural part of their culture. On the other hand, a race that lived underwater might not come onto land often, making the Running skill into a Physical skill.

Long-lived races have a more time to learn skills during their extended lives. For each doubling of a race's natural lifespan over that of normal humans, add 2 Skill Purchase Points to the pool for those characters. (Make it 4 Skill Purchase Points if the character is Mature or older.) (This would also apply to humans in possible futures where anti-aging techniques significantly extend the average lifespan.)



The extra points for Mature characters of long-lived races are new. You're welcome to experiment and find your own methods for modeling such races in the game.



As an Adult, Jason gets 14 Skill Purchase Points; he gets 4 bonus points for an Intellect of 7, for a total of 18. A bit of thought about Jason's past and current

jobs gives us the following list:

Computer Operation	Ment	I	Fam
Criminal Investigation	Ment	I	Cap
Law	Ment	I	Fam
Martial Arts	Phys	C	Fam
Missile Weapon: Handgun	Phys	C	Cap
Observing	Pers	I	Cap
Psychology	Ment	I	Cap
Researching	Pers	I	Fam
Running	Pers	S	Fam
Streetwise	Ment	I	Cap
Swimming	Phys	C	Fam
Teaching	Pers	I	Cap

6) Note Adjusted Stats ...

This is when we got back to the Stats part of the Character Record and note changes to the Stats caused by carrying heavy weapons, armor, shields or equipment, plus changes caused by superhuman powers or other special rules which might have been introduced in Step 4. To do this, simply note the value of the Adjusted Stat in the space provided.

For example, you might be wearing Armor that's too heavy for you. Subtract the C Mod from your Coordination and write the result on the Character Record. Or your Strength might have been boosted by a Secret Formula (in a super-hero game). Add the adjustment to your original Strength and write the result down.



Jason has no heavy gear, or special powers, so we don't need to make any adjustments to his Stats.

7) Calculate Minor Stats

We'll fill in some of the gaps in the Character Record here, and most importantly figure out how tolerant the character is to exertion and injury.

Speed

Speed is a relative measure of how fast a character can move. All normal human & humanoid characters have a ground Speed of 3. When swimming, humans & humanoids have a Speed of 1. (It's all inherent in the design.)

This does not mean that all humans run at the same top speed. But in terms of tactical movement, all humans cover about the same amount of ground efficiently in comparison with other sorts of life forms (like the much-faster cheetahs). A centaur (which has four legs and the muscular lower body of an equine) would probably have speeds like that of a horse.

Your character might have other ways of moving, courtesy of super-powers, magic or equipment. Also, Capable Running Skill gives a +1 to ground Speed; Expert Running Skill gives a +2. Note the methods of movement and Speeds for each on the Character Record.



Speed is less likely to be important in a roleplaying setting, but it's very important if using these characters in the **Compact Combat** or **Budget Battlefield** games.

Luck

Luck points help players get through those extra touch situations that all adventurers face. All player characters in this game normally start with 5 Luck points (though that may be modified by the gamemaster to match the tone of his campaign).

Player characters may gain Luck during the game for achieving goals or winning scenarios, and may spend Luck to modify the outcome of dice rolls.

We'll learn more about Luck in the Action Rules section on page 52. For now, just note down the Luck points as advised by your gamemaster.

Initiative Bonus

Characters with Combat Awareness skill (or special powers or gifts) tend to react faster in a fight than others.

This is the *Initiative* Bonus. Jot down the character's Initiative Bonus where indicated. You'll see where it comes into play during the Combat rules on page 47.

Combat Awareness Level	Bonus
Familiar	1
Capable	2
Professional	3
Expert	4

Unarmed Combat Max Dmg

This minor Stat reports how much the maximum damage (or *Max Dmg*) the character does with his bare hands; it's based on (adjusted) Strength.

Adj S	Max Dmg
1 - 2	3
3 - 4	4
5 - 7	6
8 - 10	10
11 - 13	14
14 - 16	18
17 - 20	22

Add 1 if the character has Martial Arts skill at Capable; Add 2 if the skill is at Professional; add 3 if the Martial Arts skill is Expert.

Fatigue Points

This little number help you track how tired your character becomes during his adventures. Add your (adjusted) Strength and (adjusted) Health — write it in the *Fatigue Points* box. There's plenty of room provided to track your Fatigue as it goes up and down. 10 is the average value; 20 is the maximum for normal folks.

Different genre expansions might introduce different rules for calculating Fatigue Points, or introduce different uses for Fatigue.

Hit Points

Last but not least, we need to know how much injury the character can withstand. These are *Hit Points*. The average human has 20 HP; the maximum is 50 HP. First, find the Multiplier in the following table:

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Adj H	Multiplier
1 - 3	2.5
4 - 6	3.0
7 - 9	3.5
10	4.0

Then, calculate your Hit Points with this formula:

$$\text{HP} = [\text{Adj S} \times \text{Multiplier}] + \text{adj H}$$

(Round fractions up to the next whole number.)

That's all there is to that — write it in the space provided on the Character Record.



The Hit Point and Fatigue Point formulas are used for all characters and Beasts (animals & monsters), too.



Jason Decker has a Speed (ground) of 3 and 5 Luck points. He didn't buy Combat Awareness skill, he has no bonus (or 0 bonus) to his Initiative. Since his adj S and adj H are both 5, he has the average values for Fatigue Points (10) and Hit Points (20).

8) Calculate Skill Ratings

As the last step in character creation, we'll fill in some numbers to go along with the Skills and Skill Levels purchased.

Each Level of Skill (Fam, Cap, Pro, Exp) gives a bonus number. This number is added to the base Stat (and Adjusted Stat) to give the Skill Rating.

If you haven't paid Skill Purchase Points for a Skill, you can still try tasks involving that skill; it just means that you are requiring on your natural talents rather than any training.

For Personal Skills, the default (Def) skill rating is equal to the base Stat (or adjusted Stat)

For Physical Skills, the default skill rating is equal to C-2 (adj C-2).

There is no default for Mental Skills. Mental Skills *require* some minimal training; no amount of natural talent can make up for this.

Skill Level	Bonus
Def	0 (Pers), -2 (Phys), N/A (Ment)
Fam	2
Cap	4
Pro	8
Exp	12



Familiar Skill used to give only a Bonus of 1; correcting it to 2 was the final step in an on-going fine-tuning of the Skill Ratings rules.

Some Abilities & Disabilities affect how Skill Ratings are determined; read the descriptions carefully!

We'll see all about how Skill Ratings are used in the next section, on Action Rules.



To finish up with Jason, we go back to the Skill Lists and apply the rules to calculate his Skill Ratings. Since it's possible Jason might have some Dodging to do in a fight, we include that in his Skill list now, even though it's only at Default level

Computer Operation	Fam / 9
Criminal Investigation	Cap / 11
Dodging	Def / 6
Law	Fam / 9
Martial Arts	Fam / 8
Missile Weapon: Handgun	Cap / 10
Observing	Cap / 11
Psychology	Cap / 11
Researching	Fam / 9
Running	Fam / 7
Streetwise	Cap / 11
Swimming	Fam / 8
Teaching	Cap / 11

And there you have it! Your character is completed and ready to start having adventures! See how the process worked on the demonstration characters on the following two pages.

After that are the complete Lists of Abilities & Disabilities and Skills, followed by descriptions of same. But if you want, you can skip right over all of those to the Action Rules on page 41 and see how this all gets done!

Jason Decker, Special Investigator, BPD

BRIEF HISTORY

Born and raised in Boston; grad. Harvard (MA. in Psychology); served in FBI for several years before being forced to resign in the wake of an agency cover-up case. Works part-time as psychology instructor at Revere Junior College as well as for Boston Metro PD's Special Investigations Division.

PERSONALITY

Typical FBI special agent; cool, composed, professional, even under fire. A little warmer as a teacher.

APPEARANCE

Adult. Tall, trim, clean-cut; usually in dark suit and tie in the approved FBI manner; brown hair, green eyes.

S: 5 C: 6 I: 7 H: 5

Luck: 5 Speed: 3 Hit Points: 20 Fatigue Points: 10
Init. Bonus: 0 Unarmed Max Dmg: 6

ABILITIES

Photographic Memory
Speedreading
Sponsor (Minor): Contacts at FBI

DISABILITIES

Compulsion: Crime-Solving
Eccentricity: Fitness Nut

SKILLS

Computer Operation	Fam / 9
Criminal Investigation	Cap / 11
Law	Fam / 9
Martial Arts	Fam / 8
Missile Weapon: Handgun	Cap / 10
Observing	Cap / 11
Psychology	Cap / 11
Researching	Fam / 9
Running	Fam / 7
Streetwise	Cap / 11
Swimming	Fam / 8
Teaching	Cap / 11

WEAPONS/EQUIPMENT

Colt Army 1911 automatic pistol
Pocket tape recorder
Miniature flashlight

"Grasp" (aka "The Blue Bandit")

BRIEF HISTORY

Very little is known of his past, and "Grasp" likes that. He often tells unverifiable tales of his life. Undisputable is that the Sheriff of Starton cut off his right hand after he was caught looting the Mayor's home and the pursuit by Kyle the White, a notorious bounty hunter with a serious long-standing grudge.

PERSONALITY

Despite his devil-may-care attitude, "Grasp" cares deeply for his few friends and for those less fortunate. He shares what he steals with the needy. After very successful burglaries, he leaves behind a blue kerchief — the calling card of the mysterious "Blue Bandit". The distraction has worked so well that The Blue Bandit has a bigger bounty of his head than "Grasp" himself!

APPEARANCE

Adult. Utterly average build and features. Usually dressed in plain gray cloak and trousers, with soft hide slippers. Keeps his abbreviated arm in a pocket or folded under his left so his missing hand is less noticeable.

S: 4 C: 8 I: 8 H: 6

Luck: 5 Speed: 3 Hit Points: 18 Fatigue Points: 10
Init. Bonus: 0 Unarmed Max Dmg: 6

ABILITIES

Financial Independence (1); Unrestricted Activity (1);
Sponsor (Minor): Underworld Contacts (0); Acute Sense of Direction (0)

DISABILITIES

Ltd. Manipulation (1); Compulsion: Zorro Complex (1);
Minor Enemy: Bounty Hunter (0); Minor Secret: Blue Bandit identity (0)

SKILLS

Climbing	Cap / 12	Merchant	Cap / 12
Convincing	Fam / 10	Observing	Cap / 12
Dodging	Cap / 12	Sleight-of-Hand	Fam / 10
Escape	Fam / 10	Stealth	Cap / 12
Lockpicking	Pro / 16	Traps	Cap / 12
Melee Weapon: Knife	Fam / 10		

WEAPONS/EQUIPMENT

Dagger
Lockpicks

Crissa DeKentos

BRIEF HISTORY

Crissa is 20 years old, born on the frontier world of Misava IV. Bright from an early age, she set her sights on getting offworld as soon as she could. Remarkable scores on Space Fleet Qualifying Exams earned her an enlistment in the Flight Corps, where she has performed reliably if not brilliantly.

PERSONALITY

Her lack of stellar performance is caused by a hopelessly romantic attitude toward the adventure of space travel and seeing other worlds... she does not attend to the things one must do to succeed in an organization. She is bright, inquisitive, enjoys flying and computing, and is serious about keeping up her gymnastic training.

APPEARANCE

Young adult. Skinny and agile, with short dark hair and bright blue eyes. Usually seen in gray uniform jumpsuit.

S: 6 C: 7 I: 7 H: 5

Luck: 5 Speed: 3 Hit Points: 23 Fatigue Points: 11
Init. Bonus: 0 Unarmed Combat Dmg: 6

ABILITIES

Acute Sense of Direction (0); Flexible (0)

DISABILITIES

Eccentricity: Wanderlust (0)

SKILLS

Acrobatics	Cap / 11
Computer Operation	Cap / 11
Computer Programming	Cap / 11
Knowledge: History of the League	Fam / 9
Melee Weapon: eBlade	Fam / 9
Vacc Suit	Fam / 9
Vehicle Operation: Shuttle	Cap / 11
Vehicle Operation: Starship	Cap / 11
Zero-G Ops	Fam / 9

WEAPONS/EQUIPMENT

eBlade
Personal comp/comm unit



Crissa DeKentos



"Grasp"



Jason Decker

CORE RULES ABILITIES & DISABILITIES LIST

Zero-Point Abilities

Acute Sense of Direction
Flexible
Minor Sponsor
Perfect Pitch
Sensible
Speedreading

1-Point Abilities

Acute Hearing
Acute Vision
Ambidexterity
Ear For Language
Financial Independence
Photographic Memory
Presence
Resistance to Aging
Resistance to Disease
Resistance to Toxins
Significant Sponsor
Superior Training
Unrestricted Activity

2-Point Abilities

Immunity to Aging
Immunity to Disease
Immunity to Toxins
Major Sponsor
Rapid Healing
Wealth

3-Point Abilities

Massive Wealth Regeneration

Zero-Point Disabilities

Distinctive Appearance
Eccentricity
Impaired Speech
Mild Allergy
Minor Enemy
Minor Secret
Slight Limp

1-Point Disabilities

- Compulsion
- Fear
- Financial Restriction
- Inhuman Appearance
- Impaired Hearing
- Impaired Vision
- Limited Manipulation
- Remarkable Appearance
- Restricted Activity
- Severe Allergy
- Severe Limp
- Significant Enemy
- Significant Secret
- Water Shy

2-Point Disabilities

Dangerous Allergy
Deafness
Hideous Appearance
Illiteracy
Limited Movement
Major Enemy
Major Secret
Mute
Obsession
Phobia
Poverty

3-Point Disabilities

Blindness
Mania
Nemesis
Restricted Movement
Terror

CORE RULES SKILLS LIST

(Skills with a colon (:) after them are General Skills; selection of a sub-skill is required.)

Personal Skills

(add bonus to indicated Stat)

Brawling (S)
Climbing (C)
Convincing (I)
Dodging (C)
Grappling (S)
Jumping (S)
Lifting (S)
Observing (I)
Researching (I)
Running (S)
Teaching (I)

Physical Skills

(add bonus to C)

Acrobatics
Blacksmith
Disguise
Escape
Forgery
Gunsmith
Lockpicking
Martial Arts:
Melee Weapon:
• Axe
• e-Blade
• e-Sword
• Knife
• Fencing
• Sword
• Pole Arms
Missile Weapon:
• Blasters
• Bows
• Crossbows
• Handguns
• Lasers
• Rifles
• Shotguns
• Submachine Guns
Mountaineering
Off-Hand Weapon:
Parachuting
Pickpocket
Riding:
Shield
Sleight of Hand
Sports:
Stealth
Swimming
Thrown Weapon:
• Knives
• Spears
• Small Objects
Vacuum Suit
Vehicle Operation:
Zero-G Maneuvering

Mental Skills

(add bonus to I)

Animal Handling
Artistic Expression:
Civil Engineering
Combat Awareness
Command
Computer Operation
Computer Programming
Computer Technology
Criminal Investigation
Demolition
Electronics
First Aid
Gambling
History:
Hypnotism
Inventing
Knowledge:
Languages:
Law:
Mechanic:
Mechanical Engineering
Medicine
Merchant
Military Engineering
Naturalist:
Navigation:
Performance:
Science:
Scrounging
Scuba
Seamanship
Social Grace
Streetwise
Survival:
Theology:
Tracking
Traps
Veterinary
Writing:

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Perfect Pitch (0): Your ear is especially sensitive to tone and pitch. You get a +1 bonus to any music-related task. Additionally, you can identify (by its musical notation) any sound you hear.

Presence (1): Presence is the quality that makes people pay attention to a character and listen to what they say. Characters with Presence know how to make a dramatic and powerful entrance, can grab attention in a crowd, and are good at getting the cooperation of others. Striking attire or rugged good looks can enhance a character's Presence, but Presence is mostly a matter of attitude and confidence.

Characters with this Ability get a +1 bonus to all Convincing tasks. If a character with Presence makes a bold surprise entrance, he automatically gains a +2 bonus to Initiative for that round — more if the gamemaster rules that the move was especially striking or surprising.

Rapid Healing (2) / Regeneration (3): This Ability lets a character recover Hit Points much faster than other people. If injured, the character will regain one point of damage within an hour of the injury. Natural healing (see below) occurs at twice normal speed; but medical treatments are not affected and provide their normal benefits.

Those with Rapid Healing stop bleeding quickly, and so never lose additional Hit Points to blood loss, even after a serious wound of 10 or more points. A character with Regeneration recovers one point of physical damage immediately upon the end of the combat or situation in which the injury occurred. He then naturally heals at three times normal speed; medical treatments still provide only their normal benefits.

Characters with Regeneration stop bleeding immediately, and never require *Stamina Checks* for any injury. They are very hard to kill, requiring reduction to -20 Hit Points before death is irreversible. This form of regeneration is a very extreme human capability, and should be allowed only in highly adventurous, cinematic, or other “nonrealistic” campaigns.

It is possible that campaigns involving non-humans, characters with superhuman abilities, magic, or psychic abilities may have other forms of regeneration ability that are considered as Racial Advantages, super powers, spells, or skills.

Resistance to Aging (1) / Immunity to Aging (2):

You are resistant to the ravages of time. Your appearance will change very little until extreme old age, and you will retain your youthful vigor longer than your peers. In game terms, use the Stat Adjustment of a character one Maturity Level younger than the character's actual age. (If Immunity to Aging, go back two Maturity Levels.)

Immunity to Aging is a very potent Ability, and the gamemaster should allow its use only in highly adventurous, cinematic, or other “nonrealistic” campaigns.

Resistance to Disease (1) / Immunity to Disease (2): If

you have Resistance to Disease, you are much less likely to catch a disease, and will recover from ailments you do contract much faster than a normal person.

Persons with this Ability roll to avoid catching a disease at one Difficulty Level lower than normal. They also cut all recovery time in half, and reduce all recovery rolls by one Difficulty Level.

If you have Immunity to Disease, you can never be affected by disease-causing bacteria, viruses, spores, etc.

Gamemasters should allow this Ability only in highly adventurous, cinematic, or other “nonrealistic” campaigns.

Resistance to Toxins (1) / Immunity to Toxins (2):

If you have Resistance to Toxins, you are less susceptible to poisons and drugs than other people, usually because your metabolism tends to rid the body of such things rapidly. A character with this Ability rolls only 1D10 on the damage table when exposed to toxic substances. If a poison is normally effective for more than one Round after exposure, the character rolls damage for one Round less than normal.

If you have Immunity to Toxins, you cannot be affected by poisons or harmful drugs.

Gamemasters should allow this ability only in highly adventurous, cinematic, or other “nonrealistic” campaigns.

Sensible (0): The *character* is very levelheaded. If the player directs this character to act in a foolhardy or dangerous manner, the gamemaster should suggest a wiser alternative. This allows an impetuous player to play a thoughtful character.

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Speedreading (0): A character with this ability reads his native language (and any others he knows) at about twice the speed of the average person, while still retaining as much of what he has read. He receives no bonuses to Researching skill rolls, but may do Researching in half the time it would take another person.

Sponsor-Minor (0) / Significant (1) / Major (2):

A Sponsor is a *non-player character* in a position of power, respect, or responsibility, who assists the character on a semi-regular basis. Sponsors may also be friends, relatives, etc., but a Sponsor offers the character direct (non-combat) assistance, outside of any other relationship.

A Minor Sponsor has little real influence, but may provide some specialized guidance. (Examples: a cop on the beat, or a librarian.) A Significant Sponsor is one who can give the character help he could not receive otherwise without noticeable expense. (Examples: captain of the homicide squad, a bank president, or a scientist.) A Major Sponsor is a person who has real authority or access to resources, and will use them to assist the character. (Examples: a wealthy industrialist, or the director of the FBI.)

The relationship with a sponsor is always a two-way proposition. The sponsor will offer assistance where it is appropriate, but she will also expect help on a regular basis. The gamemaster can use a sponsor to drag a character into an adventure situation, or to put an interesting roadblock in his path at the right time.

Superior Training (1): The character with Superior Training has dedicated himself to learning the skills of his profession, and has had access to superior teaching not normally available to the general public. The character may purchase skills as though he were one Age range older than he actually is. For example, a teenager (Adolescent) who has spent almost every free hour studying the skills he needs to be a crimefighter (takes Superior Training) may purchase skills as though he were a Young Adult.

Superior Training is by definition beyond normal, and a gamemaster may declare this Ability is unavailable for a campaign if he decides it is not appropriate. Please note that characters with Superior Training are often isolated and usually lose out on some normal life experiences because of the

intensity of their training. Thus, gamemasters may require that characters who take this Ability limit some of their social skills, or restrict the spending of skill points obtained in this way to skills appropriate to their special training (to the detriment of other skill areas. For example, a character trained in the martial arts by Buddhist masters in a remote monastery is unlikely to learn such skills as Social Grace, Streetwise, or Convincing during his stay there.) Also note that the dedication required to complete such rigorous training often involves some level of fanaticism on the part of the character. Players creating characters with Superior Training might wish to balance this choice with a Compulsion Disability that provides the extreme motivation necessary.

Unrestricted Activity (1): Characters with this Ability have a job or situation which does not require them to report at any certain time, or “punch a clock”. Unlike the Financial Independence Ability, this Ability gives no financial support. The character still has to work about 40 hours a week, but he can choose his hours freely. A full time student would not be considered to have this Ability — he has to be in class at certain times of day. A wealthy industrialist might not have this Ability either, especially if he is actively running the day to day operations of a company. On the other hand, a beggar might be considered to have Unrestricted Activity, as might a gypsy cab driver, a mystery author, or a freelance thief.

Disabilities Descriptions

Allergy, Mild (0) / Severe (1) / Dangerous (2):

An allergy is an immune system response to a foreign substance ingested by the body (an allergen). Allergens can be almost anything, from types of food, to types of pollen, to dust.

Characters with a Mild Allergy will sneeze, itch, or (in the case of a food allergy) grow mildly ill when exposed to the allergen. This can be inconvenient, but it does not normally incapacitate the character.

Characters with a Severe Allergy will grow ill when exposed to the allergen. The illness (a severe rash and swelling, difficulty in breathing, or stomach pain, depending on how the substance is encountered) will begin within 1D10 minutes of exposure, and will last 1D10 hours. During the time the character is affected, he will make all Skill Rolls at one Skill Level lower than usual because of the discomfort.

A character with a Dangerous Allergy can be in danger of losing his life if exposed. The character will fall seriously ill within 2D10 minutes of exposure, and will continue to suffer from the effects and be completely incapacitated for 2D10 hours. Each hour during this time, he must roll a Stamina Check. If successful he takes no permanent damage. If the Check is failed he takes one point of damage. This damage must heal as normal wound damage, after the incapacitating effects of the allergic attack wear off. A character with a Dangerous Allergy who is of poor health, already weakened, or who suffers from a lengthy attack may die from an allergic reaction.

Characters who are exposed to a very small amount of the allergen suffer as if their allergy was one step less severe. (A person with a Dangerous Allergy to mushrooms who consumes a tiny bit of mushroom powder in a dish of food will suffer as if his Allergy was only Severe.) Mild Allergy sufferers may not even notice a very small amount of otherwise noxious material. Likewise, those who are exposed (usually deliberately) to a massive dose of an allergen will suffer as if they had the next most dangerous variety. Dangerous Allergy sufferers who have the bad fortune to be exposed in massive doses suffer twice as long, roll two Stamina Checks per hour, and take 2 points damage for each failed Check.

Some drugs (antihistamines, available after 1950) will reduce the effect of allergy attacks by one level, if taken before or soon after the exposure.

Some people have Fatal Allergies — they will die within a very few minutes if exposed and untreated. This would be simulated as a Stamina Check *every minute*, with 1D10 damage applied with each failure. We do not think this level of Allergy is appropriate to player characters, but gamemasters may give a non-player character a Fatal Allergy if desired.

If the allergen is quite uncommon, the allergy is worth one less point than normal, and an allergy to a substance that would likely never be encountered is worth no points at all. Thus, a Dangerous Allergy to a rare plant that grows only in the Amazon jungle is worth 2 points to a jungle guide, 1 point to a big-city police officer, and zero points to a resident of a lunar colony.

Eccentricity (0) / Compulsion (1) / Obsession (2) /

Mania (3): Characters with an Eccentricity have some little twist in their behavior that is different from the norm. It is seldom serious and doesn't impair their functioning at work, home or play . . . but it does get them noticed and remembered.

Characters with a Compulsion have a fixed idea, behavior, or belief that is very important to them and that sometimes affects their behavior despite their rational desires. A compulsion can be a all-consuming hobby or pursuit (such as bird-watching, whistling), a strong emotional feeling (such as love, fear, or rage directed at one person, a group of people, or a type of object), or any sort of strong drive that might direct a person's actions. Compulsions are relatively mild. When faced with a situation involving a Compulsion, a character must roll a *Focus Check*. If he succeeds, the character will act however the player decides, and may ignore the compulsion entirely. If not, he must take some action of the player's choice (with the gamemaster's approval) that acts on his Compulsion.

An Obsession is a more severe form of Compulsion. It is very hard for a character to ignore the object of his Obsession when confronted with it. Even the possibility of acting on an Obsession requires a character to roll a Focus Check. If he fails, he must inquire after the possibility that has been raised. If directly confronted with a chance to act on an Obsession, a character must succeed at a Focus

Check at Above Average difficulty or be forced to act immediately and decisively. A person with an Obsession will not usually take an action which will immediately lead to his ruin, but he may do things that are very unwise when in the grip of his desires.

At its most severe, a Compulsion or Obsession becomes a Mania. A person with a Mania pursues it all his life, and must exercise great self control to avoid dealing with it at every turn. This warps a person and makes them hard to live with — it's where the term "maniac" comes from. For this reason, a gamemaster may rule that a player character cannot take a particular Mania as a Disability. Those who have a Mania must make a Focus Check to control themselves whenever faced by a hint of the focus of their madness. If directly confronted with a choice which affects their Mania, they must succeed at a Difficult Focus Check or be overwhelmed with passion and frenzy, no matter the risk. A gamemaster may rule at any time that a Mania overwhelms a character's common sense any time the gamemaster feels that the player is not pursuing the Mania with enough roleplaying fervor.

Appearance - Distinctive (0) / Remarkable (1) /

Inhuman (1) / Hideous (2): A character with a Distinctive Appearance is one who has physical attributes or other features that tends to make them stand out in a crowd, or could positively identify them. Examples might be a prominent and unusual tattoo, an absolutely perfect smile, overdeveloped musculature, an astounding hairstyle or other exaggerated human feature such as a big nose, missing teeth, or misshapen body part.

If a character has a complete package of features — physique, face, posture — that renders them immediately recognizable, that constitutes a Remarkable Appearance. The character may find difficulty finding privacy in a restaurant . . . or might not be able to avoid the attention of the police if an officer should cross his path.

Likewise, if a character has unusual features which immediately identify him as non-human, such as pointed ears or sleek fur or brown scaly skin, this qualifies as Inhuman Appearance. This may attract unwanted attention, depending on the game setting. A blue-skinned alien would probably not even be noticed in a star-spanning science fiction campaign. (In such a campaign the disability may

not even exist), but park the same being on 42nd Street in Manhattan and see the fracas.

If a character's appearance is so different or shocking as to inspire fear, disgust, or pity, the character is said to have a Hideous Appearance. People with a Hideous Appearance not only have trouble blending into a crowd, they also are handicapped in obtaining cooperation from strangers they encounter. Characters with this Disability always have the difficulty level for any attempt to get someone to trust or assist them adjusted upward one level in all situations.

Enemy - Minor (0) / Significant (1) / Major (2) /

Nemesis (3): A permanent Enemy can be a real headache for a player character. To be an Enemy, it is not enough for a non-player character to merely dislike the player character. An Enemy spends time trying to thwart the character at every turn, and will go out of her way to hurt the character when the opportunity is available.

A Minor Enemy is one who is not as powerful as the player character or is not usually in a position to do a character harm. A Significant Enemy must possess power or influence that match the player character's own. A Major Enemy is one that wields more influence or power than the player character himself.

A Nemesis is a special form of enemy. A Nemesis possesses at least as much influence and/or power as the Player Character, and also is tenacious enough to spend almost all of their time causing trouble for the character in some time. (The typical Nemesis has a Compulsion or Obsession Disability of his own involving the player character.)

If a player wishes to have an enemy for a character, it is up to the gamemaster to create an Enemy of the appropriate level and to introduce the Enemy into the campaign adventures on a frequent basis. A character's Nemesis will appear as part of an adventure at least half the time. Minor, Significant and Major Enemies will appear less frequently, but will always attempt to make the player character's life miserable when they do appear. A group of characters who work together, such as a villain group or an enemy organization, counts as one enemy, but their power and influence level is considered as a group when determining what classification of enemy they fill.

Fear (1) / Phobia (2) / Terror (3): A Fear is a person, class of people, place, object, or situation which makes a character strongly uneasy. A Character with a Fear requires an Focus Check to willingly face that Fear. If he cannot avoid his Fear, he can deal with it, but will get away from the situation as soon as it is reasonable and practical to do so. If faced with a Fear by surprise, a Focus Check is required to not reveal the Fear through a shocked or scared reaction.

A Phobia is a stronger sort of Fear. A Focus Check of Above Average difficulty is needed to willingly face a Phobia situation. If forced into a confrontation, a character's fearfulness will be noticeable, and he will flee the situation as soon as possible, even if that is very inconvenient. A surprise encounter with a Phobia requires the character to make the same roll or panic. A panicked character will immediately try to escape the thing he fears. If he cannot, he will be paralyzed with terror. Either effect will last 1D10 seconds (or Rounds).

A character who has a Terror will not willingly face the object of that terror, no matter what the circumstances. If forced to do so or faced with a Terror suddenly, he must roll a Difficult Focus Check or simply faint from fear. Otherwise, he will be unable to concentrate or do anything effective except tremble and shake for 2D10 minutes or until removed from the situation, and he will flee at first opportunity.

A Fear, Phobia or Terror that is extremely uncommon in the character's normal situation is worth one less point than normal; one that would almost never be encountered normally is worth zero points (an Eccentricity). A modern New Yorker with a Phobia about Kangaroos would get at most one point for it (but he'd want to avoid zoos and trips to Australia). If the same character had a Terror of two-foot-tall blue-skinned aliens with three eyes, he'd get zero points for that "Disability" unless yours is the sort of campaign where he might actually meet someone who fits that description.

Financial Restrictions (1) / Poverty (2): The Financial Restrictions Disability applies to any character who must be concerned about making daily normal expenses. A character with a standard 9 to 5 job that pays enough to maintain a normal middle class lifestyle does not qualify for this Disability. The gamemaster should require any character with the Financial Restrictions Disability to spend more than

the usual amount of game time dealing with the problems of earning money and making ends meet. If they do not, they will not have enough income to make expenses.

Characters with Financial Restrictions never have enough money for special purchases like crimefighting equipment unless they spend game time making special arrangements and seeking extra money. Examples of characters who might have Financial Restrictions include freelance writers or photographers, or students who also work part time.

Characters with the Poverty Disadvantage have little or no income. They must spend a great deal of game time just trying to maintain a survival-level lifestyle, and never have any extra income for non-essentials. Player characters with this Disadvantage will have little time for adventuring, so gamemasters may want to restrict the selection of this Disadvantage to non-player characters. Examples of characters with this Disadvantage include those who are out of work without any other source of savings or income, homeless persons with no income, and minor children who do not receive support from parents or a guardian.

Illiteracy (1): In game worlds where the vast majority of people can read, Illiteracy is considered a Disability. A person with this problem can understand speech, but cannot recognize more than the most basic of simple words when encountering them in print. An illiterate person may learn to drive a car, hold a job, and get through in modern society without the ability to read, but it is very difficult. The more advanced the society, the more difficult it is to survive without the ability to read.

Impaired Hearing (1) / Deafness (2): Characters with Impaired Hearing have some hearing capability, but it is limited. They receive a 1-point penalty to any Observing skill roll where sounds may be involved, including all rolls for ambush surprise (since sounds like shuffling feet or a gun being cocked are the most likely ways an ambush would be revealed). A character with this Ability also has the penalty for combat actions (only) in darkness increased by 1. The gamemaster should apply other similar penalties as appropriate.

A character with the Deafness Disability cannot hear sounds at all. They may not attempt a Observing skill roll where sound is the major

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component, and suffer a -3 penalty to all rolls for ambush surprise. They also have the penalty for combat actions (only) in darkness increased by 3.

A signed language like American Sign Language (ASL) or Signed Exact English (SEE) would be considered the “native” language for someone with Deafness. Sign languages can be bought by other characters just as any other language skill.

Lip Reading is a Knowledge skill. Someone with Capable level skill or more will be accurate with lip reading if the subject is nearby and speaking directly to them. A person with Professional skill or better will be able to read the lips of a person across a small room with great accuracy. (Vision aids like binoculars may dramatically increase the distance one can lip read.)

Gamemasters may require that players use gestures or writing to communicate with a player whose character is deaf and cannot lip read or sign.

Impaired Speech (0) / Mute (2): Characters with Impaired Speech have a recognizable hesitation or speaking restriction, such as slurred speech, a pronounced lisp, or an inability to pronounce certain sounds. The restriction does not prevent them from communicating normally with others who are native speakers of the same language, but it would make it very difficult for the character to disguise his voice.

Other characters who do not speak the language very well (such as people from other lands with a Capable skill or less) may have problems understanding the impaired speech, as they are not as instantly familiar with the sound patterns of the language. Such characters may require a Observing roll to figure out what a person is saying, especially if the speaker is in a hurry or the area is noisy.

A Mute character cannot speak at all. As with Deaf characters, a signed language is treated as a native language. The gamemaster may require the *player* of a Mute character be restricted to using gestures, sign language or writing to communicate with other players.

Impaired Vision (1) / Blindness (3): Characters with Impaired Vision have difficulty seeing under some circumstances. Many of these impairments are due to physical imperfections in the eye, like nearsightedness and farsightedness. The player and gamemaster will want to determine the exact nature

of the impairment, but in general any Impaired Vision disability will cause a -1 to skill rolls under certain conditions. For example, a Nearsighted character might be obliged to take an additional -1 on his Missile Weapon: Bow skill when attacking anything farther off than Close range.

Some possible impairments are: Nearsighted (cannot clearly see objects far away); Farsighted (cannot clearly see objects up close); Color Blindness; Night Blindness; or Poor (or No) Depth Perception. A character may take no more than two individual Impaired Vision disabilities.

Characters with Blindness cannot see at all, but they often learn to use their other senses more effectively (that is, have Acute Hearing ability). This is seldom enough to see any but the most talented fighters through a combat; Blind characters also take a -5 penalty to all Coordination-based skills. Blindness is a very significant disability in characters who may face combat situations of any sort.



Impaired Hearing, Impaired Vision and Impaired Speech were called Hearing Impairment, Vision Impairment and Speed Impediment in version 1. These names were changed to be more consistent to each other and to the Acute Hearing and Acute Vision Abilities.

Limp, Slight (0) / Severe (1): A Slight Limp is an inconvenience at times, doesn't significantly reduce a character's walking or running speed. A limp is noticeable, however, and may draw attention to the character at times when he wishes to remain unnoticed. When a character with even a Slight Limp attempts to move undetected, all Observing rolls regarding him are at one Difficulty Level easier than they otherwise would have been.

A character with a Severe Limp is significantly slowed by his injury, reducing ground Speed by 1. This character suffers a one-level penalty in all Skills when used where he is required to walk or run. (The restriction slows the character, but will not prevent him from climbing, moving carefully, etc. See Limited/Restricted Movement below. This also does not affect attacks or manipulations, but does affect all uses of the Dodging skill.)

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Manipulation, Limited (1): Characters with Limited Manipulation have a physical restriction which prevents them from effectively using one hand. This may take the form of paralysis, muscular damage, or a missing hand or arm. The use of two-handed weapons is, of course, impossible. Rifles and other two-handed firearms must be specially modified for the character's use, and they are fired at a penalty of one extra Difficulty Level in any case, unless well braced or supported in some manner. The gamemaster must rule on what actions a character cannot do, and which require a penalty be applied. If a character has had this limitation for at least three months, the hand and arm that are unrestricted are always considered to be dominant. Otherwise, if the character has lost the use of his dominant hand, he will suffer the standard penalties for off-hand use of weapons and other off-hand manipulations for the first three months after the restriction occurs.

Movement, Limited (2) / Restricted (3): Limited Movement is a Disability which encompasses any physical restriction which prevents a character from moving faster than a slow walk without assistance. The character may have a leg in a cast and be on crutches, or could be old and infirm, using a walker. For characters with Limited Movement, any task requiring them to walk or run beyond a simple, slow movement is rated at Difficult, and the gamemaster may rule that certain tasks (such as Acrobatics or climbing ladders) is simply impossible, no matter what skills they possess.

A character with Restricted Movement cannot walk at all in any circumstances without mechanical assistance, such as a wheelchair or other mobility aid. Deprived of their mobility aid, they can only crawl, and all Skill use depending on walking or running is denied to them. If a character has a mobility device that is attached to his body in any way (such as powered artificial limbs, a semipermanently mounted powered carriage, a flying platform, or just the ability to levitate or fly), he cannot claim these two disabilities.

Mobility devices used by characters claiming this Disability must be simple devices similar to a wheelchair. Please remember that people who use wheelchairs are perfectly capable of driving a properly-equipped car and operating normally in areas where there is room for their mobility devices. It is only in places where mobility devices are

restricted (on stairs, over broken terrain, in close quarters, etc.) where they will suffer mobility penalties.

Restricted Activity (1): Characters with this Disability are faced with a life situation which makes greater demands on their time than a normal 9-to-5 job. The character cannot easily solve the problem just by hiring extra help or using superhuman abilities. One example would be a character who has a small child or elderly relative who requires attention for large parts of the day. Another would be a busy doctor or public official who, because of his prominence and/or workload, would find it difficult to get away easily to go adventuring. A third example might be someone whose very freedom was restricted, such as a character who was institutionalized in a hospital, sanitarium, or even a jail. A character who must maintain two jobs (for a total of 60 hours a week of work or more) to maintain a middle class lifestyle might also qualify as having Restricted Activity.

Secret - Minor (0) / Significant (1) / Major (2):

A Secret, for purposes of this Disability, is defined as a piece of knowledge which, once publicly known, would cause considerable and continuing trouble for the character. The amount of trouble caused determines the level of the Secret.

If a Secret only causes a brief inconvenience, it does not create this Disability. The problems generated must be ones that cannot be easily ignored or tossed aside.

A Minor Secret is one that provides a continuing annoyance, but does not necessarily injure the character or restrict his activities significantly. A "secret identity" (as might be possessed by a superhuman hero) is usually only a Minor Secret if the character has nothing else to hide or protect.

Characters who operate along the fine edge of the legal system, or have powerful enemies and vulnerable dependents, might consider a "secret identity" to be a Significant Secret. If a character is wanted by police (in either identity), or would sacrifice his freedom or life should a secret be discovered, the "secret identity" qualifies as a Major Secret.

There are other types of secrets a character might not want revealed. A weakness, handicap, or

hideous appearance might be concealed from the public. These would count as a Secret until revealed, then would count as other Disabilities after they were discovered. But a character would not be allowed to claim both disabilities at once. A character who had a family connection with a prominent underworld figure has a Minor Secret, since the connection when revealed, would cause people to mistrust him. If a character were actively wanted by some police agency, that should qualify as a Significant Secret, since the revelation would lead to lengthy and expensive legal entanglements, or perhaps even to the character's imprisonment.

A character who is a double agent for a foreign power, or who pursues villainous activities at night to finance his daytime leisurely persona, has a Major Secret, since the revelation of the secret would bring an end to his current lifestyle altogether. The final arbiter of Secrets and their level is the gamemaster.

If a Secret is revealed in the course of a game campaign, the gamemaster should apply other Disabilities totaling the same number of points as a result of the revelation to make up for the end of the Secret. Thus, a character whose dark past was revealed might suffer instead from Restricted Activity because he must be in court so frequently to defend himself, or might gain an additional Enemy now that his clandestine activities are revealed.

Water Shy (1): The character is totally incompetent when in the water. He may never learn the Swimming skill or any skill which depends on Swimming (such as Scuba). This represents any impaired physical ability, though a Fear or Phobia of the water may very often accompany this Disability.

Personal Skills Descriptions

(bonus + appropriate Stat)

Brawling (Strength): Brawling is a basic unarmed combat skill, representing raw punching without much in the way of finesse. The Brawling skill can be used to clobber anyone, but it can be used to Defend skill only against other bare-handed attacks. For more refined versions of unarmed combat, a character must choose a Martial Arts skill (or a sub-skill of same). Brawling skill ratings (and most other Strength-based skills) are always based on the "regular" Strength of the character, never on the adjusted Strength.

Climbing (Coordination): This skill governs climbing without special equipment, including scaling rocks or walls, climbing trees, pulling one's self out of pits or holes, working one's way up narrow shafts, etc.

Convincing (Intellect): This skill gives the character the ability to persuade others and tell believable stories (true or not). The Difficulty of a Convincing task depends on how much evidence exists to support the story and the beliefs and prejudices of the person hearing the story. A person is more likely to believe a story which fits with what he wants to believe, coming from someone who he has reason to like or believe.

The listener is also more likely to believe someone when belief carries some concrete or psychological reward for the listener. A filthy trollop, thrown in a jail, has little chance to convince the guard that she is a wealthy heiress who has been imprisoned unjustly, who should be freed immediately. First, there is no evidence to support the story. Second, the guard has no reason to like or believe her. Third, there is no incentive for the guard to take a risk on her behalf. If she should show the guard the distinctive birthmark on her arm, share a hoarded cigarette with her captor, and offer to make him an officer in her private bodyguard force once she is free, the guard may be more willing to look the other way while she steals his keys.

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Dodging (Coordination): This is the ability to avoid things that are thrust or thrown, such as swords, chairs, or rocks. It is often used as a defensive skill in combat, although it can be used in other ways in special situations, such as dodging a falling object. One cannot dodge faster projectiles such as sling stones, arrows or bullets without an appropriate Ability that allows one to react and move faster than a normal human.

(For example, a character with superhuman Speed, or one with very high Martial Arts ability of an appropriate type, might be allowed to dodge arrows or even bullets in some game worlds.)

Grappling (Strength): Grappling is the second basic unarmed combat skill, representing pure grip strength, power and leverage. Grappling cannot be used to hit someone, but it can be used to force another into an uncomfortable and ineffectual position. For more refined versions of unarmed combat, a character must choose a Martial Arts skill. Unlike other Strength-based skills, Grappling skill level is based on the adjusted Strength of the character.

Jumping (Strength): This score tells how well the character can jump, applying both to jumping up (high jump) and jumping out (broad jump).

Of course, anyone can jump, but a person with this skill has training in jumping, and can get the maximum result for his natural ability. Instead of measuring jumps by length or height, the gamemaster should assign a Difficulty to a jump based on how hard it would be for the average man to succeed.

Lifting (Strength): This skill is tested whenever a character attempts to lift a heavy weight, whether the character is a weight lifter going for a bench press or a desperate adventurer trying to get a fallen beam off a trapped friend. Again, the gamemaster should measure the Difficulty of a lift by how hard it would be for the average man, rather than dealing in specific weights. Note that the proficiency at lifting is governed by (natural) Strength, but the amount lifted is directed by adjusted Strength.

Observing (Intellect): The innate ability to notice things that are out of place, or see the finer details of a situation. A character will often use this skill to test whether or not he sees something in the game. See also the section on Observing skill rolls in the rules section.

Researching (Intellect): This is the ability to find whatever factual knowledge the character needs, when a source is not immediately obvious. It would allow the character to find information in a library, through experimentation, or by interview.

Task Difficulty should be determined by the availability of research materials and the obscurity of the facts being pursued. Finding the current statistical information about a country would be an Easy task at any public library. Proving that a particular individual was the long-lost heir to the throne of Muratania would be a Difficult task, even with access to the Kingdom's birth records or the Palace archives, and perhaps impossible without such materials. A character with both the Speedreading and Photographic Memory Abilities can make Researching rolls at one Skill Level higher than their actual Skill Level, if research is done in books or other printed material, due to the sheer volume of material they can digest in a short time.

Running (Strength): Of course, any character can run, but a character with the Running skill has training in running, allowing him to make the most of natural abilities. Included in this skill is the ability to pace oneself and run for longer distances without tiring. Characters with Running Skill at Capable level receive a +1 to their Speed Stat; they receive +2 if the skill is at Expert level.

Teaching (Intellect): This skill allows the character to pass along any knowledge or skills to any other character, according to the rules for learning and improving skills. Any character can try to instruct another, but the teacher must have a Skill Level in the subject higher than the student. For example, a person with Professional level skill can teach a person with no skill, or someone with Familiar or Capable level skill. But a Professional cannot teach another Professional, even if the teacher's specific Skill rating is higher.

Physical Skills Descriptions (bonus + Coordination)

Acrobatics: Using this skill, the character can perform flips, twirls, and specialized jumps. If the character wanted to dive into a room, tuck and roll, and come up firing, he would use this skill to determine whether or not he ended up where he wanted to be in preparation for firing.

Blacksmith: This is the ability to work metal by hand into useful implements, including but not limited to simple tools, horseshoes, and metal melee weapons, shields and armor.

Disguise: This is the ability to make yourself appear to be someone (or something) else. The character can use make-up and costuming, and can also change his stance and walk to deceive others.

Escape: The ability to get out of traps, bonds and similar restraints capable of holding a normal person. A character who was tied securely to a chair or locked in handcuffs would use this skill to free himself.

Forgery: This skill allows the character to copy any type of writing style, counterfeit money, and create fictitious documents. A character with this skill would also be adept at detecting another's forgery.

Gunsmith: Knowledge of missile weapons and their construction of types appropriate to the character's time and locale. The actual conduct of this skill depends somewhat on the setting.

In the 17th to 20th centuries, this skill covers firearms and their construction; in future-based campaigns, this would cover Blasters and Lasers.

Characters with this skill at Familiar level can tear down and reassemble weapons of any type which they possess an appropriate Missile Weapon skill at Familiar level or above. Possession of this skill at Capable level or above allows a character detailed knowledge of techniques for modification and enhancement of these weapons, and for custom loading of appropriate ammunition (or fine-tuning the emission traits of energy weapons). Characters with Professional level skill or higher know enough to actually design and construct such weapons, given the proper tools and materials. Characters may

also use this skill for weapons not of their time, if they also have a Knowledge skill relating to such weapons. The effective Gunsmith skill when used with weapons of another era can be no higher than the appropriate Knowledge skill. Thus, a Gunsmith of Professional level in the 1990s who also has a Capable level skill Knowledge: Ancient Firearms could work on a Revolutionary War musket or an old French wheellock pistol at Capable level.

Lockpicking: Used to open any kind of lock. For combination locks, the character will need no tools, but most other locks will require some form of lock pick. Using improvised tools (such as hair pins or needles) will make the task more difficult. In modern and science fiction settings, the "lockpicks" may be some sort of electronic gizmo. This would still be a Physical skill for the precise movements required even with electronic assistance.

Martial Arts: This is trained unarmed combat ability (as opposed to just pummeling, which is covered under the Brawling Personal Skill). Martial Arts can be a single skill for games not requiring a lot of detail, or it can be a General Skill with subskills such as boxing, karate, judo, taekwondo, etc. Martial Arts at any level can be used as a Defense skill (allowing the character to choose the Defend option in melee combat).

At Capable level, it also gives the character a +1 to his bare hand damage, Professional level gives the character a +2, and Expert a +3. When using subskills, the subskill variants may have special bonuses or maneuvers on top of (or instead of) the general bonuses at advanced levels.

Melee Weapon: This General Skill covers all types of hand-held weapons. Appropriate sub-skills include Knife, Sword, Pole Arms, Axes, and Fencing. Melee weapons which use focused energy fields are also here: the e-Blade and e-Sword.

Missile Weapons: This General Skill covers all weapons that shoot. Sub-skills include Bows, Handguns, Rifles, Crossbows, Shotguns, and Submachine Guns. Ranged energy weapons also count as missile weapons — Blasters emit discreet packets of energy (of whatever kind), while Lasers give continuous beams.

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Mountaineering: Using this skill, a character will know how to climb up rocks, mountains, elevator shafts, and similar vertical expanses using specialized equipment (climbing boots, pitons, ropes, etc.). The character will also be able to rappel down similar vertical faces. Characters climbing without equipment would use the Climbing skill.

Off-Hand Weapon: Under most conditions a fighter attempting to use a weapon in his non-dominant hand experiences a -2 penalty on all rolls. However, some weapons and fighting styles are designed to use the off-hand effectively. Each weapon used in this way should be purchased as a separate sub-skill; for example, Off-Hand Weapon: Main-Gauche.

When the skill is known at Familiar level the character has only a -1 off-hand penalty (not -2).

When the skill is known at Capable level, the character suffers no off-hand penalty with that weapon.

When the skill is known at Professional level the character has no off-hand penalty and can choose to Attack a single target (in a single Attack action) with both weapons at a -2 penalty on each attack roll.

When the skill is known at Expert level the character has no off-hand penalty and can choose to Attack a single target (in a single Attack action) with both weapons at no penalty; or can attack two different targets (in a single Attack action) with a -2 penalty on each attack roll.



Off-Hand Weapon is a new skill, created for the **PlainLabel Armories**, added to **Compact Combat**, and included here for your stylish fighting pleasure.

Parachuting: Gives the character the knowledge and abilities to sky dive and parachute from high altitudes. With the proper equipment, such as a parasail, the character can even make precision landings. Combined with Stealth, this skill would allow the character to parachute silently into a target area.

Pickpocket: This skill allows the character to pick pockets, lift wallets, and cut purses without detection by the victim or bystanders.

Riding: The General Skill to ride an animal or similar mount. A different sub-skill is required for each different type of mount, such as horse, camel, dragon, etc.

Shield: Use of this skill will provide some protection from most hand to hand weapons. Shield skill includes the medieval shields, the composite material riot shields of contemporary police use, and handheld energy shields.

Sleight of Hand: This skill is not only useful for stage magic and illusion, but is also used in cons (the old shell game or three card monte) and can even be used to keep a captor from seeing an important object such as a lock pick or other small object.

Sports: Another General Skill; choose a sport subskill in which to specialize, such as Football, Basketball, Roller Derby, or Professional Wrestling.

Note that the basic practice of some sports, such as gymnastics (Acrobatics), competitive swimming (Swimming), rodeo riding (Riding), track (Running) and fencing (Melee Weapon: Sword) can be covered by other skills. For tasks in these areas, use the specific skill related to the practice or the Sport skill - 4, whichever is higher. Note that the Sports skill also includes the practical matters of competition. Thus, a person with a high Swimming skill, but no rating in the matching Sports: Competitive Swimming skill may be competent in the water, but not versed in the techniques of competitive swimmers. Familiarity with the rules of a sport are also assumed within a Sports skill, but a person who knows ONLY rules, histories, and trivia about a sport without actually being a player would have a Knowledge skill, not a Sports skill.

Thus, "armchair quarterbacks" and team owners who never played competitively might have high Knowledge: Professional Football skills without having a Sports: Football skill at all.

Stealth: This skill allows the character to move around silently and unobtrusively. The character also knows how to take advantage of available cover. This skill can be combined with Swimming to allow the character to enter the water and swim silently.

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Swimming: The character knows how to move and maneuver in the water. Note: A character may opt to have NO knowledge of swimming (Water Shy Disability), but should the character ever find himself in deep water he will certainly drown unless someone is there to support him.

Thrown Weapon: This General Skill allows the character to throw objects in such a way as to inflict damage on some target. The Thrown Weapon sub-skills are Knives, Spears and Small Objects. Note that throwing knives are specially made blades that are balanced for throwing.

Thrown Weapon: Knives also covers throwing stars and throwing axes. Small Objects includes such things as rocks, bricks, and any other blunt object that is compact and relatively dense.

Vacuum Suit: The knowledge of how to use and operate a vacuum or pressure suit in space. It can also determine how fast the character can get into a suit in emergency conditions. Does not automatically grant the ability to move in a controlled fashion in free fall (see Zero-G Maneuvering, below).

Vehicle Operation: This General Skill is the ability to drive or operate different types of vehicles.

Examples of the sub-skills are Automobile, Large Truck, Motor Boat, Sailing Boat, Airplane, Helicopter, Hovercraft, Starship, etc.

Zero-G Maneuvering: This skill gives the character the ability to move purposefully and in a controlled fashion in a low or zero gravity area such as an orbiting spacecraft or on the moon.

The character knows how to keep from drifting, how to move purposefully, and how to maintain his equilibrium. It may be combined with combat skills to fight in zero gravity without penalties.

(When fighting in low or zero gravity conditions, the effective combat skill can never be higher than the Zero-G Maneuvering skill.) Does not grant the ability to use a pressure suit (see Vacuum Suit). These two skills work well together, and often might both be tested when a character must perform complex tasks while suited up in free fall.

Mental Skills Descriptions

(*bonus + Intellect*)

Animal Handling: This is the knowledge of how to approach and behave around wild and domesticated animals, and how to train more intelligent and tractable species.

Artistic Expression: Each type of artistic expression is considered a sub-skill, and must be purchased separately. Sub-skills include Musical Composition, Painting, Drawing, Photography, or Holography.

Civil Engineering: This skill includes the abilities to design and construct static structures such as bridges and tunnels, and would give the character insights into the weaknesses of such structures, and what to look for to find any flaws in their construction.

Combat Awareness: The training to spot weaknesses in enemies, and advantages for the character and his allies. Higher levels of this skill grant improved Initiative bonuses.



Command skill is provided below as a convenience to those using the **Simply Roleplaying!** rules to prepare Hero or Leader characters for **Budget Battlefield**, or for **Simply Roleplaying!** characters who might find themselves on the **Budget Battlefield**. If your character will not be used in our sister game, don't waste your Skill Purchase Points on Command — just play commandingly!

Command: This is the skill of leading men in battle. The higher the skill, the better the character can direct the actions of a group of soldiers (or sailors or a space fighter squadron).

Optionally, a higher skill level can suggest the maximum number of units the character can successfully command. This is the skill of directing subordinates in the heat of mass combat; tactics and strategy are separate subskills of Knowledge.

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Computer Operation: This skill allows the character to operate a computer at a technology level with which he is familiar. The character will be able to navigate through a computer's menus or structure and give it basic user commands, run existing programs, and perform tasks for which the particular interface was designed at the common user level, but cannot alter its programming or repair a damaged component beyond simple replacement (swapping hard drives, changing cables, etc.). A character operating a computer with a technology base that is unfamiliar (for example, a personal computer user from the year 2000 trying to operate an early Altair from the 1960s or a neural interface system from the mid-2100s) will operate with at least one level penalty to their effective skill.

Computer Programming: This is the ability to design sequences of instructions for a computer to carry out. The character might even be able to change the programming in a computer, if he has the proper access and security passwords.

This skill may also be used to attempt to circumvent computer security measures. As with Computer Operation, a penalty applies when programming systems of unfamiliar technology.

If the programming language and/or interface is significantly different than a character is used to, the gamemaster may rule that use of the skill is simply inappropriate.

Computer Technology: The ability to diagnose, repair, and design computer hardware, given proper tools, parts, and facilities. As with Computer Operation, a penalty applies when working with systems of unfamiliar technology. If the technology is significantly different than a character is used to, the gamemaster may rule that use of the skill is simply inappropriate.

Criminal Investigation: The knowledge of what to look for and how to look for clues and information at the scene of a crime, including the basics of evidence gathering and preservation as well as locating and interviewing witnesses.

Demolition: This skill allows the character to set or deactivate explosive devices and traps, and gives the information about where to place charges for maximum effect.

Electronics: The ability to diagnose and repair electronic circuitry (or similar technology in science fiction settings.) The character can also design specialized circuits and build them. This skill can be used instead of Computer Technology at a task modifier of -2. A skill penalty can be applied by the gamemaster when working with unfamiliar levels of technology, or — if the technology involved is significantly different — the gamemaster may rule that use of the skill is simply inappropriate.

First Aid: Used to repair minor wounds and keep injuries from becoming more severe, usually in an emergency situation where professional medical care is unavailable.

Gambling: Knowledge of the rules, odds and techniques for almost any form of gambling. This definitely includes knowledge of ways to cheat (shaving or weighting dice, marking cards, etc.), although the practice of some forms of cheating (especially card manipulations like dealing from the bottom or palming a card) require Sleight of Hand skill.

History: This is a General Skill that breaks down into sub-skills representing certain specialty areas, such as American History, American Civil War, Ancient Rome, Ancient Egypt and so on.

Hypnotism: Using this skill, a character can try to hypnotize another character. This only works if the subject is willing, and no subject can be made to perform a task while hypnotized that he would have a strong moral objection to while awake.

Thus, a character cannot be hypnotized, handed a gun and told to shoot someone (unless he's a homicidal maniac when he's not hypnotized!) Hypnosis can be used to find out details that a character had forgotten or suppressed and can be a valuable tool for investigation.

Inventing: This is the ability to put two ideas together and come up with something new, as it applies to technology or gadgetry. An inventor need not be expert in the theory behind the technology he works with. (Such a person would be an Engineer.) The inventor is not developing new theory, only recognizing and exploiting existing developments in a new way. This skill might be used by someone

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attempting to create an improved form of drive gear for a bicycle, or modifying a car to make it watertight for use as a boat. It would not be used to develop something outside known science (like a time machine), or to make a breakthrough in a highly technical field (like building an atomic bomb that can fit inside a wristwatch).

Knowledge: This General Skill reflects specialized knowledge in any esoteric area. Knowledge skills are often less formal and rigorous than Science skills and are seldom taught at institutions; one must seek out someone with the special knowledge and learn from them directly.

Examples of Knowledge sub-skills include Occult, Baseball Teams/Players, Pottery, etc. Specialized Knowledge skills may enhance the use of technical skills as applied to archaic technologies.

Languages: Another General Skill; each sub-skill purchased would represent a different language.

Note: All characters are fluent in their native language. You may consider their skill level in the native language as equal to their Focus Check. It can then be improved from this base just as any other skill.

If a non-native character has been in a certain area for at least five years, he will gain this benefit to the new language as well. Thus, a native speaking German (Intellect 5; Language: German-10) who had spent at least five years in the United States would gain Language: English-10); the player could then allocate a further Capable skill to it, receiving a +4 bonus and resulting in Language: English-14.

Languages can be spoken, written, signed or any combination of those traits.

Law: This is the General Skill reflecting knowledge of the law. It may be broken into sub-skills to represent specialization in different types of laws, or laws for different countries or lands. If no sub-skill is declared, only knowledge of law in the the character's native land & time may be assumed.



Lip Reading was removed from the skill list; it is now a Knowledge skill, as is described under the description of Deafness Disability (page 30).

Mechanic: The General Skill of how to fix machinery, particularly (but not necessarily limited to) vehicles. Each sub-skill represents a different type of machine such as Automobile, Light Aircraft, Rotary Aircraft, and so on. (Sub-skills for Mechanic and for Vehicle Operation will be available in very similar categories.)

Mechanical Engineering: This skill gives the character the ability to design and build mechanical objects that move and/or manipulate objects. (That is, things you operate with Vehicle Operation skill and repair with Mechanic skill.) For example an Automobile Designer or a Starship Architect would need this skill.

Medicine: This is the science of treatment of illnesses and injuries. A doctor would have at least Professional level in Medicine skill, while a nurse would require Capable level. Different Races would have different Medicine skills.

Merchant: This skill allows the character to value merchandise, bargain for it, or negotiate a sale to another person to best advantage. If merchandise is particularly specialized (antique jewelry, obscure collectibles, rare coins or stamps, etc.), assigning value to it may require an appropriate Knowledge skill as well.

Military Engineering: The skill of designing and constructing fortifications, accesses and other combat structures under adverse conditions. This is what the Army Corps of Engineers and the Navy SeaBees do. Includes the ability to evaluate a piece of terrain for its offensive and defensive strengths and weaknesses, and to spot weaknesses in enemy constructions that can be exploited.

Naturalist: The study of wild plants and animals. This skill could be used to find herbs and plants that cure diseases and poisons, or to locate dangerous animals or insects. In more modern cultures, the general naturalist skill is still useful and practiced by many, but advanced knowledge (such as specifics of pharmaceutical uses, ability to refine drugs of predictable strength, information about the specific effects of herbicides on certain plants, etc.) may require an appropriate Science skill.

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Navigation: The General Skill of plotting a course from one place to another, using tools appropriate to the period and mode of travel. Sub-skills would include Ocean Navigation, Aircraft Navigation, Spacecraft Navigation, and Orienteering (Overland Navigation).

Performance: A General Skill representing the ability to present one's self before an audience. Sub-skills would include Acting, Dancing, Singing, Oratory, or a specific Musical Instrument.

Science: The General Skill of the study of some aspect of the natural world. Sciences are often rigorously structured and taught in major social institutions (as contrasted to Knowledge skills). Science has a nearly endless list of sub-skills:

Biochemistry: The study of the chemistry of life. This skill would also include knowledge of pharmaceuticals and how they are derived and used.
Botany: the study of plant life. It includes everything from identification and classification to understanding what a plant needs to live. A character could use Botany to identify a certain type of plant, or diagnose why a plant was dying.

Chemistry: study of physical materials and their interaction at the molecular level. This skill can be used to predict reactions between two or more chemicals, help identify a chemical (given the proper equipment), and make small quantities of chemical compounds (given the proper ingredients).

Geology: The study of rock formations and structure. A character with a high level of this skill may even be able to tell where a particular specimen came from.

Physics: study of physical materials at any scale. Professional level knowledge could include such specialties as Quantum Physics and Nuclear Physics.

Physiology: The study of how animals work, including knowledge of anatomy.

Psychology: The study of the mind. A character may be able to use this skill to guess how an opponent is going to react in a given situation, or persuade the reaction the character wants.

Xenobiology: This is the study of life forms that are not native to the user's normal biosphere, such as plants and animals from other planets or dimensional realms. The character will have specific knowledge pertaining to "alien" biospheres known

to his culture, and be able to make educated study of totally unknown biospheres as well.

Zoology: The study of animal life. A character with this skill could identify most species of animals of his own native world, or at least identify them with closely related animals.

Scrounging: This skill helps the character locate almost anything he might be looking for (or at least come up with a usable temporary substitute), even when a source might not be immediately obvious. This might include locating and dealing with the local black market, acquiring materials through military channels, searching for an appropriate tool, or finding an obscure collectible. The task difficulty when using this skill should be based on the rarity of the item sought and the likelihood of a source being immediately available. A scrounger would not be able to locate a radio in the middle of a desert, for example. But, should an Arab caravan pass by, he'd have a chance that the nomads had possession of one that they wouldn't mind selling.

Scuba: This represents the specialized knowledge which allows the character to use portable air tanks, swim underwater for extended periods of time, and avoid diving-related hazards such as nitrogen narcosis. Though this is a Mental skill, the Physical skill of Swimming is a prerequisite.

The character must have a Swimming skill rating the same or higher than the Scuba skill rating. When performing tasks underwater, use the Scuba skill, not the Swimming skill, to determine success.

Seamanship: This is the knowledge to operate as crew aboard a wind-powered sailing vessel, including knowledge of the ways of sea and weather and the dangers pertaining to sailing in open water. Operation of motorboats is a subskill of Vehicle Operation.

Social Grace: This is the knowledge of how to blend in with higher social circles. It would include etiquette, knowledge of fashions, and the proper forms of address in all situations. A penalty may be applied by the gamemaster when a character is dealing with a culture with significantly different social custom than his own.

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Streetwise: This skill is the equivalent of Survival, but in an urban setting. Streetwise characters know their way around cities, particularly among people of the less-advantaged social levels. They know how to discover and use the patterns of power and influence in an urban underworld, even (with appropriate penalties) in unfamiliar cities. Such characters more easily learn who to bribe and how much, what neighborhoods and locations are dangerous and how to get around in them safely, and what methods of getting around law enforcement are most likely to be successful. Streetwise characters may very well be law-abiding citizens (though some aren't), but they know how to survive in the city even in places and situations where the law won't or can't protect them.

Survival: This is the ability to find shelter and food in the wilderness, and avoid natural hazards of the environment. Each sub-skill reflects a different climate such as Arctic, Desert or Temperate.

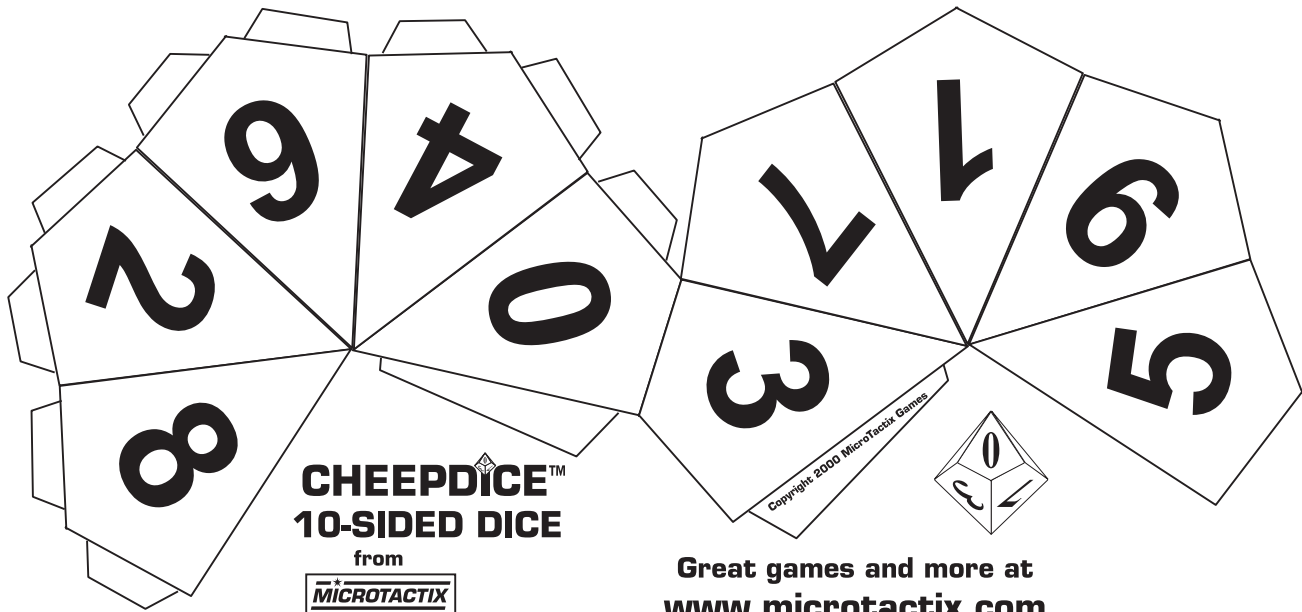
Theology: The General Skill showing advanced knowledge of the history and the practices of a particular religion, beyond that known by the average worshiper. Each general type of religion would be a different sub-skill of Theology.

Tracking: The ability to follow the traces, tracks or spoor of any other creature. A character with this skill would be adept at spotting the small signs that his prey had been in the area.

Traps: This skill can be used to find, set and disarm traps. Though most frequently used to trap prey animals in the wilds, it can also be adapted and applied to set or disarm non-explosive booby-traps (like deadfalls, tripwires, etc.) for human prey. (Got explosive booby-traps? Use Demolition skill.)


Veterinary: This skill is the equivalent of Medicine for animals. A character with this skill could treat humans in a very basic fashion in a pinch, with a -2 modifier applied and no complex or lengthy treatments allowed.

Writing: This General Skill reflects the ability to communicate with written language. Sub-skills include Poetry, Fiction, Non-Fiction, and Journalism.



ACTION RULES


Well, now we've got our characters... what do we do with them?



Playing a roleplaying game is extremely simple. The gamemaster will describe the location and situation in which the character finds himself. Each player describes his character's response to that situation; the gamemaster describes the effect of that response, and so on. Occasionally, a situation will arise in which a character must test a Skill or make a Check. When that happens, the player rolls 2D10. If the roll is equal to or lower than the target number (as determined by the gamemaster), the character succeeds at his task. If the roll is higher than the target, the character fails at that task and may need to try again, get help, or rethink his approach entirely!

Let's look at an example, with our demonstration character Jason Decker.



 **GAMEMASTER:** Decker is riding along with Jacobs, a uniformed motor patrolman who has been filling Decker in about a recent series of robberies in this area. During the conversation, Jacobs spots a speeder in a vintage red Mustang fastback and pulls him over. "Be right back", he tells you as he gets out to write the ticket. As Jacobs approaches the car, the passenger door opens suddenly and a man pops out with a submachine gun, firing. What do you do?

DECKER'S PLAYER: (thinking fast) Uh... I duck.

GAMEMASTER: Good plan. Make an Agility Check.

DECKER'S PLAYER: [rolls dice] I make it by 2.

GAMEMASTER: Good enough. The windshield explodes above you, showering you with glass, and you hear bullets ricochet off metal. Now what?

DECKER'S PLAYER: I draw my gun and wait a second for the shooting to stop, then I pop back up with my gun pointed through the shattered windshield in the general direction of the Mustang. What do I see?

GAMEMASTER: The Mustang is starting up, and a figure is getting into the passenger side.

DECKER'S PLAYER: Where's Jacobs?

GAMEMASTER: You look around but don't see Jacobs immediately. The Mustang begins to pull away.

DECKER'S PLAYER: I fire at the person getting in on the passenger side.

GAMEMASTER: Too late! He's in and the car is moving!

DECKER'S PLAYER: In that case, I make a note of the license number. Do I get it before the car pulls away?

GAMEMASTER: I don't know. Let's do an Observing test for you and see... [rolls secretly]...

Not all tasks require Skill Tests or Special Checks, of course.

Most of the time the action of the game is just a matter of the player describing what his character wants to do and the gamemaster describing what the character sees and hears and what results from the actions the character takes. Dice rolling enters the game only when there is a reasonable question about the ability of the character to accomplish the action or task described by the player.

The following two examples of play from our other sample game settings will give you an idea of some of the ways that gamemasters and players interact (even without Tests or Checks) in describing the action during a roleplaying session.

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CRISSA'S PLAYER: I'll run a fast system check, and if everything is all right, I'll turn it over to the autopilot altogether and try and catch a nap. How long till this shuttle gets to the rendezvous point?

GAMEMASTER: Six hours at moderate speed. At that, you'll be there two hours before your ship is due.

CRISSA'S PLAYER: So there's no hurry. Fine. First solo mission nearly completed! If everything's cool, I'm napping. Have the computer wake me one hour out of the rendezvous.

GAMEMASTER: Nighty-night! (Gamemaster pauses and rolls dice behind his propped-up notebook for a moment — just to make the player nervous — then suddenly jumps to his feet, waves his arms and yells.)

DING-DING-DING-DING-DING-DING—

CRISSA'S PLAYER: (Jumps, startled) What? What? What's going on?!?

GAMEMASTER: You're awakened at the controls by flashing red lights and a loud bell. It's the fire alarm.

DING-DING-DING-DING-DING-DING—

CRISSA'S PLAYER: Fire! Here on the shuttle? Do I see anything?

GAMEMASTER: You see nothing immediately in the cabin. DING-DING-DING-DING-DING-DING—

CRISSA'S PLAYER: I shut the dratted alarm off! What does the warning board say?

GAMEMASTER: The alarm stops. According to the warning lights, there's a fire in the hold. Fire suppression systems are already activated.

CRISSA'S PLAYER: I'll run back there and check it out!

GAMEMASTER: You get to the hatch and it's locked by the fire suppression system. You have to override it to get in.

CRISSA'S PLAYER: I punch in my override code.

GAMEMASTER: The light turns green and the hatch bolts retract. The door slides open.

CRISSA'S PLAYER: I quickly go inside. What's going on in there?

GAMEMASTER: The hold area's pretty crowded, but it's pretty obvious where the trouble is. Overhead sprayers are dumping fire suppressant gel in the far corner, where it appears a small crate is the source of some smoke. It's smoldering...

CRISSA'S PLAYER: What the heck? I look it over. Is the fire out?

GAMEMASTER: It's pretty much out now, yes. The sprayer system shuts off automatically. You examine the crate and see that it's just a plastic cargo crate that's been ripped open, stuffed with torn paper, and set aflame.

CRISSA'S PLAYER: But there's nobody aboard except me —

GAMEMASTER: (Smiles) Too late. You hear a creak behind you an instant before you feel the blast of a stunner and lapse into unconsciousness...

Notice the give-and-take between gamemaster and player in this example. Also notice the use of “sound effects” — the gamemaster gives the player minimal information and boosts the tension level with his incessant “DING-DING-DING-DING”-ing. Part of the gamemaster’s job is to serve as *all* the character’s senses, not just reporting what the character sees.

Notice also the end of this scene. It might seem unfair that the gamemaster doesn’t even give Crissa a chance to notice or escape the stunner bolt. In some scenes, it *would* be unfair. At the climax of the adventure, for example, having the gamemaster control the outcome would be very unsatisfying to the players. But this scene reflects the start of something new and different for our Crissa. It’s always fair for the gamemaster to surprise the characters with new situations and challenges.

Now let’s see what “Grasp” is up to...

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GRASP'S PLAYER: Things have been a little slow around Bardston this week. I think I'll put on a good cloak and wander down to the Travelers' Inn to see if there's anything interesting going on. Maybe there's a caravan in.

GAMEMASTER: You don't see any wagons nearby as you approach the Travelers' Inn, so I wouldn't count on a caravan. There are a few horse tied up outside, though.

GRASP'S PLAYER: I go in, and take a table in the corner if one is available.

GAMEMASTER: No problem. The place is less than half-full, even though you've arrived just about dinner time. A barmaid comes over quickly. (Changing to a higher, gently-toned voice for the barmaid...) "Good evening. Might I bring you wine, or perhaps a spot of supper? Cook's got a nice stew this evening..."

GRASP'S PLAYER: (Now speaking in character to the barmaid, not as player-to-gamemaster.) "Yes, a mulled wine would be nice on this cold night, and some of the stew as well." (Out of character now...) I place a couple of coppers on the table and push them toward her. (Back in character...) "More like that if you stir the fire before you fetch my supper."

GAMEMASTER: Not *many* more, pal. Not in *your* purse anyway! (In character as the barmaid...) "Thank ye kindly, sir! I'll surely do that!" (Out of character...) And before you ask — yes, she *is* pretty as barmaids go..."

GRASP'S PLAYER: Later, perhaps, if the night stays cold. In the meantime, who else is here?

GAMEMASTER: Three city guardsmen are sitting near the fire. Looks like they might have just come off duty and are knocking back a flagon of mead or three before going home. They're well along toward drunk.

A human male in green and a Kavan woman in grey are sitting at a back table, talking very quietly. The man has a bow leaning against the wall near him, and a quiver at his feet.

GRASP'S PLAYER: Hunter? Wrong time of year for that. Who else?

GAMEMASTER: Just a man sitting to the left of the door, not far from you. He's wearing a heavy cloak, and he's got his head down over a bowl of stew. Two rough traveling bags piled up next to him.

GRASP'S PLAYER: Hmmm. Vagabond of some kind. Maybe. Are his boots scuffed and dusty?

GAMEMASTER: (Innocently...) Why, as a matter of fact, they do seem rather bright and shiny for a vagabond who is dressed so crudely.

GRASP'S PLAYER: This isn't good. Is he armed?

GAMEMASTER: Not visibly. He looks up just for a moment, staring over at the human and Kavan across the room. Now, he's reaching into one of his bundles and rummaging around...

GRASP'S PLAYER: (Seeing it coming...) I ready a dagger, under the table, just in case.

GAMEMASTER: ...and the vagabond comes up with a small pistol crossbow, aiming it at the man in green!

GRASP'S PLAYER: Oh, heck. I know I'm going to hate myself for getting involved, but — I try to throw the dagger at the vagabond before he can loose the crossbow bolt!

GAMEMASTER: (Smiling and reaching for his dice...) I just *knew* you would...


Notice how the gamemaster builds a sense of "place" around the Travelers' Inn and Bardston. The exterior, the interior, the personages inside... all are invoked with a few well-chosen details, making the game more enjoyable.

The gamemaster adopts a special voice when he speaks for the barmaid. As a gamemaster (or a player), you needn't be a world-famous impressionist when you play. You *do* need to make your characters memorable and distinct. How you do that depends on your personal array of skills and abilities. Play to your strengths!

A last thought about the close of this scene: Gamemasters will (and should!) always arrange affairs to interact directly with a character's personality and quirks. That includes (in this case) deliberately preying on "Grasp"'s Compulsion to help others. This isn't playing dirty; this is making the game fun!

Tasks, Tests, Contests and Checks

It'll happen: sometimes the method of talking give-and-take won't satisfy the dramatic or physical needs of the story. When that happens, it's time to roll dice, usually as part of a Test or Contest.




Whenever a dice roll is called for, the gamemaster sets a Target Number and the player must roll less than or equal to that value on 2D10.

Tasks

A *Task* is something the character wants to do which may or may not succeed, depending on his natural abilities and competence, from lifting that hay bale to running fast enough to catch that mail carrier, to blasting the foe with his submachine gun.

Whenever the character attempts such a task, the gamemaster must decide how difficult the task is and assign a *Task Difficulty Level*. The table at right lists some Coordination-related tasks and their Difficulty Level. These difficulty levels are based on the ability of the average human being to perform a task. This makes it easy for gamemasters to assign a difficulty level to any task “on the fly”.



This section describes many ways to figure Difficulty Levels and modifiers for task rolls, but you don't always have to bother. Many times you can assume an Average test with no modifiers; the player just rolls 2D10, trying to roll his Skill Rating or less. This is the central mechanic of game play. Easy and fast!

If you do set a Difficulty Level, don't worry about being exact. Keep the game moving flowing and choose a level that suits the moment.

Notice that the low end of the scale is “Automatic:” the task is so easy or trivial that no skill roll should be required. At the opposite end of the scale is “Impossible:” no skill roll *could* be required because the

task is beyond any reasonable ability or comprehension or luck the character may have.


Task	Difficulty (Skill Modifier)
Climbing a flight of stairs without falling	Automatic (N/A)
Pitching a softball to someone 15 ft. away	Very Easy (+4)
Driving on a busy highway without a mishap	Easy (+2)
Walking along a 3" wide beam without falling	Average (0)
Juggling 3 balls in a regular pattern for 5 minutes	Above Average (-2)
Making a swan dive and entering the water cleanly	Difficult (-4)
Sinking a basket from three-quarter court	Very Difficult (-6)
Catching an arrow fired at you by an archer	Improbable (-8)
Shooting a dime out of the air with a pistol	Near Impossible (-12)
Catching a bullet with a pair of metal chopsticks	Impossible (N/A)

Tests

For those tasks which fall in between Automatic and Impossible, the gamemaster can require a Skill Test. First, the gamemaster determines which Skill pertains to the Test. In our examples above it might be Lifting (the hay bale) or Missile Weapon: Submachine Gun (to blast the foe).

Next the Skill Rating is modified by the Difficulty of the Task. See the “*Skill Modifier*” column in the table above. If the Lifting skill is 8, and the task is Easy, the modified Skill value is (8 + 2) or 10.

There might be other Modifiers as well, based on the environment or the actions of other characters or non-player characters. These are called Situational Modifiers.



Target Number = Skill Rating
+/- Difficulty Level Modifier
+/- Situational Modifiers

The modified Skill value gives us our *Target Number*. If the player can then roll that number or lower on 2D10, the Task is successful. If the player rolls higher than the Target Number, the task fails.

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Two exceptions: if the player rolls a “20” on 2D10, the task suffers an *Automatic Failure*, regardless of skill level or difficulty. If the player rolls a “2” and the skill is known at Familiar level or better, then the task succeeds regardless of the Target Number. This is called an *Automatic Success*.



If the Die Roll is...

20	Automatic Failure
Greater than Target Number	Failure
Less Than/Equal to Target Number	Success
2 (and Skill Level Fam or Higher)	Automatic Success

Contests

Sometimes, two characters may need to pit their skills against each other. Two characters playing poker against each other might use their Gambling skills, or two competing chefs might square off with their Knowledge: Gourmet Cooking skills.

In a *Contest*, each character rolls a Test as described above. (Very often, the modifiers are the same for both contestants. In such cases the modifiers may be ignored. Only apply modifiers if they are different for each character.)

If either makes a successful Test while the other does not, the victor wins that Contest. If neither character makes a successful Test, the contest is a draw and each must roll again.

But what happens if both characters are successful at their Tests? In this case, the winner is the one with the greatest *Success Margin* — the one that rolled furthest under his Target Number. If both made the roll by the same margin, the character with the lowest roll wins. If both roll the same, the Contest is a draw and both must roll again during the next Round.

Serial Contests

Chases are a staple of adventures from the biblical Exodus forward. The gamemaster could resolve the chase just on simple common sense (a Porsche is probably going to beat a Hyundai), but that’s not as fun for the players. There could be a single Contest, with the operator of the faster vehicle getting some bonus... but that’s over too soon. Chases derive their excitement

from tension: Am I gaining? Am I losing ground? Now he’s trying to lose me by swerving down that alley!

A more interesting way to resolve a chase (or any other prolonged conflict) is to set a number of successes needed to win (or lose): a *serial contest*. In a simple example, take two characters competing on the pistol range. The gamemaster decides the first to win three contests wins the match. Or, a more complex example:



Grasp has been searching for something in a castle treasure room when a guard enters unexpectedly. Grasp has time to douse his lantern and hide, but the guard decides to search anyway.

The gamemaster rules that remaining hidden in the shadowy room full of old crates, boxes and furniture requires a serial contest between Grasp’s Stealth skill (Cap / 12) and the guard’s Observing skill (Fam / 7). He decides the guard will search until he loses two contests in a row (representing two rounds of searching without hearing or seeing anything) before he gives up. But if the guard ever wins two in a row, Grasp is spotted. Since the conditions are the same for both characters, the gamemaster waives all modifiers; both will roll directly against their Skill Ratings.

The first round, Grasp rolls a 13, barely failing his roll. The gamemaster rolls for the guard — a 4. The guard wins the roll and the contest. The gamemaster rules that Grasp has scraped his boot against something, and the guard thinks he’s heard someone moving.

For the second round, Grasp succeeds with a roll of 7. The guard succeeds as well, rolling a 6. But Grasp has succeeded by a large margin (needed 12, rolled 7 — margin of 5) while the guard barely made the roll (needed 7, rolled 6 — margin of 1). Grasp wins this contest and the guard begins to think he’s just chasing shadows.

The third round, Grasp rolls a 9 (success) and the guard rolls 11 (failure). Grasp wins his second contest in a row. The guard gives up and returns to his post. “Just a mouse...” says the guard.

Special Checks

Almost everything in *Simply Roleplaying!* is rolled against the modified Skill Rating. Even if the character has not purchased the skill, one can get the Skill Rating from the “default level” (pg. 13).

However, some actions or tasks are so primitive or basic that they can’t be reckoned as learned — they just happen or they don’t, based on the character’s natural aptitudes. These are called Special Checks, and there are four of them:



Knockback Check: 2 x S
Agility Check: 2 x C
Focus Check: 2 x I
Stamina Check: 2 x H

Knockback Check

A character will be asked to make a Knockback Check when he is hit with a large physical impact, to keep from falling over. The base value of a Knockback Check is two times the character’s Strength. (Not adjusted Strength, just Strength.)

Agility Check

A character might need to make an Agility Check to keep his balance on a slippery surface, or to grab a projecting rock as he falls down the cliff face. The base value of an Agility Check is two times the character’s Coordination (not adjusted Coordination.)

Focus Check

A character who is suddenly confronted with a frightening sight or who needs to concentrated while chaos is breaking out all around him will need to succeed at a Focus Check. The base value of a Focus Check is two times the character’s Intellect (again, not adjusted Intellect, just Intellect).

Stamina Check

A character will be asked to make a Stamina Check when wounded or exhausted, to see if he can keep taking actions or just collapse instead. The base value of a Stamina Check is two times the character’s Health. That’s right, not adjusted Health, just Health.

Special Checks can have modifiers on them, just as Tests can. In most cases the difficulty should be Average (0). Special Checks should *never* be used where a specific Skill exists (for example, do not use a Knockback Check for a lifting task -- use Lifting skill, even if it’s at default level.) However, some Skills might be allowed to substitute for a Special Check. For example, someone slipping on the ice might be allowed to use his Acrobatics skill to avoid falling down instead of the Agility Check. This is only practical when the Skill is known at Pro level or higher.



Special Checks replace Stat Tests from the v.1 rules. Stat Tests were not well-defined and far too generous compared to Skills. In this edition, we provide clearer guidance and a new term for these, to highlight the importance of Skills in the system.

That takes care of the basic action rules. Everything else is just a variation or application of these principles. Pages 55-74 provide examples and demonstrations for gamemasters to use when called for in special situations.

One special situation which comes up often is combat. Heroes are always fighting monsters or villains. The next section highlights *Simply Roleplaying!*’s streamlined rules for judging combat in a story-driven manner. For those who seek the highly detailed combat experience, your *Simply Roleplaying!* characters are completely compatible with *Compact Combat* and we recommend using that to play out your fighting scenes.

Combat

In *Simply Roleplaying!* combat, each Round lasts approximately five seconds (from the characters’ point of view) and consists of two phases. During the Initiative Phase, all characters determine how equipped they are to react to the tactical situation and in what order they will act during the Round.

In the Action Phase each character, in order of Initiative (highest to lowest), makes two Actions (or, Looking Ahead, more if they have appropriate special powers or Abilities). The Actions are Move, Attack, Defend, or Other.

Initiative



Roll 1D10; add Initiative Bonus. Roll off ties. Highest has first selection of actions in round (and last, if actions are held through the end.)

During the Initiative Phase, each character rolls 1D10 and adds his Initiative Bonus. This Initiative roll determines the order in which characters act during a round; the higher the Initiative, the better. If characters have the same Initiative number, they will roll tie-breaker dice until the order is resolved. There is no simultaneous combat in *Simply Roleplaying!*.

Initiative does *not* depend on Speed. Even a very fleet character may be unaware of what is happening and slow to react to it. Nor do special senses necessarily affect Initiative.

The gamemaster is free to award special Initiative bonuses or penalties for special situations. The most common of these is Surprise. A character or group of characters who is ambushed or otherwise caught by surprise suffers a penalty of -2 on Initiative rolls for the next Round of combat. To achieve surprise, an enemy must be in a position to take action without being detected. If an enemy is detected (by special senses or an Observing roll), surprise is lost.

For the sake of simplicity, Initiative may be rolled for each side in a combat (player character heroes and their primary opponents during the combat) instead of for each character individually. In such a case, only the group leader's Combat Awareness bonus is counted for modifiers, and only if that leader is in a position to communicate freely with all the members of his team. If there is no leader, or the leader cannot easily give orders to his team, no Combat Awareness bonus is given to the side.

In any case, all unimportant non-player characters (like bystanders, minor guards, etc.) act as if they have the worst Initiative roll, taking actions after all player characters and important non-player characters have moved. The only exception is when such characters have listed Skill Ratings in Combat Awareness. These characters roll Initiative with everyone else.

Taking Actions



Take two actions in each round. Choose in any combination from Move, Attack, Defend or Other.

During the Action Phase, each character may make up to two actions, one after the other. The character who has the highest Initiative goes first. The results of his first action are evaluated, and then he may make his second action. Once he has declared and performed both actions, his turn is over and play passes to the next character (in Initiative order).

A character may choose to wait and hold one or both actions until later in the round. A character wishing to use one of his held actions may interrupt at any time before any player declares an action. This can even happen between another player's first and second actions. The holding character may then choose and execute any legal action at that time. Play then continues normally.

If both actions are held, the character may not take both at the same time. Instead, he may split them between the rounds of two other characters. Both held actions may not be used within one character's round. If two or more characters interrupt to use a held action, they take their actions in the original Initiative order. Once all characters have finished their regular actions, those characters who still have held actions must take them, in the reverse of the original order, or lose the action at the end of the round.

The disadvantage of holding actions is that if the character is incapacitated, captured, or rendered unconscious before he calls his action, any actions he wished to make are lost.



V.2 uses a much streamlined selection of Actions compared to V.1. All the movement-related actions are folded into the "Move" action; the Attack, Fire and Throw actions all collapse down to the new "Attack" action of V.2. The system is still fully compatible to other **PlainLabel** games, but in *Simply Roleplaying!* the focus is on the personalities rather than the tactics.

Move Actions

If a character chooses to move, he travels up to his Speed in yards. For most characters, this is about 10 feet per Movement Action. “Dropping” to a lowered position, like kneeling or prone, can be done at the end of any Action (movement, fighting or other), but “rising” from prone to kneeling or kneeling to standing takes a single Movement Action.

The gamemaster may rule that your hero is in such close proximity to an enemy that moving away would be risky. In such cases the character must win an Agility Contest with the enemy before moving. This contest counts as an Action, and if the character loses he may not move.

Attack Actions

An attack is an action involving one of the weapon skills (Melee Weapon, Missile Weapon, Thrown Weapon) or the hand-to-hand fighting skills (Brawling, Grappling, Martial Arts). Most attacks work like this:

The attacker chooses a target and declares an Attack using a specific weapon or hand-to-hand skill. If a melee weapon has already been used in this round to Defend, it may not be used to Attack. (Exception: Same-turn attack/defend weapons, as indicated on the weapon card.)

The gamemaster quickly determines the modifiers to the roll. Most of these are found on the Melee Combat Modifiers Table (pg. 57) and Ranged Combat Modifiers Table (pg. 58).

The attacker rolls a Test, using his weapon Skill Rating, modified by the gamemaster, to get the Target Number. If the test succeeds, he hits the target. If not, the attack does not hit the target.

If the target is Defending, the attacker must win a contest of skills to hit the target. See “Defend Action,” below.

If the target is hit, roll 2D10 and compare to the chart on the weapon card to determine the amount of damage scored.

Subtract any armor protection the target has from the damage scored. The remaining damage is subtracted from the target’s Hit Points.



Combat can be simplified by dispensing with skill modifiers altogether. Set the target number equal to the Skill Rating and go!

Defend Actions

Defend Actions are used to help ward off melee or thrown attacks. You cannot Defend against a missile attack.

The Defend action may be declared at any time, even out of the standard turn sequence (including immediately after an attack is declared against you, before that attack is rolled) as long as you still have an action unused in the round. Once declared, the Defend action is in effect until the end of the round. Thus, if you’ve declared a Defend already for the round, you need not declare it for your remaining action in the same round.

When a character defends, the standard attack roll becomes instead a Skill Contest between the attacker’s attack skill and the defender’s defense skill. The defender might need to choose from several possible skills:

Shield skill (if the character has a shield ready; use vs. hand-to-hand, melee or thrown attacks)

Brawling skill (vs. hand-to-hand attacks only)

Martial Arts skill or sub-skill (against melee and hand-to-hand attacks, but not thrown weapons)

Dodging skill (against hand-to-hand, melee or thrown weapons.)

Melee Weapon skill (against melee and hand-to-hand attacks.) The weapon needs to be ready and cannot have already been used in this round for an Attack. (Exception: Same turn attack/defend weapons, as indicated on the weapon card.)

The attacking character applies all normal modifiers to his roll. The only modifier a defender may apply is the Shield Defense Bonus. If the attacker wins the contest, he does damage as described under “Attack,” above. Ties in the contest are awarded to the defender and are not rerolled.

Other Actions

These are the other tasks that turn up in combat: getting a weapon ready to use, or stowing a weapon after use, or reloading, or aiming and so on.

The character can drop any object at the end of any action (movement, fighting or other), but to pick up an object or to ready a weapon for fighting uses an Action.

Taking an action to aim gives your fighting roll (for the thrown or ranged attack) a +2 Bonus. You can’t aim while you’re engaged in meleé combat, and you lose your bonus if you are a) injured between your aim action and your fighting action *and* b) fail a Focus Check.

Reloading usually takes a number of actions; the correct number is indicated on the weapon card.

More “Other” actions might be anything from taking a swig from a nearby beer bottle to adjusting the clockwork mechanism of a time bomb. Like the Load action, it may be necessary to declare the action several times before achieving the desired result. (For example, the gamemaster tells you it will take six Manipulate Actions to pick a complex lock.) Most “other” actions cannot be performed while in melee or hand-to-hand combat. The gamemaster may allow a simple Manipulation, however, (activating a simple switch, taking a drink from a bottle of magic potion already in hand, etc.) during a melee if the character can make an appropriate Agility Check.

Once all characters have completed their actions, the round is over. A new round begins with determination of Initiative and so on, until the players and gamemaster determine that the need for tactical actions has passed. Play then returns to a general description format. And that's all there is to combat!

Injuries and Healing

Of course, where there's combat, there are probably wounds and the aftermath of wounds. But there are many things which might cause injury to your character — poisons, fire, falling anvils. Life for an adventurer is dangerous! This section provides guidelines for how wounds affect the character and how he recovers.

Recall from the “Attack” actions in combat that damage points which get through the character’s defenses (like armor, force fields, etc.) are marked off against Hit Points.

If a single weapon attack inflicts a number of hit points greater than twice his Strength rating, he must succeed at a Knockback Check or be knocked down (into the “lying down” position, on his back).

If a character loses more than half his hit points (round down) in a single round (from all sources), he must make a Stamina Check. If the Check fails, the character falls immediately unconscious.

Once the character has lost at least three-quarters of his hit points total (round down), he must make another Stamina Check. He must continue to make these tests every time he takes more damage, even if it's as little as 1 additional point.

If a character is reduced to 1 hit point or less, he is automatically unconscious, out of the combat, and in need of serious medical attention. If a character should reach -10 hit points, he is dead.

Unconsciousness

If a character loses consciousness, another character can try to use his First Aid or Medicine Skill to revive the unconscious character. The difficulty of the test depends on the skill used and the condition of the unconscious character:


Character Has...	Treatment Skill	
	First Aid	Medicine
...more than 1/4 Hit Points remaining	Avg	Easy
...1/4 Hit Points or less remaining	Above Avg	Avg

A character who is revived from unconsciousness gains back one hit point immediately, but may take no actions until the beginning of the next Round.

Bleeding & Bandaging

Seriously wounded characters continue to bleed (either through wounds in the skin or internally) unless the wounds are bandaged. Once a character loses 10 or more Hit Points, he will continue to lose 1 Hit Point every five minutes of game time unless all his wounds are bandaged.

Bandaging requires no skill test; if the wounded character is conscious and can reach the wounds, he can do it himself. If the wound cannot be bandaged, holding a bandage or pad against the wound will also stop the flow, but the character holding the pad cannot make any other actions while so occupied. Gamemasters and players are *not* expected to keep track of this sort of damage during the heat of a pitched battle. A short battle will be over in five minutes or so, anyway.

 This keeps injured characters from ignoring those injuries and continuing their adventure without penalty. When you get beat up by the Underworld Elite, fall back to the hospital, bind your wounds, and think of another strategy.

Of course, advanced medical techniques of the future (or of alternate worlds with better medical technology) may be even more effective than that! On the other hand, medicine practiced before the 20th century was pretty primitive by comparison, and not much better than natural healing. In some cases, ancient “medical” practices did more harm than good! (“Hold fast, Sir Randolph! We’ll make you right as rain, as soon as we bleed off some of these ill humours and bile! Now where did I put those leeches...?”)

Fatigue

Some activities that tire a character may not affect his Hit Points, but will reduce the character’s *Fatigue Points*. Also, some weapons, poisons, etc., may exert their effects against FP rather than HP.

Fatigue tracks how tired a character becomes as a result of exertion and stress. The following guidelines to spending and recovering fatigue (see table below) should be provided to all players. Tracking fatigue will soon become second nature. Wary gamemasters can foil those who cheat on their fatigue scores by applying some fatigue penalties on his own.

Any time a character is reduced to below half his normal fatigue level, there is the increased possibility that the character will make a mistake at a critical moment because he is tired or stressed. A character below half normal fatigue who rolls a 19 or 20 on any test or contest automatically fails, despite the target number needed. (A 20 always indicates failure regardless.) If the character drops to 1/4 his normal level, he fails automatically on any roll of 18, 19, or 20.

Characters who push themselves to the edge of their endurance are less effective at everything they do because they are tired. Any character with 3 Fatigue Points or less remaining has the difficulty level for all tasks increased by one level, in addition to the automatic failure number penalties above. If the character drops to or below zero fatigue points, the difficulty level for all tasks is increased by two levels. Heavily-fatigued characters can become real klutzes whose exhaustion-fogged efforts to continue operations are a hazard to themselves and those around them.

Those few weak normal human characters who naturally have less than five fatigue points do not apply the first penalty at the five point level, but do apply the full penalty at reaching zero Fatigue Points.

In addition, a character with zero fatigue must rest immediately or begin doing real damage to himself. A character in combat who does not rest when he reaches zero fatigue loses 1 Hit Point per Round. If not in combat, the character may still continue action, but must make a Stamina Check every 15 minutes. If successful the character remains active but takes 1 Hit Point of damage. If unsuccessful, the character falls asleep until wakened or until his Fatigue level returns to 5 points or above. The difficulty of the test may be adjusted by the gamemaster if the character is involved in circumstances that may keep him awake, such as being surrounded by loud sounds or heavy action, or having someone there to talk to him and help him stay awake. Conversely, an exhausted character dumped into a bed in a dark room may be out like a light, his desire to continue being foiled by a much more difficult roll because of his comfortable surroundings.

Activity	FP Change
1 hour of normal activity (walking, riding, researching, white collar work)	-1
1/2 hour of heavy activity (hurrying, stress, blue collar work)	-1
15 min. of extreme activity (hard running, heavy physical labor, extreme stress)	-1
Per five rounds of Combat activity	-1
<i>DOUBLE the above costs when injured to half normal Hit Points or below.</i>	
Any single injury of 10-19 hit points	-1D10
Any single injury of 20 or more hit points	-2D10
Attempt any Difficult task roll	-1
Attempt any Very Difficult task roll	-2
Attempt any Improbable or Near Impossible Task-3	-3
1 hour of reduced activity (small talk, relaxing, light reading, etc.)	+1
1/2 hour of sleep	+1
8 hours of sleep restores all fatigue	

Notice that one of the things that causes fatigue to build up fast is injuries. Thus, even a character who can take a lot of hits and is healthy enough to make Stamina Check rolls regularly will tire after being hit enough times.



Don't get carried away with keeping track of fatigue! Gamemasters are strongly urged not to let the bookkeeping involved with the spending and recovery of fatigue become a significant concern for players to the point where it slows down the pace of the game. If you feel the player characters have had enough for awhile, you are quite justified in saying "You are all too tired to continue and you need to return to headquarters to rest for six hours before you can go on." In many cases, this is all the fatigue rules you will need or want.

Luck

Luck Points represent the extreme efforts a character can take to succeed plus the action of Fortune.

If a character has Luck points to spend, these may be used to alter a roll in the character's favor. Also, Luck Points may be used to reduce the damage from a single attack by up to one-half. Any Luck Points not spent in a game session will carry over to the next session, but can never be traded or shared among characters.

When using Luck to modify a roll, the player must declare that he is using Luck before the roll is made.

If he would fail the roll, he may add as many Luck Points as needed (if he has them) to the Target Number to make the roll a success.

In any case, succeed or fail, he must spend a minimum of five Luck Points. If it turns out that he does not have enough Luck Points for a success, he only spends the minimum five points.

When using Luck to reduce damage being taken, the character may spend as much or as little Luck as he chooses, but may not reduce the damage by more than half (rounded down). For example, a bullet wound of 9 points damage could be reduced by 1 to 4 damage points at the expense of 1 to 4 Luck.

Luck may be used in Healing tasks as well. Either the victim character or the character administering the aid can spend Luck... but not both on the same roll. (This is an obvious exception to the "can't share Luck Points" rule -- but the wounded character is a very involved party and so should be permitted to spend luck on his own healing!

And, of course, Luck may be used in Combat. Like Healing, only one participant in an exchange of blows may use Luck to improve Skill. Determining who that lucky fighter is can be tricky. Generally, "first come, first served" applies: if you declare you are using Luck on your Attack, the target cannot use Luck to Defend. The only exception is if the Defender had previously used Luck Points on a Defend earlier in the round. Since Defend actions persist from the time declared to the end of the round, the declaration of Luck on the Defend persists as well.

Character Rewards

While we'd like to feel that the play itself is reward enough, we're practical (and greedy) enough to know that we'd like something more tangible to record our characters' successes. These rewards come in the shape of Luck Points or improved Skills.



The reward systems offered here are fairly conservative. Feel free to season to taste for your game world. For example, try skill improvement after 3 sessions rather than 5. Use more Starting Luck, or less, or different rates of reward. Or invent your own all-new rules! All these things can add a unique and personal feel to each game world.

Luck Rewards

As play progresses, you may be rewarded by the gamemaster for roleplaying a character particularly well, or for especially clever ideas or stunts. Also, the gamemaster may choose to reward you for an especially amusing action or comment. These rewards will come in the form of Luck Points.

Luck may be awarded in one of two fashions.

The first and easiest method is the straight reward system. A good rule of thumb is that for good roleplaying, the gamemaster may award 10 Luck Points per session. Clever ideas or stunts should be worth 5, and amusing actions or comments may be worth from 1 to 5 each.

The second system is the random method. The gamemaster may allow you to roll 2D10 for good

roleplaying, and 1D10 for clever ideas or stunts. (Amusing situations should still be awarded 1 to 5 points each.)

Characters typically start with 5 Luck Points and may have as many Luck Points as they can hoard. The gamemaster may set different rules, depending on his game world. In a free-wheeling comic-book or fairy-tale campaign, characters may start with as many as 20 or even 25 Luck points. In a gritty, realistic game world, everyone may be a Hard Luck Charlie. In such a case, characters may start with no Luck Points, and be prohibited from holding more than 20 points of Luck at any time.

Skill Improvement

Players often discover, in the course of play, that there are other skills they'd like the character to have; or they'd like to improve a skill the character already has. This section provides guidelines for character growth, so that characters improve with experience as people do.

Each month of game time (or every fourth game adventure), the character will receive one *Skill Purchase Point*. This represents practice and study during game time between adventures. These points may be spent immediately, or saved for later purchases of new skills or improvements to Mental Skills.

Learning New Personal & Physical Skills

Spending one Skill Purchase Point will allow the purchase of a Personal or Physical Skill at the Familiar level (just as in character creation.)

Learning New Mental Skills

Learning Mental Skills is more complicated. The most efficient way to learn Mental Skills is with a teacher or tutor. To learn from another character, the teacher must have a higher Skill Level in the skill being taught than the pupil. Each Skill Purchase Point spent on a skill while learning with a teacher allows the student to add the skill at Familiar Level. Of course, the student may never learn more than the teacher knows, and cannot raise his Skill Level above that of the teacher.

When there is no teacher available, the character may also study and learn a Mental Skill strictly through book study. This is much slower, however, and the character must spend two Skill Purchase Points to gain the Familiar level. The gamemaster may place a limit

on the effectiveness of the available reading materials as well.

A character who does not even have access to books and other reference materials on a subject may still learn the Mental skill by trial and error or personal experience. (After all, the first person to learn something had no books...) This is the slowest method of learning, costing the character three Skill Purchase Points to acquire the skill at Familiar level.

Improving Personal & Physical Skills

Whenever Personal or Physical Skills are Tested or Contested in an adventure situation, there is a chance that the Skill may be improved slightly. At the end of a game session, a player may choose to test a skill for improvement. A skill may not be chosen unless it was Tested or Contested at least once during the session (successfully or not). Roll 2D10 for each skill. If the roll is *higher* than the Skill Rating, add 0.2 to the Skill Rating. Thus, it takes five successful Skill Improvement rolls to raise a Skill one full point.

(For purposes of the game, any fractional part of the skill is dropped off during play. For example, if a character has a Skill Rating of 12.8, that is the same as a Skill Rating of 12 for all game purposes.)

In that example, a roll of 13 or *higher* would add an additional 0.2 to the skill (in this case raising it to 13), while a roll of 12 or less would not improve it.



The real rewards for your character in this game are accomplishments that the character makes within the game world.

It is up to you as the player to set goals for your character... and then attempt to achieve them.

There is no "score" in a roleplaying game beyond the accomplishments that you set out (in character) to achieve. Keep this in mind during play, and don't get sidetracked by a pursuit of more skills, more equipment, more points to spend. Instead, think about what motivates your character, and pursue those goals within the game. Does your character want money? Vengeance for a past wrong? Stability and a safe home? Adventure and excitement?

Whatever the character wants, the player should pursue.

■■■■■■■■■■ **Simply ROLEPLAYING!** ■■■■■■■■■■

Improving Mental Skills

Mental skills are not usually improved with repeated use; time and dedicated study is normally required. A character with a teacher can improve a Mental Skill from Familiar to Capable for 1 Skill Purchase Point; or from Capable to Professional for 2 Skill Purchase Points; or from Professional to Expert for 4 Skill Purchase Points. Double costs if only books are available; triple costs if learning solely by trial and error. Remember that a character's Skill Level cannot improve to exceed his teacher's Skill Level.

That's everything you'll need as a player to enjoy hours and hours of ***Simply Roleplaying!*** adventures! Go have fun!

But if you're up for a challenge... if you've got the talents of an Orson Welles, a Rich Little and a Lon Chaney, Jr. wrapped up inside you... then gamemastering might be for you!

The Special Rules section includes reference material for the gamemaster: special combat rules, life in the dangerous world of adventure, etc. The Worldmaking section gives guidance on making campaign worlds, campaigns, and how to make them all work together with your characters to produce involving and exciting adventures.

Good luck and happy gaming!

SPECIAL RULES

This section is mostly for gamemaster reference, with rules guidelines useful for preparing adventures or for judging situations. Players are welcome, too, of course! The topics are sorted in alphabetical order for easier reference.

Note that we said “guidelines” — the gamemaster always has leeway (indeed a mandate) to change rules as the situation warrants. We find the rules below the best and simplest approach to what can be complex topics, but that doesn’t mean they are perfect or that they can hope to cover every possible situation. (Adventurers get into trouble in the most inconvenient ways!) If you as gamemaster have a rule you like better, or face a game situation in which the rule-as-printed doesn’t help — change it, wing it, ignore it!

Also please note: this is NOT a first aid guide — this is a game! Certain liberties have been taken and some abstractions have been used for the sake of playability. Do NOT consult these rules when attempting to treat real injuries and ailments!

Beasts

Occasional encounters with animals, creatures and monsters (collectively, “*beasts*”) are staples of the roleplaying experience, adding atmosphere and menace to a setting. A dangerous beast can be more of a threat than the vilest villain; a trusted beast can be more steadfast than your oldest and dearest friend.

Beasts have the same array of Stats as characters. For convenience, assume all examples of a given beast will have that same Stats. The first three Stats should be selected based on the beast's size, speed, style of food gathering and other factors. Solitary predators are often big and strong; pack hunters need to be well-coordinated and fast; herd beasts might survive by being big (like cattle and buffalo) or slim and quick (like a deer); scavengers are likely to be quick enough to dart in and grab scraps or numerous enough to swarm over a kill and bring it down by sheer numbers.

The Intellect Stat is treated differently for beasts, however. Instead of a numerical score, Intellect for beasts is rated as shown in the Animal Intellect Chart below.

The Intellect rating is largely based on how much “thought” the beast puts into its activities and how “unselfish” it may be; that is, whether it acts purely in self-preservation or in the higher interests of its herd/pack/pod/etc.

When a beast acts — attacks, defends, runs — its base Stat is Coordination. Beasts are considered to have effective skills (though instinctive, not learned), usually at Capable or Professional level. The truly exceptional beast might have Expert level. For example, a cheetah would have a high Coordination and Running skill at Expert level — you're not going to outrun a cheetah! The beast card will indicate the skills and their ratings.

Beasts with claws do damage using the standard Unarmed Combat damage based on Strength, with a +3 bonus to the Max Dmg. Some beasts do more damage than their Strength might suggest! And beasts have many ways to hurt players, including claws, talons, pincers, tentacles, razor-sharp beaks, spines, stingers, mandibles and other natural weapons. They can also spit, inject or secrete toxic substances that will do further damage. And some may have multiple ways to attack (though they'll usually use only one method in a given Round)! For these reasons each beast description will have full description of the methods and damages a beast may use.

Of course, beasts that are of human-like Intellect (on alien worlds, in fantastic realms, or from our own legends) may wield created weapons as humans do, and still use their natural methods of attack. Human-sized beasts will use the same weapons as humans, but weapons carried by beasts of greater than human size will be proportionally larger and may do more damage than the smaller human varieties. The gamemaster is encouraged to use a simple multiplier for muscle-powered weapons wielded by giant-size foes. For example, the Max Dmg of a weapon wielded by a giant human (twice normal human size) might be multiplied by two.

Some beasts are too small to be dangerous as a single animal but are dreadful when encountered in groups, like rats, bees, and army ants. The Stats and info provided are for swarms or packs of these small beasts; treat the swarm or pack as though it was one creature for purposes of making attacks and taking hit points of damage. A swarm that is made “unconscious” or reduced to zero hit points is dispersed.

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Beasts of Earth

Name	Max Dmg	S	C	I	H	HP	Speed
Alligator	10	7	5	A	5	26	2
Bear, Black	16	12	5	A	5	41	7
Bear, Grizzly	20	15	5	A	6	51	6
Bull	18	14	3	A	8	57	5
Cat	4	2	8	A+	5	11	6
Cheetah	12	8	8	A+	7	35	14
Cobra	3	2	9	A-	7	14	4
Deer	10	9	7	A	7	39	6
Dog, Large	7	5	6	A+	7	25	7
Donkey	18	14	4	A	5	47	8
Elephant	33	30	7	A+	5	95	5
Gazelle	10	10	8	A	7	42	10
Gorilla	10	8	7	A++	6	30	4
Hawk	3	2	8	A	7	14	10 (fly)
Horse, Riding	14	12	6	A	7	49	10
Horse, War	18	14	6	A	8	57	9
Lion	21	14	7	A+	7	56	10
Mule	14	11	4	A	5	38	10
Wolf	7	5	6	A+	6	21	8

Beasts of Legend

Name	Max Dmg	S	C	I	H	HP	Speed
Bear, Devil	22	17	6	A+	8	68	7
Dragon, Hatchling*	4	3	4	2	5	14	3
Dragon, Young ¹	6	7	6	6	7	32	5 (fly 7)
Dragon, Adult ¹	18	15	8	8	7	60	6 (fly 9)
Natural Armor = 2							
Dragon, Ancient ¹	33	30	9	10	7	112	8 (fly 15)
Natural Armor = 4							
Giant, Lesser ²	14	12	5	5	6	42	6
Giant, Greater ²	18	15	5	3	8	61	8
Gryphon	18	15	6	A+	7	60	8 (fly 10)
Minotaur ²	14	11	5	3	5	38	6
Pegasus	18	14	7	A+	8	57	8 (Fly 12)
Scorpion, Giant ³	10	10	7	A--	5	35	5
Natural Armor = 2							
Spider, Giant ³	14	12	6	A-	5	41	5
Natural Armor = 1							
Unicorn	14	13	7	A+	8	54	10
Wolf, Dark	6	6	7	A+	7	28	8

¹ This creature has a Flame Breath weapon which it may use every turn against a single target. Max Dmg for flame breath attack is equal to the creature's Strength.

² This creature may use weapons instead of making hand-to-hand attacks.

³ Besides normal damage, the victim of a successful hit takes 2 points poison damage per turn for 3 turns, then 2 additional points each turn thereafter until a successful Stamina Check succeeds.

Beast Intellects

Intellect A--

The beast operates on the most primitive impulses only: eat, reproduce, defend. One-celled creatures and simple mollusks like the jellyfish operate at this level.

Intellect A -

The beast obeys the simplest instincts: defend the home or eggs, flee predators, and so on. Higher insects (like bees and ants), most fish, amphibians and reptiles have this rating.

Intellect A

A sense of the group well-being is included in the beast's behavior. These animals protect their young and the integrity of their collective. Herd mammals like deer and cattle and many birds are here.

Intellect A+

Rudimentary imagination appears; these animals can plan to some extent. These are the pack hunters, like wolves, lions, dogs and so on.

Intellect A++

The highest of animal intelligences, capable of abstract problem solving, tool use and some communication; could almost be reckoned as a 1 or 2 on the normal Intellect scale. Apes, dolphins and whales belong here.

Sometimes even the smallest, weakest beast can be the deadliest through the use of poison, and some swarms and packs may even attack in this way. Most poisons can take effect only if the beast attacks and successfully damages the target; once this has occurred, then the poison can affect the target.

Beasts can also have natural defenses against damage in the form of thick fur, scales, tough skin, or even plates of horn or bone. These defenses are treated as Armor in all cases, just like the Armor the characters might wear.

Some beasts may also have special Abilities (or even Disabilities), and very intelligent beasts of A+ or A++ Intellect might even learn some basic Skills at low levels. This is all at the discretion of the gamemaster.


Gamemasters should feel free to vary Stats somewhat for special instances, especially where an animal is featured prominently, or in a continuing role. If you want your King of the Wolf Pack or a player character’s companion animal to be a bit stronger, faster, or smarter, this is perfectly acceptable.

Stats for a sample of real and imaginary creatures are provided at right. For others, see the *PlainLabel Bestiary* series of packages available from MicroTactic Games.

Collisions

To determine the damage done by a collision, take the higher Armor Value (see Objects, pg. 66) of the colliding objects, multiply by the speed of the impact in miles per hour and divide by 4. This gives you the Max Dmg for the collision. Then, roll on the appropriate line of the Master Damage Table.

Remember that for two moving objects colliding, sum their speeds before plugging into the formula!



The most common collision damage you need to worry about is an automobile hitting a person, so we’ve precalculated that for you. A car moving 30 miles an hour on a normal city street does **75 points Max Dmg**. Halve that if the car is moving in stop and go traffic, can slam on the brakes, or is otherwise not up to speed; double it if the car is up to the highway/freeway speed limit. Double again if the vehicle is a bus or heavy truck.

Personal armor provides limited protection against collisions. If the collision occurred at 30 mph or less, Armor provides half its protection value against the collision damage.

Note that the object collided with takes the same amount of damage! If the damage is sufficient to rupture the collided object, the moving object may pass right on through!

Combat: Melee Combat Modifiers

<i>Circumstance</i>	<i>Modifier</i>
Target at higher elevation (on stairs, uphill)	-1
Low light (torchlit, deep shadow)	-1
Normal darkness (partly moonlit)	-2
Total Darkness/Attacker blinded	-5
Attacking a target's side	+1
Attacking a target's rear	+2
Off-hand penalty	-2

Combat: Grappling

The function of a Grappling attack is to hold or pin an opponent (instead of just doing him injury). In the cases described below, the character uses his best of : A Martial Arts skill which includes hands-on techniques; Grappling Skill; or Grappling at default (equal to Strength score).

A character who wishes to attempt to grapple must win a Skill Contest with his opponent. If the defender’s contest total is higher, the grappling attack is refused. If the attacker’s contest total is higher by any amount, the opponent is held. A held character must drop any ready weapon immediately. Also, a character who is held may not attempt to Move.

If a character starts the Round with another character already in a hold, he may maintain that state with no further roll until the opponent successfully escapes. A character who maintains a hold may use the Grapple Action in subsequent turns to attempt an additional maneuver, such as a takedown, throw, or pin. If the margin of success for a successful hold or reverse is 4 or more, the attacker may immediately proceed during the same action to one of these maneuvers.

A takedown requires a contest. If the attacker is successful both fall to the ground, the defender lying down and the attacker prone and still held. A failure does not break the hold.

Combat Damage and Results

Every weapon attack and hand-to-hand attack form will have a Maximum Damage (or Max Dmg) given. In this game, most damage is rolled with 2D10. On the weapon card given for the chosen weapon, the damage table on the card will tell how many points of damage the attack causes. Compare the number rolled on 2D10 to the chart to find the amount of damage actually done by that attack.

If there is no card for a weapon, consult the appropriate row on the Damage Master Table based on the weapon's Max Dmg and compare the result rolled to find the actual damage scored.

Characters using an unarmed attack have already determined their Unarmed Combat Max Dmg during character creation. Consult the Damage Master Table for the specific damage caused by the damage roll.

A few weapon types do not have separate Max Dmg listed. Instead, these weapons (usually worn on the hand like a cestus or brass knuckles) add to the bare hand damage that would normally be done by the attacker. Characters with greater Strength may get a further damage bonus for such weapons.

On occasion, an attack is reduced to 1/2 damage for some reason. When this happens, roll 1D10 instead of 2D10 and compare the result rolled to the appropriate damage table to determine the exact damage taken.

If you roll a natural unmodified 20 on the Damage Table, you're allowed to roll again and add the two results to determine the final damage. Ouch! (If you roll another 20, you do not roll a third time, however...)

Combat: Called Shots

Sometimes it can be useful to shoot at a part of a target — an arm, a leg, a head, a tire, a headlight, and so on. The only way to do this deliberately is to make a *Called Shot*.

Any Called Shot is made at a difficulty that is two levels higher than normal. Thus, if the attack was normally an Average task, the Called Shot requires a Difficult test. All normal to-hit modifiers are in effect; if the character was able to Aim in the preceding action, he would receive the +2 bonus.

Shooting at an arm, leg, or head means the actual target area is significantly smaller than normal. The Target Size modifiers in the Ranged Combat Tables can be used as a rough guide here, but since the target is

moving irregularly, tend to lean toward the larger modifier in marginal cases. Thus, a Called Shot at an arm or a leg should offer a -2 target size modifier, while a Called Shot at a person's hand or head should offer a -4 penalty, on top of all other adjustments.

A Called Shot ignores armor effects unless the target is wearing armor that covers the specific target area. A character wearing a bulletproof vest gets no armor protection for an arm, leg, hand, or head shot, and even more significant body armor will not protect against a head shot unless a helmet is worn.

A Called Shot does the same hit points of damage as a normal attack, but the effects of the attack may be augmented. A character who takes 8 or more Hit Points of damage as a result of a Called Shot attack to the leg must immediately fall down and roll a Stamina Check. If the roll fails, the injured leg is useless until medical attention can be obtained and healing returns the limb to normal (effect of Limited Movement Disability.) Any attack to the hand or arm doing 5 points or more injury has the same effect on that hand or arm — incapacitation until healed (effect of Limited Manipulation Disability).

A target hit by a Called Shot to the head must make a Stamina Check or be knocked unconscious (whether actual damage got through the armor or not). If damage did get through the armor, that damage is doubled (and may require another Stamina Check to see if the target will remain conscious and survive the wound!)

A Called Shot against a component of an object works against the Armor value of the component, rather than the general Armor value of the object. For example, a Called Shot to an automobile's tire would be reduced by the tire's (rubber) armor value of 4, rather than the auto's (general metal) armor value of 10. The damage would then be applied to the tire's Hit Points of 6 rather than the car's 100 Hit Points.

A ranged weapon firing a "burst" (see Burst Fire, below) cannot make a Called Shot. Melee weapons cannot be used to make Called Shots, though thrown weapons may.



Do not allow use of the Called Shot rules to dominate and slow the game, but rather to dramatically enhance the action within the natural context of the scene. If players overuse or misuse the Called Shot rule, feel free to dispense with it altogether.



Many have asked us why we don't allow Called Shots for Melee Combat. The answer lies in the structures of the rules. A combat round is about five seconds long; is it reasonable that a character could do two attacks in five seconds? No! A character could reasonably do quite a bit in that time. So, we must say that the Melee Combat rules reflect a certain amount of abstraction.

But Ranged Combat rules *are* tied to the actions of each single shot. This is a different level, less abstract than Melee Combat. Called Shots are more important and needed here than they would be under Melee Combat.

Gamemasters, don't forget: The game is yours! If you want Called Shots in Melee Combat, you may have them! Drop us a line and let us know how it works out.

Combat: Auto Fire

Firearms capable of firing more than one shot in a single trigger pull will have a designated Burst Factor. A character may fire an automatic weapon burst all at a single target, which increases his chances of damaging that target. Weapons that can do both single shots and autofire will have ammunition that they hold described in both ways.

Automatic weapon bursts can also be aimed at multiple targets, up to the number of targets indicated by the Burst Factor. This reduces the chances of hitting any one target, but makes the weapon capable of dealing some damage to all the individuals targeted. Characters targeted by a burst must all be within 5 yards of one another, all within line of sight of the attacker. Adjustments to the Attack task based on burst fire are shown below.

Burst Fire Table

Range	Single Target	Multiple Targets
Short	+4	+2
Medium	+2	No bonus/penalty
Long	No bonus/penalty	-2

When a burst is aimed at multiple targets, normal weapon damage is rolled separately on the weapon damage table for each target hit. Subtract all protection from armor to determine the final damage actually taken by each target.

When an entire burst is concentrated on one target, roll the damage from a single hit on the weapon damage table. Subtract all protection from armor, then multiply the remaining damage by the number of shots in a burst of the weapon. This makes automatic weapons aimed at a single target very deadly indeed.

Combat: Area Effect Weapons

Area Effect weapons are those which explode, burst or flare to spread their force over a wide area. They may be set in place (like a bomb), thrown (like a grenade), launched (like a rifle grenade or missile) or projected (like an Area Effect superpower).

Those using an Area Effect weapon pick a spot as the intended target. If the intended target is within Medium range (or less), there is no need for a to-hit roll. The intended target is automatically hit. If the intended target is at Long or Xtreme Range for that weapon, a to-hit roll is required. Roll just as for any normal missile or thrown weapon. Success indicates the intended target was hit. Failure indicates a miss — see Scatter, below.

Area Effect weapon cards list a radius within which they do their max dmg (or “effect”, in the case of things like smoke bombs that do not directly do damage). They also show a “reduced effect” radius. Anyone outside the full effect zone but still inside the reduced effect experiences a reduced effect. If the weapon does damage, these targets roll only 1D10 on the damage table. If the smoke cloud blinded everyone in the inner area, it might only promote a -2 Visibility penalty to those in the outer region.

Scatter

Even if the attacker missed the intended target, that weapon is still going to affect some area out there. If the intended target was at long range, roll 1D10; if at Xtreme range, roll 2D10. (Subtract 5 for thrown weapons.) This tells you how far (in yards) from the intended target the weapon landed. Direction is at gamemaster's discretion. This could still result in success... or the player might end up with his own weapon in his lap!

Cover

A person who is partially shielded by a sufficiently solid object (like someone standing behind a tree, a car, or a low wall) will take only reduced effect if in the primary effect area, and no effect at all if in the outer reduced zone. To be sufficient to protect, the solid object itself must have enough Armor and/or Hit Points to absorb all of the damage rolled normally (or otherwise be able to shield the character from the effect). If not, the object doesn't really protect at all, and full effect is taken.

A target that is totally shielded by a solid object (like a person inside a building, behind a high wall, etc.) will take NO damage if the object is sufficiently solid to absorb all damage. If not, roll damage as normal for the target and subtract the points that would be deflected by the shielding object's Armor and absorbed by the object's Hit Points. The target takes the remaining points as damage.

If two targets are shielded by the same object, make a single damage roll for the object, determining from that roll how much damage is absorbed.

Each of the targets behind the object then take the remaining damage.

The gamemaster must use reason to determine if shielding by a solid object will protect a target from non-damage effects of an Area Effect weapon.

For example, a character in a building behind a window would probably be fully protected from a gas attack, but receive no protection at all from a blinding flash — and an actual explosion might do MORE damage to the character than normal because of flying glass from the shattered window!

Combat: Area Fire Weapons

Firearms like shotguns and flame throwers spread their effect wider at longer ranges, but do less damage to each individual target. At closer ranges, they have devastating effect against a few targets, while at longer ranges they are capable of injuring larger numbers of people to a lesser extent.

The cone of fire passes along an imaginary line from the shooter to the designated target and beyond to the weapon's maximum range. Any character along the line the cone of fire passes through is a potential target. With this sort of weapon, targets at different Range Classes can be struck by one shot, if they happen to be unlucky enough to be in the cone of fire. At closer ranges as shown below, roll damage as usual on the weapon

damage table, then multiply the damage shown by the Damage Adjustment. For the longer ranges, roll 1D10 instead of 2D10 when rolling on the weapon damage table.

The table below gives some guidelines as to the maximum number of closely-spaced people who can be injured with a single shot at each Range Class, as well as the Damage Adjustment to be made at each range class.

Area Fire Table

<i>Range</i>	<i>To-Hit Mod</i>	<i>Dmg Adj</i>	<i>Max # Of Targets</i>
Short	+4	X2	2
Medium	+2	Normal	4
Long	0	Roll 1D10	8

Falls

Any fall from a height of 4 yards or less which warrants an injury is given a Max Dmg of 10.

Any fall from a height of 5 to 9 yards which warrants an injury is given a Max Dmg of 30.

In both cases, Armor provides half its usual protection, as with low-speed Collisions, above. Also, the gamemaster may allow the damage to be modified by use of appropriate character skills such as Acrobatics or Parachuting, as well as by circumstances like soft things to land on.

Any fall from a height of 9 yards to 200 yards is given a Max Dmg of (1.5 x height of fall). Neither armor nor skill use can reduce this damage, and the gamemaster is perfectly within his rights to declare any normal human falling from such a height to be automatically dead. (But remember those awnings, flagpoles, and conveniently-placed cornices that can break your fall with a successful skill roll and an application of Luck points!)

Any fall from a height over 200 yards is treated as though it were 200 yards; that is, Max Dmg 300, armor & skills don't help, etc.

(Please note: the Master Damage Table provided only goes to 100. If you really need to generate a fall or collision damage above that, break the damage into segments of 100 points or less and roll each separately, then add the results for the total damage. Chances are that you will never really need to be that precise on such a fall, though. If it falls that far — splat!)

Financial Life: Abilities & Disabilities

The Abilities and Disabilities suggest the amount of money that can be spent — cash on hand or easily found and disposed of without endangering their lifestyle — that is, money available after paying all bills and expenses. While players are welcome to keep track of the nitty-gritty of their character's life and funds, this is only a game and supposed to be fun. Balancing one's own checkbook is seldom entertaining; the rules are going to assume that the day-to-day chores are handled, and that any money the character comes in contact with (either from a job, or rewards from an adventure) is freely spendable.

Anyone with Financial Independence or Wealth will have a home, possessions and the ability to maintain those possessions (pay the servants, pay the utilities, keep a contract with a security service,

Characters who are Working Men or Financially Restricted don't normally own homes outright and must pay for their room and board (or mortgages) from cash on hand, but they may still have modest personal possessions. Only those cursed with Poverty have no important personal possessions.

Financial Life: Acquiring New Stuff

Characters may spend their income (including whatever they come up with while adventuring) however they like... subject to the gamemaster's ruling. For example, the character may want to buy a BlastMaster 3300 Autofire Assault Weapon with RangeMayhem Grenade Launcher Attachment. The gamemaster knows one would have to be at least Financially Independent to afford this pricey piece of personal artillery. In addition, (if the game were set in Contemporary America) it would be completely illegal; the character would have to cultivate contacts in the criminal world to get it. Or it might be that there's only one BlastMaster 3300 — the prototype — which would require either major thievery on the character's part, or the hiring of professionals to acquire the weapon. (We never said gamemastering was easy.)

Generally you will not want to fiddle with keeping track of daily expenses like paying for rooms or buying a round of drinks at the local pub. Just make sure than any expenditures are normal and reasonable for the character's financial status. For example, a character with Poverty disability will not be buying a round of drinks

for the house, and a character with Financial Restrictions will only do so if it is important. A character with Wealth, however, wouldn't think twice about it, or about buying a new computer, or maybe even a new car.

Special acquisitions, though, require special judgment. If the gamemaster knows his world or campaign sufficiently well, he can make these calls on the fly. ("Sorry, there's no place nearby to buy monofilament line. You'd have to go the the Super-Mart across town for it... do you think you have the time?")

If the gamemaster is uncomfortable with this, we offer the following optional rule:

1) Have the character roll 2D10; the target number is set by the level of Financial Ability or Disability:

Poverty:	4
Financial Restriction:	6
Working Man:	10
Financial Independence:	12
Wealth:	16
Great Wealth:	18

2) The roll is modified by the object's Expense, Availability, and Legality:

Expense	Availability	Legality
Cheap +5	Trivial +5	Perfectly Legal 0
Inexpensive +2	Common +2	Lightly Restricted -2
Moderate -2	Moderate -2	Mod Restricted -5
Expensive -5	Rare -5	Misdemeanor -5
Very Expensive -8	Very Rare -8	Felony -8
Priceless*	Unique*	

*These objects cannot be obtained with a simple die roll. They must be earned during an adventure or whatever).

So, a person with Financial Restrictions must roll a 10 or less to buy a heavy-duty flashlight (Base 6, Inexpensive +2, Common +2, Perfectly Legal.) The same person would not be able to buy an assault rifle (Base 6, Moderate -2, Moderate -2, Moderately Restricted -5, for a roll of -3 or less on 2D10.) A Wealthy person wanting to buy the same rifle would roll a 7 or less.

Let's define the terms.

Expense

Cheap: Something purchasable out of what the average individual carries on his person. (Example: a paperback novel, a movie ticket). In modern terms, \$10 or less.

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Inexpensive: Something purchasable without making substantial impact on the individual's expenses. (Example: an article of clothing, dinner for four). In modern terms, \$10 to \$100.

Moderate: Something the average individual would think twice before buying which would expend all his discretionary income for a month. (Example: a major appliance, a weekend vacation). In modern terms, \$100 to \$1,000.

Expensive: Something the average individual would not be able to afford without saving up for a long period or taking on significant debt. (Examples: a car, a long foreign vacation). In modern terms, \$1,000 to \$25,000.

Very Expensive: Something the average individual wouldn't even consider buying without significant long-term debt. (Example: A house.) In modern terms, \$25,000 to \$250,000.

Priceless: Something the average individual admires from afar but wouldn't even think of owning. (Examples: a mansion, a rare artwork.) In modern terms, \$250,000 and up.

Availability

Very Common: Something available seemingly at every street corner. (Examples: newspaper, gasoline, candy bar.)

Common: Something available immediately from a variety of vendors, with a minimum of fuss. (Examples: a used car, a flashlight)

Moderate: Something the average person can obtain after locating a vendor in the phone book in any moderate-sized city. (Examples: a cellular phone, a length of gold chain, a personal computer.)

Rare: Something the average person can obtain by special arrangement with a local vendor (who probably won't stock the item, but can obtain after a wait), or from a specialized vendor in larger cities. (Examples: sailboat fittings, custom furniture upholstery.)

Very Rare: Something the average person will have some trouble obtaining until they locate one of the few vendors who specialize in that item. (Examples: portable hyperbaric chambers, encryption & security systems for banks).

Unique: There's only one of these in all the world. It may be easy to find, in a public collection, or may be lost to time and history. (Examples: The Mona Lisa, The Ark of the Covenant).

Legality

Perfectly Legal: Something anyone of any age can easily buy without attracting any attention at all. (Examples: a hammer, a package of writing paper, a computer game)

Lightly Restricted: Something that, though not illegal for most people to buy or possess, might raise an eyebrow or two if purchased in a hurry or from an unusual vendor, or be denied to a minor. (Examples: a bottle of whiskey, an automobile, nonnarcotic prescription drugs)

Moderately Restricted: Something that would be a misdemeanor or felony without special permission.

(Examples: prescription narcotics, weapons concealable on your person, conventional explosives).

Misdemeanor: Possession of these items except under very special circumstances is illegal and punishable by short jail terms, or public humiliation, or some other inconvenient but short-term obstruction. (Examples: certain forms of pornography, plastic explosives)

Felony: Possession of these items is strictly illegal, and punishable by years and years of imprisonment . . . or in some cases torture or death, depending on the culture of the adventure setting. (Examples: fissionable nuclear material, secret government documents)

The interplay of Expense, Availability and Legality allow the gamemaster to quickly assess any material requests by the player and determine whether it can just be bought, must be sought as part of a roleplaying experience, or is just plain unavailable.

It also gives the player direction in how their character may acquire something — whether they just need to get a loan, or shop a little harder, or cultivate shadier associates.

Financial Life: Changing Financial Status

It's possible that characters may change their financial status as a result of events during the game. (Gee, finding that lost pirate treasure was a lucky break!) If so, the gamemaster may require those characters to trade off an Ability or Disability that has become inappropriate. For example, a homeless person who hooks up with adventurers and earns a share of the take can no longer be considered to have the Poverty disability. The gamemaster may then require the character to invest half his earnings as expenses or

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investments to raise him to the level of “Working Man.” The character must then “trade off” the 2-Point Disability somehow.

One way is to take an equivalent Disability to replace the financial one. This works best when tied to the plot of the adventure in which the wealth was gained. Continuing our example, suppose the pirate hoard was found at the bottom of a deep and dangerous pit. Maybe the character has acquired a Phobia of dark, enclosed places. He’s wealthier now, but he leaves the lights on all day and all night...) Another way might be to lose Abilities along with the departing Disability. (Perhaps the noise of the blasting needed to free the treasure from some boulders cost the character his Acute Hearing.) Other less desirable options would be: to spend Luck Points to buy off the Disability (at 100 Luck per point of the Disability); or spend Skill Purchase Points (see Skill Improvement) to balance off a removed financial Disability (rate to be determined by the gamemaster).

The gamemaster may permit any combination of these methods which seems reasonable as part of the story.

One can use similar methods to buy new financial Abilities, if the gamemaster permits and the circumstances of the story justify the improvement in the character’s finances. One cannot use Luck Points to buy off any Abilities or Disabilities other than the Financial kind.

In the rarer case, a character may need to drop in Financial status. Perhaps the Financially Independent character invests heavily in the stock market — and guesses very badly. Or the character might simply be robbed. In such a case, the player might choose to accept and live at the lower status (trading others for appropriate Abilities or Disabilities); or he might choose to spend Luck Points to preserve his status until such time as his financial welfare is restored.

Fire

A normal fire does 10 points max dmg per Round (to people or structures). A blowtorch or other flame that is fed by jet of flammable fuel of some sort (like a flame thrower) does 30 points maximum per Round. Thermite, white phosphorous, magnesium or other exotic fire-maker does 60 points maximum per Round or more.

Flammable materials like wood start to burn after they have received fire damage equal to their Armor value. Most objects burn at a rate of 10 Hit Points per minute or roughly 1 Hit Point per Round.

GMs have a great deal of flexibility in applying these rules. A character who deliberately enters a fire might take the maximum damage every round; those hit with a torch would take damage as per a club, plus the fire damage (rolled against the Max Dmg of 10).

Lifting Tasks

Characters with human level Strength (Strength of 10 or less) measure their absolute maximum lifting capability on the Human Strength Lifting Table shown below.

Lifting the maximum amount as a deadlift (lifting from the ground to waist-high) requires a Difficult Test of Lifting skill. Each time the amount is halved, the task is reduced one step of Difficulty.

S	Weight	Example Object
1	100 lbs	Older Child
2	200 lbs	Adult
3	300 lbs	Pro football player
4	400 lbs	Adult Gorilla
5	500 lbs	Adult Lion
6	700 lbs	Motorcycle
7	1000 lbs	Kodiak Bear
8	2000 lbs	Compact Car
9	3000 lbs	Rhinoceros
10	4000 lbs	Full-Size Car

The strongest normal human (Strength = 10) has a Difficult task lifting 2 tons, an Above Average Task lifting 1 ton, an Average task lifting 1000 pounds, and an Easy task lifting 500 pounds. The average player character has a Difficult task deadlifting 500 pounds, an Above Average task lifting 250 lbs., an Average task lifting 125 pounds, and an Easy task lifting 63 pounds.

Increase the Difficulty one step if the lift is overhead, with control enough to hold the item for a few minutes. Increase the Difficulty two steps if he wants to throw the item with enough control to aim at the item at someone. Thus, a character with average strength (for a player character) could lift 63 pounds overhead comfortably as an Average task and could throw it at someone with normal control as an Above Average task.

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At the gamemaster's option, a character who is truly motivated by fear, determination, pain, or just raw heroism can attempt to deadlift up to twice his normal maximum lift weight as a Very Difficult task (probably requiring a lot of Luck to make the roll). This simulates the ability of a human being to get an adrenal surge and perform feats of strength otherwise impossible. An average human could conceivably deadlift the front of a car off a person using this roll. Anyone performing such a feat, however, can hold the weight only 1 full Round and then must drop it. He will also take 1D10 Fatigue points in addition to those assessed for the Difficulty of the task.



These rough guidelines may help you get a feel for how Strength affects moving and lifting, but don't stop the action to closely calculate such things. If a

character needs to lift something heavy in the middle of a fast-moving chase, just assign a Difficulty Level to the Task by quick guess and keep the action going! On the other hand, if everything is riding on a feat of strength and a level of tension is built up, you can prolong the tension by letting the character describe anything he is doing to improve his chances (using a lever, getting a solid grip or stance, etc.) and adjusting the Difficulty Level carefully to highlight the importance of the moment.

You might even give the character a second chance if he fails the first time, allowing him to improve his position, etc. and giving him a one-level bonus on the roll for a Heroic Last Effort (penalizing him afterward by assigning extra fatigue or knocking off hit points for a minor strain).

Movement, Distances & Time

All movement within the game is described by the gamemaster rather than measured and tested.

If a group of characters wish to go downtown, for example, the gamemaster will describe them hopping a bus, catching a cab, taking the subway, driving a car, or just plain walking. The exact distance and time involved are not important. The players know how long a bus ride or a walk of a quarter mile should take.

More exact movement description is important is when characters must compare their movement to the actions of other characters, or to things that happen in their environment. If, for example, the characters must deliver a ransom payment to a prearranged drop point across town before noon, we had better have some idea if that means a walk across the block or a frenzied car ride on the freeway. Likewise, if a player character is racing against the villainous Mr. Big to reach the pistol in the far corner, their respective movements are very important, indeed.

Most such comparisons can be treated either as a task with an assigned difficulty level (like the ransom delivery), or as a skill contest between characters (like the race for the gun). In either case, the exact distance and time is not really important. What is important is the tension and uncertainty of the situation, and the relative ability of the character to handle it.



If the gamemaster thinks in terms of dramatic situations instead of maps and counters, the characters will spend more time roleplaying than rolling dice. This will result in more exciting games.

If a situation requires more precision of positioning or players want more tactical combat options for an important battle, the **Compact Combat** board game makes an excellent advanced movement and combat system for use with sessions.

For tasks with a difficulty level, the gamemaster should describe the situation thoroughly and use common sense in setting the difficulty. The characters can then use whatever their environment provides them to improve their chances. Returning to the ransom example, if the drop point is across the street, no roll may be needed at all if the characters have 20 minutes to make the drop.

If the characters must travel twenty blocks, with traffic so snarled as to make driving or riding impossible, and they have only ten minutes to make the trip, the ransom scenario becomes... interesting.

Such a situation might require a character to make an Average difficulty roll on his Running skill to make it on time. It is recommended that critical tasks (like delivering the ransom) not hinge only on a single die roll. If the character misses the Running roll, perhaps he

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has run into traffic and must make a Difficult Dodging roll to get back on track, then another Running roll to make up the lost time.

When movement comparisons are a skill contest, it doesn't matter much whether the distance covered is ten yards or ten miles. The winner is the one who reaches the goal first. For longer distances, several rolls should be made to build suspense, with a character getting behind or ahead depending on the results.

Objects: Armor & Hit Points

For some reason, one of the most common actions in any action-adventure situation is breaking things. An attempt to break an object (like snapping handcuffs, or putting the hurt to The Evil Scientist's latest deadly invention) requires only a standard attack or Stat contest, whether with bare hands, a melee weapon, or a firearm.

Objects have Armor and Hit Points, too, just as characters have; in the case of objects, the Armor and Hit Point values come from their physical composition.

Armor Value	Material
0	Paper or Cardboard
2	Soft Woods
2	Soft Plastics
3	Hard Woods
3	Solid Plastics, Normal Glass
4	Fiberglas™
6	Light Metals (alum., copper)
8	Brick, ceramic
9	Hardened Resins (Lexan)
10	Concrete
12	Heavy Metals (iron, lead)
15	Common steel
20	Reinforced Concrete
25	Structural steel alloys
35	Special Alloys (Ti-Steel)
40	High-resistance material (carbon-fiber, spun titanium)

An item's Armor depends mostly on the material of which an object is made. The Hit Points mostly depend on mass and size, but complexity enters the picture, too. Thus, items of harder materials have greater Armor, and larger items have greater Hit Points. Remember that these Armor and Hit Points numbers are based on solid objects made of a single material. Most common objects are not solid or made of one substance. Thus, though an automobile may contain a great deal of common steel, it also contains plastics, light metals, tempered glass, etc.

An automobile would have a Armor of 10 or 12, not 15, and about 100 Hit Points.

Hit Points for objects work just like Hit Points for characters. Once an object is reduced to 0 hit points it is "dead" — it cannot perform its functions. It might be "healed"... that is, repaired, given time and skill.

If an object is driven into negative hit points, it becomes harder and harder to repair. After a certain amount of Hit Points are taken, the object is utterly destroyed and cannot possibly be repaired.

Hit Points represent the size and mass of the object, along with how complex or fragile the object is.

Hit Points	Object Size
1-2	Pencil-sized
3-10	Hand-held, up to brick size
10-35	Item held two-handed, bread-box
40-60	Man-size, carryable
65-90	Man-size, too heavy to carry
95-120	Automobile-size

The car is a complex object, with lots of fiddly bits that can be broken, so its Hit Points are less than the average two-ton object. A tank, made mostly of steel, would have Armor 25 and maybe twice the Hit Points of a car, about 200. A handgun might have Armor 12 and only 3 Hit Points.

Moreover, it is not necessary to completely destroy something to render it useless for its purpose. Luck or skill can disable an object with only a minimal effort. The gamemaster might rule that an Automatic Success disables the target object in some way; for example, a lucky shot right through an old car's distributor will stop the car, even though the car may still have plenty of Hit Points. Or, one can try to target the vulnerable parts of an object in hopes of disabling it. The rules for this were described under "Combat: Called Shots" (pg. 59).

Armor / HP	Common Item
5 / 2	Small electronic item (cel phone, radio, etc)
15 / 3	Handcuffs
12 / 3	Handgun
3 / 4	Chair
3 / 30	Conference Table
20 / 20	Street light pole
15 / 10	Parking meter
10 / 100	Automobile
25 / 200	Tank

Objects: Portals and Walls

When applying these rules to more solid objects, it's important to remember the function of a wall or door in this game: to obstruct the players! So, when the wall or door has taken sufficient Hit Points of damage, it is no longer an obstacle. Doors, from simple interior doors to vault doors, simply have to have their locking mechanisms broken or be ripped from their hinges to cease to be a problem. Walls require creating a small breadbox-sized hole to retrieve an item, or a man-sized hole to allow access.

To get through a door, a character must only overcome the Armor and Hit Points of the lock or hinges, which is often less than that of the door itself. The following tables indicate some of the common doors and walls encountered in this game, and the amounts of damage needed to penetrate.

Portal	Armor / HP
Light Interior Door (home, office)	3 / 10
Hvy Exterior Door (home)	6 / 12
Hvy Exterior Door (glass and steel)	8 / 16
Security Door	12 / 20
Wall Safe	12 / 15
Floor Safe	20 / 25
Bank Vault	25 / 50

In the Wall table below, "SH" is the Hit Points needed to make a small hole (about 6 inches across). "Man" is the Hit Points needed to make an opening large enough for an average man to get through.

Wall	Armor / SH / Man
Light Interior Wall (home, office)	4 / 10 / 20
Load-bearing Intr. Wall	6 / 15 / 35
Exterior Wall	10 / 20 / 45
Security Wall	20 / 25 / 45
Vault Wall	25 / 30 / 60
Reinforced Confinement Wall	30 / 35 / 75



Once again, a lot of rules — but their use is not always necessary. You probably have this figured out by now, though.

Use these rules where specific effects matter or players need more information (if just to comfort them). Otherwise, apply a standard of "reasonableness" and get on with the fun stuff.

When the villain's car spins out and hits a hydrant, you don't need dice or a calculator to tell you that the hydrant breaks and sends a geyser of water twenty feet into the air. That's just what happens because it's dramatically right. If the sign says "In case of fire, break glass", don't figure the Armor and Hit Points of the glass! The player smacks it with the butt of his gun and pulls the handle to set off the alarm. If the heroes are hiding behind a brick wall while the bad guys fire at them, don't calculate the penetration of each shot. Just describe the sound of bullets knocking chunks out of the brick, so the players realize the characters are in danger. When the heroes need to blow the Generalissimo's safe, they make an Average roll on the Demolition skill to calculate the charge correctly and BOOM — there goes the door. You know how the world works in the movies, and that's usually how the world should work in your game, too. Describe it, make it exciting, and let the characters live it instead of calculating it and rolling it.

Observing Tasks



The *gamemaster* makes all the Observing task rolls on the behalf of the players, since he is in charge of reporting what their senses detect.

Many times, a character's actions — and his life — may depend on whether or not he notices or remembers some detail of the situation or his surroundings.

The gamemaster must test his ability to notice clues, recognize danger, remember details, and spot hidden items without letting the player know that

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anything unusual or noteworthy is present. For this reason, players will rarely make a *Observing task* roll themselves. Instead, when a character enters a situation in which something important must be noticed, observed, remembered, recognized, or found it is up to the gamemaster to secretly roll 2D10 and compare them to the character's Observing target number. (The gamemaster should keep a list of the Observing skill ratings of all player characters for this purpose.) The only exception to this rule is if the character is trying to spot something that is obscured or read something that may only be visible for a moment or two (like a license plate on a moving vehicle).

In this case, the character may be asked to make an Observing roll himself, since he will know immediately whether or not the material was observed successfully.

The difficulty of this task is calculated as for any other. An occurrence or detail that would be noticed by the average human being who is reasonably alert but not expecting anything noteworthy is an Average task; changing a factor which makes the occurrence or detail more noticeable makes the task easier (a larger target, for example).

If conditions aren't as good as the average suggested above, make the task more difficult (as in a darkened or noisy room).

The character can do things to improve his chances of success. If the character has been warned about the situation being tested (perhaps by someone telling him to expect mice and other vermin in the rooms), he receives a one-level-easier adjustment in difficulty even if he isn't actively trying to search. A character who is actively looking about for anything unusual or important receives the same benefit even if he doesn't know exactly what he's looking for. A character actively searching for something specific gets both bonuses (so the task is two levels easier).

The gamemaster should remain generally aware of these factors as the characters continue play.

When a situation occurs in which a character might or might not notice something, the gamemaster notes all the factors that might affect the task, then rolls the Test. If a character does notice something important, the gamemaster may then point it out.

("You see what appears to be a rat run along the wall and into a hole near the corner.") Otherwise, the gamemaster keeps silent and does not call attention to the situation at all.

When multiple players are involved, figure the target number for the character with the best chance to

succeed. If he spots the situation, he may inform the others in the group. If the gamemaster thinks there is a chance the player might want to conceal what he knows, compare the single 2D10 roll to the target numbers for each character present, then privately inform only the characters who succeed of the situation (perhaps by passing a note).

There may be times when a character may have to determine after the fact if he noticed something important. For example, a character who uses a phone at a crime scene may later need to call that phone from another location. Did he notice the number on the telephone when he used it previously, and if so does he remember it accurately?

This can be determined by a Observing roll, again made in secret by the gamemaster. Why? Because, just as for searching, it's unrealistic for a player to be certain that his character recalls or forgets or (worse) misremembers something.

If the character announces he is observing something in particular (for example, "I am making a note of the number on this phone..."), then he needs no roll to have that information later on. Otherwise, the Observing roll is made with all the modifiers that would have applied at the time, plus one more level. Suppose noticing the phone number in our example would have been a Difficult task; trying to remember it after the fact would be a Very Difficult task.

Also, gamemasters shouldn't be afraid to ignore the results of a secret roll if it does not fit with the reality of the action. If the gamemaster feels that it is really impossible to notice something, no roll need be made at all, even if the characters are actively searching. On the other hand, if it is important to the plot of an adventure that the characters find something, don't let a single bad Observing roll destroy the continuity of your game. Let the player who came closest notice the occurrence anyway, but penalize the characters in some other manner.

For example, if everyone in the group fails to notice the tripwire that sets off a deadly boobytrap, have the character that hits it notice it just as he is snagged by it. Then give him a chance to shout a warning, throw himself backward, or take other action to limit the effects of the trap, perhaps with an increased difficulty level. Never seriously harm a player character or destroy the group's chances of completing a mission on the basis of any single bad die roll.

When describing newly-entered scenes or areas, you should make it a habit to roll dice often, even if there is

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nothing to find. This keeps players guessing about whether or not they are missing important details. As a suspense-building exercise, when you want the players to be alert and excited (such as in a dangerous villain's lair or a spooky old mansion), roll dice secretly when describing what the player characters see and hear, and no matter what the dice say, nod meaningfully, say "hmmmm... all right" and perhaps make a small note on a piece of paper. If the players ask what you are doing, ignore the question. Nothing gets players nervous faster than thinking something is happening behind their character's backs which they have failed to notice!

Poisons & Drugs

Most poisons start to take effect only if they can be introduced into the victim's system, either by the victim ingesting it, or by scoring a hit that causes at least one point of damage (after armor) with a weapon or natural attack that is poisoned. Every poison has four numbers associated with it.

Delay is the number of minutes before the poison starts to take effect in the victim's system. A poison with zero delay starts to work immediately.

Immediate Max Dmg is the Max Dmg taken from the poison's effect immediately after the delay is over.

The character rolls normal damage on 2D10 and compares to the table based on this Max Dmg, scoring that many Hit Points of damage immediately.

Persistent Damage is the number of points of damage taken from the continued presence of the poison in the system. Some poisons have no persistent damage, others have no immediate damage.

Some have both. No damage roll is taken for Persistent Damage. The damage is just subtracted from the character's hit points every five minutes.

Persistence rates how long the poison remains effective in the character's body. Persistence minus the character's Health gives you the number of times Persistent Damage will be applied. For example, a Average Character (Health 5) has been injected with a Persistence 10 poison. 10 minus 5 gives 5 bouts of persistence — the character will take the Persistent Damage value every five minutes until 25 minutes have passed.

The gamemaster may rule that persistent damage can be stopped if proper care is provided to the character. If a poison is ingested, inducing vomiting, providing an

antitoxin, diluting the poison with something that coats the stomach (like milk), or pumping the stomach may cancel any remaining persistent damage. For toxins introduced through wounds, bites, or ingestion, elevating the wound and keeping the patient calm might cut the persistent damage value in half, allowing sufficient time to reach a hospital. With poisons that are breathed in, supplying oxygen to flush the lungs or even just getting the victim away to a well-ventilated area may end further persistent damage. As with bleeding damage, don't attempt to apply persistent poison damage until after a continuing combat is completed.

It is then that characters can withdraw to take action to save poisoned friends.

Drugs

Drugs are defined as any chemical substances applied by ingestion, wounds, injection, or inhalation that affect characters in ways other than direct removal of hit points. Drugs may affect primary and minor Stats for a period of time, or they may have other measurable special effects.

Like Poisons, Drugs may have a Delay stated before their effects are felt. They may also have an Immediate Effect and a Persistent Effect, similar to the Immediate Max Dmg and Persistent Damage of poisons. Some drugs have a Duration of Effect as well, which may be measured in Combat Rounds, minutes, hours, days or even weeks. Some common types of drugs are detailed. Please be aware that these so-called "drugs" are based on adventure-style situations, not on reality. In the movies and TV, drugs which knock out a character quickly and last for a short time with no side effects are common. In reality, chemical substances and human physiology don't work that way.

The most common sort of "cinematic" drug is one which renders the victim unconscious harmlessly, which may be administered as a substance mixed with food or drink ("knockout drops"), as an injectable given by hypodermic or rifle dart ("tranquilizer drug"), or as a gas ("sleep gas").

Gamemasters may vary the effects of these drugs as necessary. It is also possible for a gamemaster to equip villains (especially ones who have especially high Intellect scores) with specialty drugs that temporarily cause weakness (reducing Strength), induce dizziness (reducing Coordination) or create other special effects.

Knockout Drops: One ounce, mixed with food or drink. Cannot be detected except with laboratory equipment. Effects are delayed 1 minute plus an

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additional number of minutes equal to 1/2 the character's Health Stat, during which the character may feel woozy and sleepy. At the end of the Delay period, the drug immediately reduces the character's Fatigue rating by 1D10. The drug then continues to reduce the character's Fatigue rating by 1D10 per Round for 10 Rounds minus the 1/2 character's Health. If the character's Fatigue rating drops to zero, he falls asleep and will remain so until physically awakened or for 1D10 hours. Fatigue otherwise returns at its normal rate.



This may seem like a lot of complicated rules and numbers to deal with drugs and poisons. After all, in the movies people take poison or knockout drops and then just fall down. Why do we need all these rules? In truth, a lot of the time, you don't. If a non-player character (like a minor guard or some other "spear carrier" not important to the plot) drinks poison or a knockout drug, he falls over. Period. The rules help you and the players predict the effects when they are using a poison or drug, or when one is being used against them. Where the specific results aren't important, move on.

Tranquilizer Drug: A drop or two, coated on a dart or injected by a needle. Can be detected by close observation of the dart or needle, though it takes a knowledgeable character to recognize the substance without a laboratory. Effects delayed one combat Round. Immediate effect is to reduce victim's Fatigue rating by 1D10. No persistent effect, but the effects of being struck by subsequent darts is cumulative. If the character's Fatigue rating drops to zero, he falls asleep and will remain so until physically awakened or for 1D10 hours. Fatigue otherwise returns at its normal rate.

Sleep Gas: Can be given directly by mask, or pumped into an enclosed area in volume to affect all in the area. Has a scent, somewhat sickly-sweet and floral, that may be noticed on an Average Observing test. Only a knowledgeable character (with specialty knowledge in medicine, poisons and drugs, etc.) will definitely recognize the gas by odor before it takes effect. Characters may attempt to hold their breath, and can do so for (4 x Health) Rounds if not fighting, or half that number if in combat or other situation requiring exertion. (Characters with special training (illusionists,

commandos, etc.) might have higher multiples for breathholding — gamemaster discretion.) Gas masks will filter out this drug, and even a makeshift mask (a wet rag held over the mouth and nose, for example) will delay the effect up to three additional combat Rounds. Once the gas begins to take effect, all affected characters lose 3 FP each Round until the victim is no longer breathing the gas or the victim reaches zero Fatigue, fails a Stamina Check and falls asleep. A sleep-gassed character will remain asleep until physically awakened or for 1D10 hours. Fatigue otherwise returns at its normal rate.

Speed Tasks

Occasionally, Speed is not compared just to placement on the ground but to the movement of another item, to a deadline, or to another character.

Most such comparisons can be treated either as a task with an assigned difficulty level (such as a character trying to beat a set deadline), or as a skill contest between characters (like a race for a fallen gun). In either case, the exact distance is not really important. What is important is the tension and uncertainty of the situation, and the relative ability of the character to handle it.

Because Speed is set at a different scale than primary stats, it is tripled when using it in a Test or Contest instead of doubled.

Technological Advances and Skill Use

Skills affected by technical advancements (including most science, technical, mechanical, and knowledge skills) are assumed to reference the time and culture of the character that chooses them. Thus, a character operating in the 1940s who is transplanted somehow to the 1990s will find his Mechanic: Automobile skill hampered by his lack of familiarity with such things as electronic ignition systems, catalytic converters, and fuel injection.

Likewise, the 1990s mechanic will be at a handicap if faced with trying to get a Model T Ford to start after a long period of storage. Similar problems would be encountered by a surgeon of today trying to deal with conditions in a World War I battlefield hospital, or a guitarist whose training stopped in the 30s who is faced with a modern electric guitar with all the technological trimmings.

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As a rule of thumb, characters will suffer a penalty of one Skill Level when dealing with technology or conditions that are old and outdated for their skills, and **two** Skill Levels when faced with technology which is more advanced than that which they are trained to use. Thus, the 1940s Professional level mechanic works as if he had only Familiar level skill if faced with a 1990's era sports utility vehicle, while the modern Professional mechanic working on a Model T exhibits only Capable level skill. Gamemasters may rule that some situations are more or less restricted than this, depending on the specific situation.

An appropriate Knowledge skill can reduce or eliminate such penalties, however. A character with at least Familiar level Knowledge skill relating to a particular time period will reduce any technological handicap relating to technical skills of that period by one Skill Level. Thus, if our modern Professional mechanic also has Knowledge: Antique Automobiles at Familiar, he suffers no penalty when applying his Mechanic: Automobile skill to them.

This won't help the 1940s mechanic who finds a temporally-displaced 1999 Corvette, as he has no way to gain a Knowledge skill relating to the technology of the future!

Vehicles

The role of car chases and aerial dogfights in adventure gaming cannot be overlooked! Nothing revs the excitement level in an adventure like a good chase. But if the gamemaster wants a chase, he'll need to do a little extra preparation to have solid vehicle information at hand.

Vehicles have Armor and Hit Points, just like any other object. Vehicles also have a Speed score, reflecting their typical maximum Speed. This score is equal to the vehicle's maximum speed in miles per hour, divided by 5. (How to know how fast a vehicle can go? The

gamemaster will need to estimate or look it up in a reference.) Vehicles may also have a Handling modifier, indicating that the vehicle is easier or more difficult to operate than average. Apply the Handling modifier to every Vehicle Operation roll made for that vehicle.



Jason Decker is doing a ride-around with patrol Officer Dunphy, getting the officer's impressions of some unusual crimes in the area.

The police cruiser has a Speed of 24 (about 120 mph), an Armor of 18 (reinforced body panels) and 120 Hit Points (heavy-duty components). It has a Handling modifier of 0.

Suddenly, two glossy black sports cars race out of a sidestreet and pull up fast behind Dunphy's car. A figure in pinstripe suit and dark sunglasses leans out of a passenger side window... and he's holding a submachine gun! The sports cars have Speed 32 (about 160 mph), an Armor of 10 and Hit Points of 100. They also have a Handling modifier of +2.

Vehicle Action

In most cases, operation of a Vehicle does not require a roll of the character has the appropriate skill. However, anytime the character wants to do something unusual — a snap turn, a sudden stop or reverse — a skill roll is appropriate. At the bottom of the page is a table of possible difficulties for assorted stunts. Note that these could be applied to any time of vehicle, from race car to biplane. "Velocity" here is a relative term; what's "slow and steady" for a jet plane would be impossibly fast for a car.

Steering Action Is...				
Velocity Is...	Maintain	Turn	Hard Turn	Stunt
Slow	Very Easy	Easy	Average	Above Avg.
Moderate & Steady	Easy	Average	Above Avg.	Difficult
Fast & Steady	Average	Above Avg.	Difficult	Very Difficult
Moderate & Changing	Average	Above Avg.	Difficult	Very Difficult
Fast & Changing	Above Average	Difficult	Very Diff.	Improbable

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The gamemaster can also modify the skill roll based on the terrain or other conditions which might affect the vehicle's operation, as shown in this chart:

Conditions	Modifier
GROUND VEHICLES	
Asphalt / concrete paved surface	0
Packed earth surface / wet pavement	-2
Loose gravel or icy pavement	-4
Sand / mud / wet ice	-6
WATER VEHICLES	
Active wind and wave conditions	0 to -6
SUBMERSIBLES	
Active currents	0 to -6

Don't forget to include the Vehicle's Handling modifier. And, if vehicle speed is important, the faster vehicle should get some bonus. The degree of modifier is relative — for a car chase, it might be +1 for every 5 points difference in speed; for jet fighters, it might be +1 for every 10 points of speed. The modifier should not be more than +5 — in such a case, the faster vehicle is so much faster that there's no contest.

If the roll succeeds, the vehicle makes the appropriate action. But if the roll failed... then the gamemaster is called on to describe the resultant mishap, and the worse the roll failed, the worse the mishap. Consider a car, attempting to make a sharp turn while flooring the accelerator (a Very Difficult task). If the task roll was missed by only 1 or 2, perhaps the car slides a bit in the turn, tires squalling, but no real harm done. If the task roll was missed by more, perhaps some obstacle was hit (trash cans or newsstand, anyone?), doing minor damage to the car. If the roll was failed badly, the gamemaster could describe the impact as the car spins out and slams violently into a brick wall, doing much damage to the car and its occupants.

This *Possible Mishaps* table provides some hints, but the actual details of any given mishap must be left for the gamemaster to describe as vividly as possible.

Task Roll	Possible Results			
Failed by	Ground	Water	Air	
1 or 2	Skid	Wallow	Turbulence	
3 or 4	Fishtail	Swamp	Stall	
5 or 6	Spinout	Capsize	Engine Stall	
7 or 8	Roll	Slow Sink	Tailspin	
9 or worse	Vault & Roll	Fast Sink	Break-up	



Dunphy grimaces into his rearview mirror. "Looks like we've got company," he mutters to Decker and floors the accelerator. Dunphy as a Vehicle Op: Car skill of 14. The gamemaster asks for an Above Average task roll as Dunphy accelerates in and through traffic; Dunphy succeeds easily. (The gamemaster cheats here and doesn't make the bad guys roll against their skills of 9 — but he rolls dice noisily to make the players think they did. The chase must go on, after all.) Decker readies his pistol and starts to unbuckle his seatbelt, but Dunphy says, "No, you'd better not. It's almost impossible to hit us, and even harder for you to hit them. Best we can do is let them make the first mistakes." Abruptly, Dunphy grins. "Time to see if that pursuit driving course I took was worth the time!" Dunphy's driving skills and knowledge of the neighborhood let him shake one of his pursuers (which badly failed a Difficult roll to keep up with him after a sudden turn and skidded into a garbage dumpster at full speed).

Vehicles in Conflict

One can easily have conflicts with vehicles as the central movers; it's a tradition as old as sailing ships and will no doubt last 'til the starships have tamed the galaxies. The combat rules adapt very easily for vehicles, with only a few changes in scale. For example, while a turn in a car chase and running gun battle might use the usual five second Round, the stately dance of tall ships locked in mortal combat might want turns of one minute or more. The gamemaster will determine the appropriate time period between vehicle actions in his combats.

Combat between vehicles is almost exclusively with ranged weapons. As a rule, all the usual modifiers for ranged combat apply, plus the modifiers based on "terrain" conditions described above, plus modifiers based on the handling of the vehicle from which one is firing.

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"This is getting us nowhere," Decker complained. "He's either lucky or good . . ."
"Lucky," says Dunphy, gruffly.
". . . but he's stayed right with you.

We've got to get out away from the bystanders and settle this."

"I know just the place," Dunphy replied, and the chase was on.

The gamemaster decides that Dunphy needs to get three successes ahead of his pursuers to "win" the race (a Serial Contest). He further decides that the contests will begin with both players rolling Above Average difficulty rolls because of the higher speeds involved. If Dunphy gets his three successes ahead, he gets away; if not the bad guys are able to stay with the police car and the chase continues.

Dunphy's player will roll for the good guys, while the gamemaster will roll for the bad guys. If Dunphy is an NPC, we'd allow Decker's player to roll for the NPC (based on Dunphy's stats), even though Dunphy is actually driving.

On the first turn, Dunphy's player and the gamemaster roll a Contest based on their Vehicle Operation: Car skills. Both rolls are successes, but Dunphy has a greater margin of success than the bad guy driver. Dunphy wins the Contest and is one success up on the bad guys.



Dunphy takes an abrupt right, then a left, and Decker realizes they've turned onto Wallace Street just before hitting the area known locally as "the Bends".

"Hold on, pal," says Dunphy, not slowing down. He takes the first bend at more than moderate speed, tires screeching. The pursuers hesitate a bit going into the curve, but make it through. Dunphy has gained almost a block on them in the process.

"You left my stomach behind back there," says Decker.

"You wanna go back for it?"

"... Not just now."

On the second turn, Dunphy decides to push his luck just a bit, confident in his character's driving skill.

He tells the gamemaster he's pushing the difficulty of the rolls up a notch by speeding up. Remember that in a Contest, if one character makes the roll and the other does not, the success margin doesn't matter. Dunphy's player is banking on his ability to pull off a more difficult test than the other driver can manage. Another contest is rolled, with both drivers now facing a Difficult level task.

Dunphy's player makes the roll — barely. The other driver fails the roll by 2 points. Dunphy has a second success, while the other driver faces a mishap.



Dunphy and Decker see a tough switchback ahead of them, but Dunphy presses the accelerator instead of slowing down. To stay with them, the driver behind has to gun it as well.

Dunphy screeches through the curve, swaying right, then left. The tires break traction for a moment, but Dunphy's expert driving keeps the road underneath them. Decker gulps nervously.

Behind them, the pursuing Porsche sways through the curves, but the less-expert driver at the wheel skids coming out of the turn. He's lost more ground. Decker sees Dunphy smile. Decker thinks, *He's actually enjoying this!*

"Yeah, that car's very, very good," says Dunphy. "But that guy driving is not worthy of her. He's mine, now..."

On the third turn, Dunphy continues to push his luck. As the lead driver, he's setting the pace, so he tells the gamemaster to keep the difficulty level at Difficult. Both Dunphy's player and the gamemaster roll. But this time, Dunphy's player has less luck, and — though he rolls successfully — his margin of success is less than that of the other driver. Despite Dunphy's skill, the other driver is making up the ground he lost.



Dunphy comes out of the switchback into a sweeping turn with an abrupt jink to the other direction at the end of it. He's a bit too busy looking in his rear view mirror and has to brake a bit. The other driver is paying better attention, and creeps closer.

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"You were saying, Mister Andretti? " chides Decker. "You watch the road; I'll watch the bad guy!"

Now Dunphy is back to being only one success ahead. He could play it safe and rely on his greater skill to continue to allow him to slowly gain ground over a period of turns. But the Porsche's handling modifier means that the very maneuverable pursuing vehicle is making up for the difference in the driver's skills. Dunphy would eventually win more contests than he loses, perhaps, but it could be a very long chase. Instead, Dunphy's player goes for broke, and tells the gamemaster to take it up to a Very Difficult roll.

Dunphy makes the roll, but not by much. The other driver fails it by six full points, and is in big, big trouble.



Ahead, Dunphy sees the hairpin turn locals have known for years as "Dead Man's Point".

Decker groans as Dunphy puts the pedal to the floor. "Here's where we separate the men from the boys..." The police cruiser roars into the curve. Heavier and less controllable than the Porsche, the car sways and tires slip dangerously on the gravel at the edge of the asphalt. But Dunphy has entered the turn just right, and the patrol car never quite loses traction or flips over.

Dunphy is again two successes ahead, but the Porsche driver's significant failure causes another mishap. Considering the speeds and the location, it could be a fatal one. The gamemaster decides to roll a second test for the bad guys, just to see if they can recover at all. They fail this Very Difficult test again by seven points, and the gamemaster decides it's all over for them.



Looking back, Decker sees the Porsche slide into the turn. He's low and sleek and looking good — but then he abruptly loses it as the car hits gravel at the edge of the road. The black sports car spins wildly — just a bit too wildly. In a moment it is through the

already-battered guard rail and over the edge of the short but abrupt and rocky dropoff. Decker knows he will remember the sound of ripping metal and the flash of flame a second later for a very, very long time.

Dunphy only shrugs. "Mess with the best, die with the rest." But Decker sees his friend's jaw clench tight, and knows the cop is not as casual as he wants to appear to his ex-FBI friend.

"It's a dangerous business," says Decker. "Let's get back to work."

Note that the gamemaster does not spend the time to determine the actual damage to the vehicle or the bad guys. They are out of the chase and that's all that matters. Onward to the next scene.

That's all for rules. Gamemasters can modify, expand, reduce, ignore, or etc. to any of these rules to suit their tastes

The next section discusses the hows and whys of world and character design and how all these decisions come together to make an enjoyable play experience.

WORLDMAKING

Preparing the Game

So you want to be a gamemaster! Good for you! The authors have found very few pursuits so personally satisfying as the construction and sharing of adventure scenarios with their player friends. But be warned, you will be called on to serve as actor, judge, referee and all-around authority. It's a tough job, but a few simple guidelines will help you keep your games fun and running smoothly. The rules sections should have given you an idea of the details in managing events during a given game session. We'll now look at the other great responsibility of the gamemaster: managing the world. The first decisions you make about a game setting will affect the entire game, so take the time to make them with care. Involve your players in the planning from the very first, as there is no use spending time creating a game that many of them later decide they don't want to play. Decide first on the tone, theme, texture and premise for the world you will create together.

Tone

A game's tone refers to the mood of a game and the emotions it creates. Like any other work of fictional entertainment (books, movies, plays), a game campaign can be light-hearted or dark and somber; heavily dramatic or breezy; action-packed or full of puzzles and mysteries; swashbuckling and heroic or gritty and realistic.

The tone you choose should be set by what your players enjoy. If they tend to be action-oriented and want the game to be quick and fun, stay with a lighter tone full of action and heroism. If they want a challenging game full of mystery, struggle, and gritty situations you should choose a more dramatic, mysterious, and realistic tone for your campaign.

This does not mean that every adventure must follow the tone set for the campaign. Occasionally, you will want to present a change-of-pace adventure to break up the mood. Even a dark and somber mystery campaign can have a light-hearted adventure now and again, and a heroic swashbuckler series should include an episode or two with a grim turn to it — just to remind the characters that their heroic lives are, in fact, dangerous lives.

Theme

The theme of a game defines the motivations of the central characters. What are the player characters doing in the adventures and what are their common goals?

A game campaign's theme may be simply a *Struggle for Survival*, in which the idea from adventure to adventure is mainly just to get out with your entire skin intact. A common theme for heroic games is *Defending the Good*, where player characters act as protectors of a population — the motivation behind many games where characters are law enforcement personnel or intelligence agents. *Rebellion against Authority* is a primary theme for games where the characters are part of a population under the thumb of evil, hoping to overthrow it. *Life of Adventure* campaigns take place where characters live on the edge or in challenging situations mostly for the pure thrill of it, taking on these challenges simply because they choose to do so for the adrenaline rush. The campaign may have no more goal than *Making Life Better* for the player characters themselves, who start with little and work toward more money, more fame, more power and position, and more control over their lives.

As you gain more experience at preparing campaigns, you will be able to work in themes that are more interesting and subtle, as a good author does with a novel or screenplay. For now, work with broad themes like those above, but notice the themes and subthemes that shape the books and movies and other fictional works you experience. These ideas can be addressed in your games, too, making them more interesting and entertaining.

Since the theme of a game is the campaign's emotional center, make sure the theme is something that has an emotional effect on the players. A group of conformists isn't going to enjoy a Rebellion campaign as much as a group of would-be free spirits. Likewise, a rowdy bunch of thrill-seekers is going to be driven crazy by a mystery-oriented campaign or one where the theme is subtle and quiet.

Not every player character must be motivated by the exact same thing that motivates the campaign as a whole. Even in a campaign with a Defending the Good theme, there is room for the Lone Rebel, the Thrill-Seeker, and the guy who is Out for Number One. This sort of conflict of goals, in fact, is the source of a lot of

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the tension and fun in a good game campaign. These sorts of characters start in positions which require they work together (most of the time) to move the campaign toward the goals of its theme in order to make achieving their personal goals possible.

Texture

The texture of a campaign refers to how each adventure connects to the next and the pacing of the overall "story" being told. The sort of texture you choose should be closely tailored to what your players want and can handle.

Games with an *epic* texture are telling one overall story, with each separate adventure sequence building to a definable goal. Epics you may be familiar with include *The Odyssey*, which tells the story of Odysseus' struggle to return home after the Trojan War, and the *Star Wars* movies, telling the tale of the rise and fall of the Empire. Epics are fun, in that you get to build and play characters who are the primary movers and shakers in the events of this grand saga. But they take a long time to prepare and play, and require a lot of commitment on the part of gamemasters and players.

An *episodic* texture is like many dramatic television series. It contains a lot of smaller stories, each telling one adventure that is more-or-less self-contained. The common thread among the adventures is the main cast (the player characters), some supporting cast (the important non-player characters who crop up again and again), and the campaign's theme and tone (which tie the adventures together emotionally, providing a continuous feeling of growth or motion). Episodic campaigns are good for groups that don't meet frequently or on a regular basis. Each "episode" takes only a session or two to complete.

When the same players are likely to be there for every game session, they become the "stars" of your game and all episodes are built around their actions. When players are likely to come and go unpredictably from session to session, it might be better to run an "ensemble" group for your episodes. In an ensemble, there are many characters, but each adventure may center on the actions of just a smaller group of them, different from episode to episode. That way, you can run adventures in which just the characters whose players show up participate, with the other characters off doing something else that session.

In a *saga* or storytelling campaign, the action centers on the lives and environments of a group of people from day to day. Player characters tend to play out more of their lives between "adventures." Sagas are like television soap operas. Each session leads directly into the next, with primary story lines that take a long time to play out and numerous subplots involving one or more characters which occur alongside the main action. This is good for very cohesive groups of players that do not change much, and who play very frequently. Saga players get very attached to individual characters, and may play them for years, building up rich personal histories.

It is not uncommon for game characters in sagas to grow and change like real people, completing some of their major goals and moving on to others. Saga characters grow attachments to other characters (both player characters and gamemaster-operated non-player characters) and sometimes get married, have children, grow old, and die within the campaign — with the player moving on to run his original character's heir.

Selecting a Premise

Once you and your players have decided the type of game you wish to play, and settled questions of tone, theme and texture, it is time to assemble a setting and background for your game campaign.

Often the best way to start is to approach the campaign as if it were a television series idea that you were attempting to sell to a network. To get Important People to consider your idea, you will need to summarize what the series is about, and what the strong points of the series are, in a few paragraphs of information. (These are busy people! They don't have time to read a lot about your show unless you can grab them with a short description.) This short summary is called a premise, and creating one will help you focus your ideas into something you can work with. If you can't describe the basics of the idea in a few paragraphs (no more than a page or two of typed text), the idea is too broad, and you need to whittle it down, centering on the things that are most important.

The premise should contain a quick general description of the setting of most of the action, an idea of who the heroes (player characters) are and their relationship to the setting, and a hint at the direction main plot threads might take during the campaign. The best way to explain a premise is to show you a couple that may seem very familiar.

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Premise A

The setting of most of the action is a compound of hastily-constructed quonset huts and tents in a clearing in South Korea, during the height of the Korean War. In this mobile hospital unit, teams of US Army nurses and surgeons (and the enlisted personnel who support their efforts) work to preserve the lives of front-line soldiers who are transported here by ambulance or helicopter from battalion aid stations for emergency surgical care.

This unit's job is to deal with critical or complicated injuries that cannot be handled at battlefield aid stations, but without the resources or time that stateside hospitals would have for similar trauma cases. Always overworked and understaffed, this hospital serves the critical cases first, with no time for leisurely routines and by-the-book surgery. The pressure is enormous on all the personnel, and many must create colorful and sometimes outrageous methods of coping with the tension and exhaustion to keep from going crazy.

The player characters here are doctors, nurses and support personnel who will form bonds of friendship as they struggle with the horrors of war, the stress of a daily struggle with death, the disappointments of separation from loved ones, and the insanity of a bureaucracy that has little regard for their situation. As a group, the characters will attempt to work within the system (or, often, work around it or against it) to survive personally, and insure the survival of the patients in their care.

Premise B

The characters are a group of special intelligence operatives in the US, who have been recruited for their knowledge in a variety of specialized fields. This special force — all volunteers — is given assignments to handle specific operations which would be considered beyond the capabilities of normal intelligence field agents. Though the setting of this episodic campaign will change from adventure to adventure, the action always starts with a briefing held by the group's leader, in which the assignment is presented in detail.

It is up to the characters to plan a course of action to accomplish their objectives. Sometimes this will involve retrieval of a person, object, or piece of information from a highly secure location, under the watchful eye of enemy operatives. Other times they might be called upon to disrupt a plan being executed by an individual or government hostile to the interests of the United States.

In most cases, it will be of utmost importance that no one ever know that an official US intelligence operation was involved. Thus, the actions of this unit are "unofficial" in all respects. Though the resources the characters will have to draw from are almost limitless, once the operation starts they are on their own, and if they fail the government will deny any knowledge of their actions.

Planning operations in advance is a major part of the play of the game, because once the action starts, player characters will need to work under tight deadlines and with close cooperation and expert timing. Because the missions are so difficult, the player characters are top experts in various fields, each with advanced skills in areas such as electronics, security systems, disguise, tactical operations, weapons, languages, etc.

Each mission is very different. The players may be sneaking into a high-tech American office building in one adventure, infiltrating a desert stronghold in a foreign land in another, and impersonating visiting members of a European royal family to draw out a known assassin in a third. The excitement of the missions is heightened by the fact that something unexpected can always occur to force players to modify a plan on the fly, or "wing it" in the event a plan completely comes apart.

Premise C

The setting is the city of Boston, where a Special Investigations Division of the police department is being formed. The player characters are all police officers of various ranks, backgrounds, and experience who have all been recently recruited. The SID is an unusual unit in a number of ways.

The recruits are an odd mix of officers of all types. Some seem to have been brought to this unit because of long experience in investigating unusual crimes. Others seem to have been recruited for special knowledge or backgrounds, such as paramilitary training, or former service with police or intelligence agencies on a national level. A few seem to be here because of personal experiences which have given them unusual contacts, insights, or experience with crimes that are beyond the scope of the usual police investigation.

The recruits themselves have not been thoroughly briefed on why this unit was formed. Rumor has it that the unit was set up at the specific order of the office of the mayor, over the objections of some senior police officials, and is funded by a special appropriation that the

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mayor rammed through the city council. This may account for the fact that the unit is well equipped and housed in a brand new near-downtown facility built especially for the purpose, and also for the resentment that the recruits are beginning to recognize in some fellow officers not chosen for this duty. Part of the unit's mandate is to investigate crimes where corrupt elements within the police department itself may be involved, which further increases tension on the job for these hand-picked officers.

The player characters will face assignments and investigate crimes which are of unusual scope.

Many times they will be interfacing with state and federal officers in various agencies, or investigating cases that may involve members of their own police force as victims or even suspects. Dealing with the pressures from political forces above them and the tensions within the force itself will be as much a part of the adventure as solving crimes.

Premise D

The mighty Terrano-Kentaur League is a loose but stable alliance of planetary governments spread throughout one arm of the Milky Way galaxy. A bit less than 100 years ago, the Terran Alliance was at the brink of civil war. It had been founded to prevent conflict among the many colony worlds that sprung from Terra (a.k.a. Earth) when the invention of hyperdrive allowed hundreds of social, political, ethnic, and religious groups to leave Earth and seek havens among the stars. But this very diversity threatened to bring warfare into space as the colonies grew and began competing for likely colony worlds of their own.

The historic First Contact with the Kentaury changed all that. A peace-loving race of vaguely centaur-like proportions, the Kentaury brought advanced planetary reforming technology to trade with their Terran neighbors. This technology made it possible to reshape many once-uninhabitable worlds into usable planets, relieving the population pressure that threatened to turn the Terran colonies against one another. Within a generation, the philosophies of peace espoused by the Kentaury were adopted by a large number of humans of Terran ancestry as well, and the Terrans and Kentaury joined forces to explore and expand into the galaxy together.

At the forefront of that expansion effort is the Space Fleet of the Terrano-Kentaur League. The Fleet is organized like a military force (a holdover from ancient Terran naval traditions) and it does serve as a

peacekeeping arm of the League. But the primary job of the Space Force is to patrol the outer reaches of the empire, assisting the newer colonies which are not yet self-sufficient, protecting the merchant vessels that supply them, and searching for new worlds which can be planetformed and colonized.

The player characters will be crew members aboard a small patrol ship of the Space Force which is operating on the fringes of colonized space. This mixed Terran-Kentauri crew of specialists will be the main link between a number of newly-colonized worlds and the bulk of the League worlds. The ship will also be engaged in a search for new planets to colonize beyond the borders of explored space in this region. Crew members will range from Flight Corps pilots operating the ship's landing shuttles to scientists sampling new life and surveying likely colony worlds, to security personnel charged with protecting landing parties from danger.

Premise E

On the world of Tellustrila (which roughly translates from the ancient Kavan tongue as "land with three moons"), an ancient race called the Kavan (which means "Wise Ones") lived in peace for many centuries. A biped race with slim bodies and pale, almost albino-like skin, the Kavan built an empire on the Great Continent of Tellus. They were led by their ruling class of shamans, who wielded powerful forces of nature in support of their god-kings.

No one knows exactly why the Kavan began to war among themselves, but the use of their great magics to create destruction almost wiped them out in less than ten years and brought forth a time of darkness called the Great Chaos. Magically-warped creations came into existence during this time and spread across the once-mighty empire, dominating it. The surviving Kavan were scattered and reverted to a primitive existence, except in a few isolated pockets where they sealed themselves away to protect what was left of their culture.

The primitives of Kavan stock forswore magic in all forms. They relied upon the strength of their bodies and the quickness of their minds to live and tame nature. They grew stronger and coarser than the Kavan, but they soon became numerous again and succeeded in casting out the creatures of darkness from much of the continent, taking it for their own. They called themselves "Human", which translates as "strong ones".

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When the Humans occupied the old cities and destroyed the magical creations and writings of the creatures of darkness as well as the surviving works of the Kavan. When the Kavan reemerged from hiding, they were a semi-legendary race to their coarser, stronger descendants. A few Humans accepted the Kavan as gods to be worshiped, some saw them as evil sorcerers to be destroyed, and a few accepted them as brothers to be welcomed. The vast majority, however, just wanted the Kavan to go away and leave them alone.

Today, most of the Kavan live in scattered enclaves, but some walk and live in the cities of Humans.

Both groups work to keep the creatures of darkness at bay while they rebuild a new civilization with a mixture of Human muscle and machines and Kavan nature magic. There is still distrust between Kavan and Human, but a common enemy exists in the Regions of Darkness, and it is said to be growing in power and awaiting a time to strike and bring a return of the Great Chaos.

The player characters are people of this world, including Humans and Kavan, as well as some beings who have been tainted by the Darkness but who wish to reject Chaos and live in the light. They live in the growing Kingdom of Stellaris, which takes its name from the circle of stars which adorns its flag. Organized under the Royal Family of Stellus, the Kingdom has successfully held its borders against the incursions of the Darkness for seven generations, largely because of an alliance between the Stellus royalty and the Magna Kavas ("Great Wisdoms") of the Kavan enclave within the Kingdom's boundaries. Though many still distrust the Kavan in particular and the use of nature magic in general, there can be no doubt that the Kavan allies have been useful in repelling the forces of the Darkness which mass near the mountain of Karantar on the western border of the Kingdom.

It is said that the forces of Darkness rally around a Lord of Darkness, who will soon loose a great Beast to lead the war of Chaos against Humans and Kavan alike. The Royal Family is gathering special groups of citizens from all walks of life who have special skills or knowledge. These Fellowships will be charged with many important tasks, including searching for lost Kavan lore, assisting in missions to push back the Darkness and, eventually, challenging the great Beast of Karantar and the Lord of Darkness. These Fellowships (including the one which the player characters will form, the Fellowship of the Firedrake) are often composed of people of quite different backgrounds and heritages —

from royalty to commoner, from Human to Kavan, from Tainted to Pure. Somehow, they must find ways to work together for a common goal, and face the Darkness with defiance.

The first two premise statements shown are easily recognizable as being drawn from popular films and television programs of the past. The other three are similar in structure, but they are the premises behind the campaigns of which our example characters (Jason Decker, Crissa deKentos, and "Grasp") are part. Premise E, for the fantasy epic, is a bit longer than necessary but demonstrates how a premise can shape a world long before the player characters are added.

Present the premise to your players before you ever start creating characters. You may want to create two or three and see which they like best. Your players may have suggestions for altering or improving the premise, or you may find that a premise you thought was dynamite is something they don't care for at all! Agree on something that will be fun for you to create, as well as fun for them to play.

Building the Setting

Now you have a premise, which is the core set of ideas for the game campaign you wish to run. Next you must create a setting — the game world in which that campaign can occur.

A game "world" is more than a physical location. It is really the set of places, circumstances, and characters surrounding the action of the game.

Those members of that set which are close to the player characters and interact with them a lot need to be more fully developed and detailed. Things that are farther away and do not impact the player characters as much can be a bit more vague. So your first job is to figure out just how broad the player characters' world needs to be, and how much of that "world" is really close to them.

Some settings can be very tightly focused and quite familiar. The setting of the game featuring example character Jason Decker is Boston in the modern day. For your first campaign, it's not bad to start with a place that is already quite familiar to you and your players. But much of the fun in roleplaying is to have adventures you can never have in real life, so your gaming may eventually take you far afield from the cities of the late 20th and early 21st century, requiring bigger "worlds".

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Even so, a bigger world really is not much harder to prepare than a smaller world, because the amount of material you must plan is still defined by what the characters can actually experience. Consider a relatively "small" game world: a modern urban adventure game involving police officers in a large city in the year 2002.

As police officers, the characters' jurisdiction is restricted to the city in which they live, so their adventures will rarely take them outside it. Thus, the "close" area is one city. The closest part is where the characters work, so you'll want a pretty good idea of what their station house looks like. The neighborhood they patrol every day is close, so you'll want to record your impressions on what kind of businesses, residential areas, schools, etc. are around. Is it a well-to-do suburb, a run-down inner city slum, or something in between? You may not need detailed maps of the whole area, so don't start with that. But you'll want to know what's around, and establishing a few special landmarks is a good idea.

"Close" characters are those non-player characters who encounter the player characters on a regular basis. In this case their fellow police officers stationed at the same location are among the "closest" and should be detailed well. Likewise, any spouses, children, family members or roommates who actually live with the characters are likely to be "close". Also, consider characters on the street who play an important part in the characters' work. A favored street informant, a recurring nemesis, a waitress at the local coffee shop who may be a potential love interest — any of these may be "close" enough to be detailed characters with stats, basic skills, personality notes, and full descriptions.

Events and subplots can also be "close". If the city's mayor has started a war on corruption (as the one in our example campaign has apparently done), you'll want to note down a few things about it (especially the mayor's name, a little about him, and what sort of political friends and enemies he has). If there's been a lot of gang trouble, note down the names of the gangs, and a little about their leaders, their distinctive "colors", their turf and history.

The "distant" things still are important to a lesser extent, though. The characters may be sent to the state capitol to testify in a major trial, or even go to Washington D.C. to attend a national conference. But these locations are unlikely to be visited on a moment's notice, so you will not be too concerned about them at first. This is also true about characters and events that are "distant". You don't need details on the assistant

D.A. or the Keep Our City Beautiful campaign until they come into play in an adventure, so don't worry about them at first.

The setting in which we will place "Grasp" is a broader campaign "world". Here, the characters might be traveling all over the Kingdom of Stellaris seeking allies, magical knowledge and artifacts, or foes, hardly ever having an adventure in the same place twice. Even so, the job is exactly the same, and in the final analysis, you won't be creating any more details than you do for the "tight" world of a single modern day city. You'll just be spreading that detail around more.

Here we decide that the "closest" part of the setting will revolve around the Royal City of Stellusia, where the player characters get their assignments. Close characters will include the player characters' immediate supervisor (a grizzled Royal Army veteran who is now an advisor to the Royal Family), other members of their Fellowship, who they work with on a regular basis, and the people in the Royal City who they see most often. (An innkeeper, a clerk in the Royal Library who digs up a clue or two for them from time to time — maybe even a lady in waiting to the Princess, if the characters are meant to get close to her.) If there are recurring adversaries (local rebel leader among the Tainted, scheming Royal pretender, etc.), they'll need to be somewhat detailed as well.

The Fellowship House in Stellusia is just like the "home base" for characters in the police drama described earlier. But in this case, we probably don't need to know a great deal about the city itself. The Fellowships come back here to report, but much of the time they are out in the Kingdom and beyond. They're rarely going to be in town, except at the start of the adventures. You can get by with a general idea of what the city is like, not much more than you'd know after reading a travel agent's brochure of a modern city.

The important characters, places and ideas of the Fellowship's game may be scattered all over the Kingdom geographically, but there are no more of them that are "close" than there are in the police drama. The work is essentially the same. You'll deal with more places, but in far less detail. You might want to know in general where the Fellowships have major strongholds, who the heads of some of the more prominent Fellowships are, and what forces are arrayed against them. But the details can be sketchy until you design specific adventures that make the details important.

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The same principle holds even if your game "world" is an entire galactic arm, as it is in the Terrano-Kentaur League game. Detail the places and people the characters see and interact with all the time. Have general ideas about the structure of the rest, and fill in as the individual adventures call for it. Since the player characters live and work on a star vessel, that vessel is their home and is "close". The far-flung planets they visit are "distant", and can be outlined very generally until they actually visit one. The one exception is their major supply port, which you place on the frontier world of Misava IV. Since the ship will call there frequently for resupply (and because a player character was born and raised there), you will want to know more about it. You will especially want to know a bit about Freeport, the city which contains the spaceport where their ship is serviced between missions. A favorite bar, the mechanical crew of their service bay, a couple of helpful connections in the city — you'll want to treat all this as "close" and detail it a bit more.

Sometimes the best way to create the setting is to start from the "outside" and work in, giving sketchy details about the things at a distance, and more detail as you move closer to the center of the action. Start with the broadest level where the characters are ever likely to visit.



Police Drama The United States (or whatever country the city is part of) is the general setting, and if you are setting the game in your native land you already have the general idea of what you are working with there. Know where the player characters' city is, and what importance it plays in the national scene. Know what the city's national reputation is, and why someone would travel there from another city (or even another country).

Fantasy Epic The entire Kingdom of Stellaris is your game's "playground", but at first you only need to know some very basic things about its history and current leadership and status. Create some details about the Royal Family and the structure of everyday life in the Kingdom — things anyone would know, such as how money works, what part religion plays in everyday life, what are the major political factions in court, etc. Know what city the player characters will use as their

headquarters and what leaders they will answer to in their work.

Know what the reputation of the Fellowships is among the Kingdom's people, and who their foes might be. When you send them to a specific barony or castle or darkness-tainted forest for an adventure, you'll want to note down more about that place so you can create a proper "feel" in the adventure, but at first concentrate on the big picture.

Starfaring Adventure A whole galactic arm is the general setting, but because you are assigning the player characters to a remote frontier sector, you only need to have a few general ideas worked out about Terra and Kentaurus (the "cradles" of intelligent life thus far encountered). If you decide that so far the Terrans and Kentauri are the only spacefaring groups known, you will only need to detail their customs and civilizations before the game starts. (If there are other alien races out there yet to be encountered, and you plan for the players to make the first contacts with them, you'll want to have some general ideas about who they are and what they want as well.) Decide here how the Space Fleet gets its orders and what the overall nature of their mission will be. A few interesting details about the current leadership of the League and the problems they face would be good here as well.

Next, move in a step to the general area in which the player characters will spend their day-to-day lives. Create a smattering of detail here; enough to wing it if the player characters suddenly move in an unexpected direction.



Police Drama The characters may run all around the city, so draw up a map which just places the major landmarks and outlines the main neighborhoods and regions. Is there an oceanfront, river, or lake on whose shores the city is established? That's where the docks are, and perhaps the warehouse district. There's a downtown area, which may be the oldest part of the city. Is it

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in decline, economically depressed, or has urban renewal and new construction and attractions revitalized it? Where are the economically depressed areas? The affluent suburbs? The main business districts? The governmental buildings? The tourist attractions? The recreational facilities like parks and sports complexes?

In which neighborhood is the police precinct the player characters call home? Who is the mayor? Who are the other important political and social leaders of the city? These characters don't need to be detailed. A paragraph of description about their relationship to the city and the police is enough for now, until they cross paths with the player characters. Don't forget to note what the city's big problems are, as these will be the player characters' problems, too. Urban decay? Gang violence? The flight of affluent taxpayers from the central city to security-conscious suburbs? Industrial pollution? Drug traffic? Organized crime?

Fantasy Epic Though the characters travel all over the Kingdom, the places that create continuity for them are the far-flung castles and strongholds of Barons loyal to the King. Which of these barons can be counted on for support when a Fellowship needs assistance? Which baronies are near to and threatened by Places of Darkness, especially along the border that is between the Kingdom and the great Darkness ruled by the Lord of Darkness himself. Where are the enclaves of the Kavan, and who are their leaders? You need to have no more than six to twelve such scattered locations, each with no more than a half-page to a page of description to start. You'll also want to sketch out some of the major concerns of the King in each area. Is there a baron here who may be seduced by the Darkness and be unreliable? Is there an old ruined city of the ancients there that might still contain powerful magic items you need to battle the Beast of Kartantar? Is there a village over yonder where a group of Tainted subhumans have forsworn Darkness and are attempting to rejoin the Light?

Starfaring Adventure The player characters will patrol a frontier sector of space where new colonies are expanding the boundaries of the League. Some of these colonies are settled by groups of Terrans from many different backgrounds, and some are Kentauri colonies — a few may be joint Terrano-Kentauri development projects, with humans assisting and learning from terraforming crews of Kentauri engineers. You will need to decide on a little general information about each of the regular ports of call on the patrol route of the PCs' ship — climate, facilities, government, special hazards, strategic importance to the League.

You will also need to know about how long it takes to travel between these ports. Finally, you will need to have notes about some of the unknown planets along the borders of known space where your players will be assigned to explore. Especially, you will want to know what dangers there are in these uncharted areas so you can be ready for the fun when your player characters come calling!

Now center on the heart of the action, where the players will be most likely to turn up. Here, you'll want a few more detailed characters, perhaps some interesting specific locations, and a lot of cool ideas for subplots in which the player characters can become involved on a continuing basis.



Police Drama Focus on the precinct or region served by the player character police officers. Who are the most influential and active people in the neighborhood? Politicians and social leaders, of course, but don't forget clergy leaders, influential merchants, citizens groups and their organizers, hospitals and schools and the folks who run them.

Create some recurring characters who can act as sources of information and "spark plugs" to trigger adventures. These can include cab drivers, local priests or rabbis, newspaper and TV reporters, beat patrolmen, and the operators and employees of neighborhood businesses where a lot of people pass through — news vendors, diner

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waitresses, pool hall owners, bartenders, mall security people, etc.

You don't need to know everything about these characters — just enough to make it possible to interact while wearing their faces and looking through their eyes. It doesn't matter that Harry the Cab Driver has a Strength of 6 and a Health of 4. It does matter that he picks up passengers outside the airport, and knows the downtown area better than most people know their own living rooms. Don't forget to know where the street people and bad guys hang out, too. Who are the local thugs and troublemakers, bookmakers, numbers runners, drug dealers, etc.?

The most important specific location is the building where they will report for work. In this case, you decide it is an old precinct house that was replaced several years ago by a new facility. The department has decided to save a little money by refurbishing this old place as the headquarters of the new Special Investigations Division. This provides the atmosphere with a mix of police tradition with modern facilities. You'll want to draw up rough floor plans and prepare some details about the place, because the player characters will spend a lot of time here. For example, though the second floor offices, crime lab, and computer facilities are very up-to-date, the first floor lobby has been left much as it was when the building served as one of the city's oldest precinct houses, complete with the central dais for the desk sergeant on duty and the wood and wrought iron bannister on the old marble staircase. Old photographs of distinguished officers from the original Precinct 13 still hang on one wall as a reminder of the traditions of the department.

Fantasy Epic: Now it is time to detail the people with whom the Fellowship will work for the betterment of the Kingdom. Who is the person who they report to, and what is his general personality and outlook? If they have friends or rivals among other Fellowships, this can be noted now. The inn where the player characters stay between adventures may

have a number of colorful characters around who involve themselves in missions or provide important services and advice. The Fellowship Hall is another location the characters will spend some time, so know who runs it, and what kind of supplies and assistance they can get there. Is there a healer who will bind their wounds and treat them between adventures? (And does he have a lovely daughter who assists him, or a subteenage son who wants to be a great adventurer himself one day?) Is the Fellowship composed only of the player characters or (more likely) do they have non-player characters along who are squires, grooms, assistants, etc. who should be described and detailed a bit so the PCs can get to know them and interact with them?

Starfaring Adventure: Home base for our players will be their ship, so be sure to give it a name and a bit of a history. This one is a small patrol vessel, but since "small" can mean as many as fifty crewmen, you won't need to draw up a map showing every pantry, airlock, and bathroom on the ship, nor will you want to name and create full character sheets for all the crew people. Instead, you will want a general map of the ship showing the location of important areas like the bridge, the shuttle bay, the crew quarters, and the sick bay. You'll want to know quite a bit about the captain (who is a nonplayer character in this game — the source of the orders to the player characters who will be going on landing parties) and the major officers like the ship's doctor, first officer, security chief, etc. You will also need character information for the PCs' immediate superior officer, who they will see and deal with on a daily basis. Give these people personalities, physical descriptions, and interesting details in their backgrounds as well as some hints on their skills and abilities. (For example, the ship's doctor may be a patient and fatherly Kentauri with whom Crissa deKentos plays chess during her offshift time.)

Creating the Characters

Creating Player Characters

Once you have decided on a setting and organized your ideas for how that setting will be developed, then and only then should you prepare the characters for the players to assume during the game.

Character creation should be a shared experience between the gamemaster and the player, with the player deciding the type of character he wants to play and the gamemaster helping the player fit the character to the game setting and situation.

Ideally, the gamemaster should work one-on-one with the players during character creation, allowing them to shape their characters without too much interference from other players. The presence of other players may result in more reserved players being "railroaded" into creating characters that appeal more to what others desire than what they really want for themselves. Also, there may be details of a character's abilities or background that the player does not wish to reveal immediately to his fellow players.

The gamemaster must have input into the character creation process, however. Only the gamemaster has the "big picture" of the game world. During character creation he must be able to veto character details that would cause difficulties during the game, and he must be free to help steer the player into creating a character that will offer interesting possibilities for future adventuring.

The gamemaster must maintain a balance between what is desirable for the player and what is good for the group as a whole.

The procedure for character creation has been discussed earlier, but the real meat of character creation is not found in rules but in the descriptive imagination of the player. A character must be more than an assemblage of stats and skills, levels and ratings. The character must live in the mind of the player, and the reality of that character must be transmitted from the player to the rest of the game group.

Before creation of individual characters begins, the gamemaster and the player group should discuss the game setting and the player group's role in it. Who are the player characters, why are they together, what are their shared goals, and what will they need to achieve them? Once the player group is defined, individual characters can be created that will give this group the composition it requires.



In our ***police drama***, the player character group will be members of the newly formed Boston Police Department Special Investigations Division. This means that all players will have to be police officers, and their backgrounds will all have to reflect the sort of training and experience that would put them into an elite group such as this.

Some characters may know each other, but in a big city like Boston it is possible that some of them will meet for the first time during initial orientation for the new division.

In our ***fantasy epic***, the player characters will be a newly-assembled Fellowship, gathered together by Royal Decree because of special skills, knowledge, or background the Kingdom needs to perform special missions of great urgency in the face of the Coming of Darkness.

Because Fellowships are deliberately formed of people with much-different backgrounds, player characters may be Human, Kavan, or even a member of a Darkness-tainted race who is seeking the light. Some may be great warriors, some may be wielders of Kavan nature magic, and others may be scholars of the ancient lore, skilled rogues, or savvy trackers and hunters.

Most of the members of the Fellowships will be volunteers who are rallying to defend the Kingdom from the Darkness, but some may be here for more selfish reasons, while a few may have been conscripted by Kingdom authorities and serve against their will.

In our *starfaring adventure*, the characters must all be crew members aboard a patrol vessel in a frontier sector of known space. Again, their backgrounds may be very different, but as all are members of a semimilitary force, they will all have a certain amount of training and experience in common within the Space Force. A variety of specialties are needed, including pilots, scientists, security personnel, and more.

It is then the task of the gamemaster and the individual players to create unique characters who will be fun to play, but still work well as a team around whom the main action of the game will revolve.

This does *not* mean that all members of the team will necessarily have the same goals. In fact, some may have mutually exclusive personal goals and even be openly antagonistic to one another. But if this is the case, the situation should be one in which the characters must cooperate (at least generally) to accomplish what shared goals they do possess.

The example characters were created with their respective campaigns in mind. Jason's unusual background as a former FBI agent makes him perfect for situations where the SID will have to work with (or sometimes around) the investigations of similar federal agencies. Crissa is a native of one of the new colony worlds which her patrol ship will service and protect. "Grasp" has skills learned in a lifetime of dealings outside the law which can assist a party of adventurers in sorties against the Darkness in their world of magic and danger.

To start out creating their character, the player should be less concerned with game statistics than his overall view of the character. Try to get the player to express his view of the general type of character they wish to play. Do they want someone who is a great fighter, or one who is clever and quick, or one who is thoughtful and smart, or some other sort of person?

Sometimes, it is easier for players to express their preferences by referencing a familiar character from TV, movies or literature. ("I want a Han Solo-type character" or "I want to play a character who thinks a lot, like Sherlock Holmes".)

Once the basic concept of a character is known, you can help the player develop the character a bit by adding some idea of how he got to where he is at the beginning of the game. Having a rough idea of a character's background at first is a real advantage during character creation, because that information can suggest interesting choices for Abilities, Disabilities and Skills.

This is a good place to create the first "character hooks" which will tie the character to the setting. You already have a game setting in mind, and you should tie your characters to that setting by putting details into their backgrounds that relate to the setting.



One player in the *starfaring adventure* wants to play "an ingenue type — kind of like a country girl going to the big city for the first time".

Translating this into the futuristic game setting, the gamemaster suggests the character might be from a new colony planet, where life is still pretty rugged. The player likes this angle, and further suggests the character has a real wanderlust built up to see all the exciting new worlds she's up till now only read about in books. Since the game setting involves a frontier sector of space where the player characters' ship will patrol, they decide to have the character be from the colony world where the ship calls most frequently, a still-rugged world whose newly-established spaceport gave the character her chance to sign up for the Space Fleet. The gamemaster realizes that having her return from the Space Fleet academy to be assigned in her home sector will let him bring many people from her past into the game at various times as non-player characters. This will tie her more firmly to the action in the game and give her emotional links to the setting.

When player characters are being created, the gamemaster must also take into account the types of character skills and backgrounds that will assist the overall player group in accomplishing goals in the game. If players will face a broad range of challenges, it is likely they will need a broad range of experience and ability to deal with them. For this reason, a variety of character "types" should be part of the game. If the group has decided on a game whose tone is dark and mysterious with a lot of puzzle-solving and clue-finding to be done, at least some of the members of the team should be heavy on investigation techniques and observation abilities.

A single combat-oriented character might be useful in such a campaign as well. (After all, investigators often attract trouble from unscrupulous people who don't want busybodies prying into their business.) But if all the players in this sort of game choose big, tough brutes who think with their fists... well, they are going to have trouble dealing with those puzzles they want to solve.

Simply ROLEPLAYING!

When specialty skills are likely to be needed, try and steer at least one player into playing a character who is likely to possess the necessary background.



In the **police drama**, the player has decided he wants to play a fast-thinking detective-like character who is more oriented toward problem solving than physical confrontation. Several players have already chosen Dirty-Harry style tough cops, so the group is certainly ready for a change of pace. The game group also contains one character who is an ex-homicide detective, so another isn't really needed. The gamemaster knows that he plans to make friction between the new division and federal authorities part of the theme, so he suggests that the character might be an ex-FBI agent. The FBI stresses investigation, giving the player the excuse he needs to be a good investigator and problem-solver. This appeals to the player, and he agrees. The gamemaster decides the character is no longer with the FBI because of political reshuffling which led to cutbacks. The gamemaster makes a note of this, realizing he can use this tie to the FBI to introduce interesting non-player characters (former FBI colleagues, criminals from past cases, etc.) to the campaign, and also to feed information to the players through this character's FBI ties. It also will give him interesting problems when a case involves a jurisdictional dispute between the FBI and the Boston Police — will the character choose to support his Boston colleagues, or will he help out his old FBI buddies, with an eye toward being reinstated with the Bureau?

Sometimes you want to leave some breathing room in a character's background, to be filled in later when the campaign has developed a bit. At the beginning, players don't really know enough about the game setting to zero in on interesting concepts that may become apparent later in the campaign.

Leaving a bit of mystery in their background let's them decide later to tie their characters more tightly to the setting and the action by "filling in the blanks". It also allows gamemasters to use the "opening" to create

challenges for the character that come out of his unknown past.



In the **fantasy epic**, one of the players knows he wants to play a "free-spirited" character, but has no idea of how he wants to approach it. The gamemaster knows the players will need someone who is good at skulking around when they search for lost magic items in ancient ruins, so he suggests the character play a streetwise thief. The player likes the idea, but still can't decide how the character became a thief, where he's from, or much about his background. The gamemaster and player decide to leave much of the character's background a mystery, giving him just a nickname — "Grasp". No one knows his real name (not even the player and gamemaster at this point), which allows the player to later pick a name and a background when he knows more about the game world.

Also, try to avoid having everything in a character's background be positive and helpful. It is more fun and challenging to play a character who has some problems and flaws, and gamemasters should encourage players to take appropriate Disabilities, reminding them that these can be used to balance the choice of special Abilities they may wish to have. Flaws and Disabilities are also great roleplaying "hooks" that a player can use to make characters special and exciting.



The player with the character called "Grasp" asks the gamemaster to provide some sort of personal detail he can use to make the character more identifiable and interesting. The gamemaster suggests that the thief be missing a hand, having lost it as an especially brutal punishment when he was caught stealing. It also makes the name "Grasp" more clever and ironic. Both player and gamemaster know that sort of Disability can be balanced with a pretty nice Ability somewhere along the character creation process, and a one-handed thief is... different. The player accepts the idea.

Simply ROLEPLAYING!

As you walk players through the character creation process with the player, remember that it is important to create a character that the player will enjoy, but it is just as important to create a character that enhances the play for everyone concerned.

Avoid creating any character who will always dominate the action of your game, at the expense of other players. Also take the player's personality and style into account. If you have a player who is outgoing, experienced, and clever, try to give him a character that will challenge his roleplaying ability with interesting personality quirks and stronger Disabilities to overcome. This will be more fun for him, and will also slow him down a bit so that the other less-experienced players have a chance to keep up with him.

Creating Non-Player Characters

All the people your players will meet in the game (outside of those actually played by live players) are non-player characters. Non-player characters (NPCs) are a very important part of the game. As the players are expected to react and speak "in character" during the game, so the gamemaster must react and speak for all the NPCs. It is important that these characters be interesting and detailed.

This does not mean that you need to create a character sheet for every non-player character the player group might encounter! In fact, very few NPCs need to be very detailed in this manner. When creating an NPC you only need to specify the information that a player character would learn about him.

"Extras"

The last time you entered a store and bought a gallon of milk you dealt with a store clerk at some point. You probably knew little about that clerk and probably remember as much about them now. This sort of NPC crops up every day for the player characters: someone who interacts with them briefly and doesn't make much of an impact. These people are extras — faceless hordes who are only there as window dressing or to fill a momentary function. Don't worry about creating a detailed description of every shopkeeper, starport cop, and street punk you need for your campaign. Just make them up as you go along. They don't need stats, skills, hit points, or even a name. Generally, they don't even rate a note anywhere.

"Spear Carriers"

You will also have some characters who do fill a minor function and interact with the characters a bit, but who don't really have a lot to do with the story. These are spear carriers, so named because they are like the guys who are in the background of every scene in a Shakespearean play, holding a spear but never speaking or doing much. For the average spear carrier, you only need to know what is most obvious about the character. Need a guard for the warehouse the players are going to have to sneak into? He's not quite an extra, because the player characters are probably going to have to talk or fight their way past him. So you need to know that he has a weapon and knows how to use it, and perhaps have some idea how observant and suspicious he is likely to be. If he's probably going to engage in combat, you'll have to create basic stats for him (including hit points), but the only skills you care about are those relating to combat. Just note what kind of weapon he has and assume he is at least Familiar with it. Need more than one (like a horde of goblins for your fantasy heroes to fight their way through to get to the Great Ruined City)? Don't worry about individualizing them. Just create a generic "goblin warrior" and use that set of stats every time the player characters encounter one or more. On occasion, you'll need a spear carrier who does something other than fight, especially if he's likely to engage in a Skill Contest with a player character. If so, assign them just the skill that is most likely to matter in the game and move on.

Spear carriers should have their important characteristics noted as part of your adventure notes, but beyond that need no record keeping.

Secondary NPCs

Secondary NPCs are those that may interact with the player characters more than once during an adventure, such as a villain's major henchmen or the bartender at the corner tavern near the station house who is always good for a lead. These people need names and a bit of personality detail, as well as stats and a couple of pertinent skills.

For example, the major henchman in a fantasy adventure might be Grog the Odorous, a Darkness-tainted half-goblin. He's very strong, carries a big greatsword, and doesn't bathe very often. Grog has a grudge against all Humans, and carries a chip on his shoulder the size of a Buick. Good thing he isn't very bright.

Simply ROLEPLAYING!

The bartender in our police drama is Larry Hitch, an ex-con gone straight who picks up a little money on the side as a police informant. He has good connections with the criminal element in this neighborhood and those connections (and Larry) will last as long as none of the local hoods figure out he's sharing what he knows with the cops.

These folks don't need a full character sheet, as we really don't care if Larry builds model trains or that Grog used to be a blacksmith before he found out being a thug paid better. But we do need to know if they have useful skills that will matter to the player characters.

You can also give them an interesting Ability of Disability, just for flavor. If a player character has family members or close friends who show up occasionally but don't really participate in adventures, they are probably secondary NPCs. (If they are really distant — like parents who live in another city — they may just be spear carriers or even extras.) Secondary NPCs may turn up again, so note the important info about them — particularly any interaction they have with player characters — on a 3 by 5 card for later reference.

Primary NPCs

Primary NPCs are those who interact with the player characters a great deal, either as frequent companions or major foes. Unlike secondary NPCs, these characters will probably figure prominently in the player characters' lives and do have a major role in adventures. Any NPC who travels as a regular part of the player character's team is probably a primary NPC. Major recurring villains are also primary NPCs, as are friends and family members of player characters who frequently involve themselves in the action. Primary NPCs need names, backgrounds, and probably a full set of stats, abilities and skills. None of this needs to be as detailed as the information created for player characters, but their relationships and interactions with player characters do need to be detailed. Primary NPCs should always be deliberately created with links to possible adventure ideas.

For example, if Crissa (in our spacefaring adventure) has a younger sister who hangs around with her every time she's in port, you'll not only want to name her and give her some description, background, skills and such — you'll probably want to establish some interesting background details for her so that she can drag Crissa into trouble occasionally. Maybe the sister has a boyfriend who runs with a youth gang in the spaceport that runs errands for a local crime boss. That

should be good for a lot of problems and adventurous situations, especially if the boyfriend uses Crissa's sister to help him smuggle something illegal aboard Crissa's ship. Characters like these will have detailed 3 by 5 cards, and some of them may even have full character sheets of their own.

NPCs as Tethers

Non-player characters are often created just for the purpose of tying the player characters more tightly to the adventurous situations you will create for them. Using NPCs as links between adventures and player characters is a great way to make the players care more about the action. Properly used NPCs can give player characters an emotional jolt even if they are just extras.

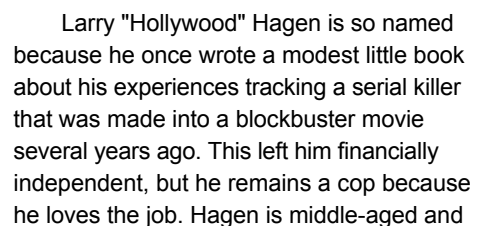
Want the player characters in the police drama to get involved in a turf war between two rival gangs? You could have a primary NPC relative join one of the gangs, but that might not be necessary. All it may take is having a down-and-out wheelchair-bound extra roll up to one of the PCs (one whose character was once in the military, perhaps) and ask him for some spare change for a wounded vet. One minute after the PC gives the man a five-dollar bill (and he will, if you've picked your target well and primed him with a little conversation with this wounded ex-Marine), have the vet cross the street and get shot down right in front of the player characters when he puts himself between a drive-by shooter and his intended target — a couple of kids whose older brother belongs to a rival gang. Your players will be instantly motivated to action, and they will care much more about the case than if their desk sergeant had simply assigned them to investigate the gang war.

Gamemasters must be ready, however, to "promote" an NPC to a more important status if players suddenly take an interest in him. The extra behind the bar at the local tavern becomes a spear carrier when your players decide to talk to him at length one night when they are seeking information.

You may have to make up a name and a few details about him on the spot, or even figure out what his Streetwise skill might be. Try to do this quickly and confidently, so your players never suspect that you hadn't set the situation up in the first place. The same man becomes a secondary NPC if the players start going back to him again and again in future cases. You'll then need to keep a permanent record about him on a 3 X 5 card, perhaps noting when his information led to the arrest of one of the major villain's most loyal henchmen.

The Opening Adventure

The opening adventure may also provide the first impression the players will get of a gamemaster's style and abilities. It is important to keep the first adventure entertaining, but it is of even more importance to watch how the players react to the way the first adventure proceeds to discover if there are parts of the setting, play, or theme that they do not enjoy. This gives you a chance to adjust things early on when a lot of your game setting is still unrevealed. Don't be afraid to change some things after the first adventure.



Simply ROLEPLAYING!

not as physically fit as he used to be, but his long experience in Homicide Division makes him a natural for the Special Investigations Division. Even so, he is disliked and mistrusted as a "glory-hound" by some of the top brass because the movie made of his book promoted Hagen's character as the hero while painting a less-than-flattering picture of his superior officers.

The gamemaster sees several common bonds among the officers — the desire to be a good cop, a focus on personal competence, a feeling of alienation from the rest of the force, and "something to prove". He also sees potential conflicts, especially when it comes to their personal styles. Decker, Killian and Hagen in particular will tend to have their own way of doing things that may not mesh with the others in a team effort. Killian's free-wheeling loner style will not mesh well with Decker's FBI-borne methodical approach and Yamata's by-the-book procedures. Morales and Yamata have issues with being stereotyped by their peers and the public, while Hagen and Decker are used to getting their own way because of position or notoriety.

After some thought, the gamemaster decides to start the characters off with an adventure which sets up the conflict between rank-and-file cops and the new unit, as well as tests their ability to cooperate.

The adventure will revolve around a series of murders across the city that seem unrelated at first observation. A former FBI agent of Decker's acquaintance becomes involved when his daughter is a victim, and he sees a pattern that leads him to believe that a supposedly-dead killer he pursued when he was an agent has returned in Boston. This former agent brings the case to Decker informally, asking him to bring it before the NPC police captain who heads Decker's special unit.

The gamemaster can use this situation to establish the character of the captain and his relationship to the squad. He wants the character to be gruff and somewhat by-the-book, to balance out some of the maverick tendencies of the player character officers.

He also wants the characters to look at the captain as basically a good officer, whom they can trust to back them up when they are doing a good job just as surely as he will clobber them when they are out of line and behaving unprofessionally. To do this, he has the captain question Decker sternly about the case when Decker brings it to him, but eventually allows Decker to put the case before the other officers to see if they see any merit in the theory that the murders are all part of an elaborate series of killings by one perpetrator who is likely to strike again.

Details in the various murders already committed will be used to "hook" character details for several of the player characters. The captain will suggest sarcastically that Hagen might write another bestseller about the case. Yamata's wife knew one of the victims, who was killed on the Boston College campus. All of the victims are professional women, a detail which might interest Morales. The gamemaster decides to set up some evidence that at least one of the murders was a drug-related killing, thus planting a red herring which might create some interest for Killian and cause him to create some conflict with other officers like Decker who see a deeper pattern to the crimes.

Since the murders took place all over the city, it is a perfect opportunity for the gamemaster to let the members of the new unit stir up some resentment among the officers in various precincts who already are working the case. These officers may not see the unusual connection among the victims, and could resent interference from their special squad. In addition, Decker's distraught ex-FBI friend may cause trouble with his own unofficial "investigation".

The gamemaster also decides that the killer will be a bizarre and very smart and dangerous character in his own right. If the character works well, he considers the possibility that he could become a "continuing villain", reappearing every now and then during the campaign. For that reason, the gamemaster decides to try and set things up so that the final outcome of the adventure will put a satisfying final end to the case, but

leave the possibility for the killer's return. That will depend a great deal, however, on the actions of the player characters during the final showdown, and the reactions of the players themselves to the NPC.



The gamemaster notices during play of the first adventure that the person playing Hagen really gets into the idea of writing another book, so he decides to make this a running bit throughout the campaign, introducing Hagen's literary agent as an NPC. The agent will provide some comedy relief in the otherwise grim and gritty campaign by showing up at odd times to talk with Hagen about his writing, book contracts, and cases that might produce interesting future topics for his literary ambitions.

Also, the gamemaster notices that the male player running the Linda Morales character is having real trouble getting into playing a woman, despite his earlier enthusiasm for the idea. He decides to talk with the player privately, and see if he'd like a change. If so, Linda Morales will be transferred, replaced by a male cop. On the other hand, the gamemaster wants some female cops on the squad, so he will introduce an NPC officer who is female in the same adventure where the new player character is introduced.

Adventure Design

Designing adventures, whether for a continuing campaign or a one-night game session, is the most challenging part of a gamemaster's job. The subject is, in fact, far too big for this book, but there are some specific techniques a gamemaster can use to make adventures exciting and fun.

When you think about the structure of an adventure, it is often helpful to think of it as a movie (for a stand-alone adventure) or an episode of a television series (for an adventure that is part of a larger campaign). Movies and TV episodes are composed of a series of scenes which fit together into a dramatic structure that brings the players through the action.

In the case of a game adventure, the structure cannot be completely fixed, since the actions of the player characters in each scene will determine the direction the final story line will take. So the overall dramatic structure for a game adventure resembles a branching series of scenes, leading to several different possible approaches and perhaps to several possible outcomes.

The first scene is very important, because it both sets the tone for the adventure and pulls the player characters into the action. You must "grab" your players with the first scene to provide a transition into their character roles. The first scene should tell them "We're entering the game world now", so they will begin to think and react as their characters. It should also make them excited and alert, ready for action. In TV shows, they call this scene the teaser, because it teases the audience with action before the credits and gets them to stay tuned for more.

Many gamemasters start their adventure with a lot of talk, where the player characters get an assignment from superiors or are told at length about the situation at hand when the game story begins.

It is usually more effective, however, to make the teaser an action sequence which will immediately require the players to react in character. This brings the players right into the game, when they otherwise may be slow to turn their attention to play. The action itself may relate directly to the larger plotline of the adventure, starting the players on the path they will be following. On the other hand, it may be an incident which has little or nothing to do with the plot, but is there just to get the adrenaline flowing and the players thinking in character.

Either way, it should involve the player characters actually making decisions and taking action, not just listening to someone talk.



The gamemaster could start our police drama story about the ex-FBI agent and the serial killer with a visit by the agent to Decker's home for a discussion of the case. But that would be a slow scene with a lot of talk, and it wouldn't involve most of the player characters. Instead, the gamemaster opts for something a bit more exciting. Since it's the first adventure for the new special squad, the gamemaster decides it is also their first day in the remodeled precinct house that will be their headquarters.

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He will start the adventure with all the player characters carrying in their personal items and getting settled into their desks in the "bullpen" upstairs. In a few minutes, they will be called into the captain's office for their first briefing — the first time many of them will meet their fellow officers formally.

The gamemaster will give the characters a brief setup description of the room and allow them just a few moments to get oriented. Morales is told she is talking to a woman who has wandered in, still thinking this is a local precinct house. Somehow, the woman has talked her way upstairs and is now bending Morales' ear about a noisy neighbor.

Yamata has just met the squad's NPC crime scene expert, a bespectacled young man named Chris McNally, who is showing him the small but well-equipped lab facility.

Killian is trying to log into the new computer on his desk to get his daily schedule, but the program isn't cooperating.

Hagen has notes for his next book scattered atop his desk. He can't get his new file drawer open to put them away.

Decker is at his desk when the phone rings. It is the desk sergeant, telling him he has a visitor downstairs.

Suddenly, alarms start to sound and the sprinkler system goes off, spraying water everywhere. The civilian visitor starts to panic. McNally dashes into the lab, saying something about a Bunsen burner. The captain burst out of his office wanting to know what's going on. Is there a fire?

The player characters must immediately deal with the crisis, reacting in character. There actually is no fire — the new alarm system has malfunctioned.

But the PCs don't know that and must deal with the problems the sprinklers, alarms, visitors, and resulting chaos causes. This gets them into character quickly, and tells the group more about each other without a boring introduction scene.

In the process of getting the building evacuated and turning off the alarms, Decker can meet his visitor, his ex-FBI friend. The man is upset and desperately wants to talk to Decker alone. Will Decker go with his friend

(perhaps missing the roll call and meeting upstairs, once the alarm problem is dealt with) or make him wait with a promise to speak with him later? Unknown to the players, this decision is the one (among all of the decisions they are making in the first scene) which will really set up the later action of the game.

The teaser is usually followed by an establishing scene. This scene is the real start of the presentation of material relating to the adventure. The teaser may contain things relating to the plot, but in the establishing scene the characters are actually set on their way. After the action of the teaser, this scene often is composed more of talk and information gathering. It establishes the conflict of the adventure, usually a problem to solve or an obstacle to overcome. You have established the unity of the characters in the teaser, but occasionally an establishing scene may require separating the characters to give them information.



In our police drama's establishing scene, the player characters must be made aware of the latest murder. At this point they have no knowledge of other murders, so they will be concerned only with the latest, which is being brought to the special unit because the victim was the daughter of a prominent local columnist who has been an outspoken critic of the police. By assigning this new, high-profile special unit to the case, the police hierarchy hopes to get the vocal journalist off their backs a bit. The characters are to be briefed on the case by their captain, who has been instructed to provide whatever manpower and support the case requires. After the briefing, he sends them off to investigate the scene of the first murder, which gives them some direction toward the next scene.

The briefing scene involves most of the characters, and is pretty much straight exposition with the gamemaster playing the role of the captain. The only wild card in the mix depends on the actions of Jason Decker in the teaser. If Jason goes off with his friend after the false alarm, he will miss the briefing. In this case, the gamemaster may send

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Jason's player out of the room for the short time that the briefing takes, while having the captain rant and complain about Jason's unexplained absence. On the other hand, if Jason delays his meeting and does attend the briefing, he will come out of it to find the friend has left, leaving behind a room number and a time — 6 pm — written on a matchbook from a local motel.

Following the establishing scene, the gamemaster will plan a number of scenes which advance the overall plot, each designed to give the player characters more information or require them to overcome some obstacle to their success. Since he cannot totally predict the path which the player characters will take toward their goal, this "path" is usually composed of branching possibilities rather than a straightforward "script". The gamemaster will outline the choices the player characters could make along the way, and attempt to anticipate events that will occur because of them.

To make the scene-by-scene plotting easier, the gamemaster should prepare a timeline, which shows what will happen in the story unless the player characters involve themselves in the action and change the flow of events. The timeline will help the gamemaster keep track of the passage of time and keep the pace of the game. This is important, in that the players should always feel that their characters are in a real world where things happen around them whether or not they are present to affect the outcome. Of course, that outcome is likely to be a bad one if the player characters don't do something about the situation. The villain will escape, innocent people will die, perhaps civilization itself will be threatened.



In the timeline of this police drama adventure, the serial killer (who is indeed the same criminal who escaped the FBI years earlier) has already performed a series of murders that the police have yet to connect to a single perpetrator.

The most recent has occurred only hours before, and as the player characters are being briefed about it at 9 am (delayed an hour by the false fire alarm) the local precinct cops are closing off the crime scene in preparation for an investigation.

Within an hour, they will begin gathering evidence and if no other authority intervenes, they will finish this job and haul off all evidence to their precinct facilities by 12 noon. The precinct's detectives will have lunch, then interview people in the area to see if anyone saw or heard anything.

They will finish up at 4 and return to the precinct house, where they will fill out reports until 5 pm and go home. No one on the following shift will follow up on the crime, and the evidence will not be further examined until after 8 am next morning.

In the meantime, assuming Decker doesn't meet with him, the ex-FBI agent will leave SID headquarters at 9:15 am in his car, which is equipped with a police scanner. On the way back to his motel, he will overhear a police broadcast referring to the murder that has occurred that morning, and stop to call a local reporter of his acquaintance who happens to have spoken with the officer who found the body and started the investigation. By noon, he will be at the crime scene. Unable to get in to the crime scene because of the police presence, he will pretend to be a cop and begin interviewing people in the area an hour before the police detectives arrive to do the same thing. By 2, the detectives will have figured out that someone pretending to be a policeman is canvassing the neighborhood ahead of them and they will start looking for him. By 3, the ex-FBI man will be in custody for impersonating an officer. He will use his one phone call to call Decker's office. If Decker has not returned, he will leave a message for him with the reception officer at the SID, which Decker will only get if he calls in specifically for messages, or returns to his office before the reception officer goes home at 5 pm.

If no one comes to bail him out, the ex-agent will cool his heels in jail overnight until he is interviewed by detectives on the murder case the next morning. He will still be there, being questioned, when the news of another murder reaches the precinct at about 10 am.

The murderer, meanwhile, is aware that his former nemesis is on his trail, and the deranged killer considers this an interesting

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challenge. He has another murder victim picked out, and plans to kill her at 9 am the next morning. He uses the ex-agent's absence from his hotel room as an opportunity to search it to see what he has already found out. He will break in to the agent's room at 10 am and spend a half-hour searching it.

Assuming no one has beaten him to it (the ex-agent himself or one or more player characters), he will find the ex-agent's notebook hidden under the mattress and will leave with it at 10:30. In the process of the search, he has trashed the room and accidentally dropped the wrapper from a logo-marked candy mint he picked up at his own hotel.

He will return to his hotel (which is only blocks from the scene of the most recent murder) by 11:30, pack, and check out by 12:30 pm.

After having lunch in the hotel restaurant, he will check into another hotel across town, near the apartment of his next planned victim. The murderer will stay there until 6 pm reading the notebook. He becomes convinced that the agent is too close to catching him, and decides to kill the agent. He will drive to the agent's motel and wait in his car near the agent's room. If the agent or anyone else enters or leaves the agent's room, he will attempt to shoot them, then flee back to his new hotel. Unless stopped, he will then leave to meet his next victim at 8 am and kill her at exactly 9 am. The body will be found and the murder reported to police by 10.

The player characters make their choices and the gamemaster follows them from scene to scene, providing information and interaction with nonplayer characters as needed. Where the player characters choose different paths from the main thread of the adventure, it is up to the gamemaster to follow these alternate paths, anticipating them where possible and making up material on the spot where the players have totally surprised him. In the process, he must assure that the players always get a fair chance at any information or encounter that is vital to completing their mission, even if that means he must give them a second chance at the

information later. On the other hand, when player characters miss fairly-placed clues or choose actions that hinder them from reaching their goals, the gamemaster is justified in making it tougher for the player characters to get back on track later, depriving them of useful assistance or putting them in a tight spot because of their bad decisions.

In playing out these scenes which form the body of the adventure, it is best to try and alternate action scenes with exposition scenes. Action scenes are those where characters must make quick decisions in character. They may or may not involve actual combat, but they always require decisive use of a character's abilities and skills. Exposition scenes are those where characters gather information and work out in-character concerns and problems. They usually consist of the characters talking to non-player characters, figuring out clues, or assembling data — including some scenes where they just sit and talk among themselves.

Sometimes a gamemaster may have a short sequence of multiple action or exposition scenes, especially when the members of the group are not together. But usually it is best to alternate action scenes and exposition scenes. It keeps the game from getting bogged down, moving things along while still presenting the necessary information for the player characters to work within the game setting. This is called maintaining dramatic pacing.



Assuming Jason Decker meets with his friend, he will be told about that friend's daughter's recent murder. The friend believes the 'perp' was a criminal that he failed to catch eight years ago in a case that led to his leaving the Bureau. He knows nothing about the most recent murder; it will be up to the player characters to make the connection once Jason catches up with them.

This is exposition, like the establishing scene, but if Jason makes this meeting it can be considered part of the exposition scene before it and run at the same time. If Jason has attended the briefing instead this scene will not happen, and Jason will be with the rest of the group as they move on to the next scene. He'll have to get the information about the friend's daughter and the similar murder later, perhaps following up on the matchbook note left behind in that eventuality.

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The next scene should be an action scene, and the gamemaster has planned one for them. At the scene of the latest crime, the player characters will meet with police detectives and patrol officers from the local precinct who have been gathering evidence. They do not know that the crime is a high-profile case, but they are doing a moderately competent job. If it is suggested that they aren't handling the evidence or investigation well, they will resent the "interference" of officers from the "fair-haired kids" of the new Special Investigations unit. How many sparks fly depends on how the player characters behave. If they are careful to respect the local precinct cops and don't throw their weight around, they may get cooperation and a little information that they will miss if they get into a shouting match with the detective inspector in charge. The inspector outranks the PCs, but their special unit has been given jurisdiction.

Considering the maverick attitudes of some of the PCs and the touchiness the regular cops have over the unit in the first place, this could lead to some real trouble. Note that there is not likely to be any real combat here, even of the fistfight variety, unless the PCs are really out of line (And if that happens, they may have to have this straightened out by a very unhappy captain and miss the next important exposition scene entirely!) But this is an action scene even if there is no combat because it emphasizes interaction in character and use of skills in a confrontation. The fact that these skills are more likely to include Convincing than Brawling is not important.

Following this scene is an exposition scene in which the player characters actually investigate the crime scene. They may use skills here, too, to gather evidence and interview witnesses, but these are not used in a conflict or confrontation, so the scene is basically exposition. The gamemaster plants evidence at the crime scene that will later provide a connection with something Decker's friend has told (or will tell) him.

The gamemaster has planned for what will happen whether or not Decker meets with his friend right away, but what if the player characters go off on some different tangent altogether? It is possible, for example, that Jason and his squad would decide to go to his friend's hotel early and, if he is not there, search his room. It would be up to the gamemaster to portray any non-player characters encountered there (such as a desk clerk or housekeeping worker) and to make up the action of the scene as he goes along. It would also be up to the gamemaster to decide what happens because the player characters are not in attendance at the new crime scene during the initial investigation. Perhaps they miss some minor clue that moves them on to the next scene. They still can get the information, but now they will have to create a jurisdictional crisis to convince a semihostile precinct captain to release things gathered at the crime scene from his evidence room. This procedure will further delay the characters and perhaps create more hostility between them and the precinct cops than would otherwise exist.

Continue to alternate action scenes with exposition scenes, following the timeline where the players do not act to change what is to happen. Remember that the players don't know what is happening on the timeline unless they are present when it occurs or they encounter someone who can tell them of events they were not around to witness. If the player characters get too far off the track, the gamemaster may help them along with a little hint or nudge in the right direction, though such things should always be done in character. You, the gamemaster, may not tell the players that their characters are barking up the wrong tree. But you can have an NPC drop them a suggestion or have some piece of information or evidence come their way.

If you are forced to do this, though, it should cost the characters time and effort somewhere else. To get the hint or nudge, the player characters may have to promise to do a favor later for an NPC, give up something valuable, or create a situation which will cause them problems later.



The player characters are spending too much time hanging around the crime scene. They have found all there is to find, and time is a-wasting.

The gamemaster has had the local precinct cops grumbling about the delay, but the PCs haven't taken the hint, so it is time for something a bit more drastic. The PCs' captain calls them back to the office, pronto, to discuss their findings and talk about their "attitude problem" with the local cops. At the end of the meeting, Decker will get the message from his ex- FBI pal and can bail him out of jail. But the gamemaster exacts a penalty for having to put the PCs back on the scent of the killer. By the time all the paperwork is processed and the ex-agent is freed, the killer has already taken the agent's notebook, read it, and returned to the hotel to await the agent. If the agent returns alone, he will be killed. If Decker or other PCs are with him, there will be a short flurry of fire in which someone may be hit before the murderer speeds away. This will remind the PCs that they are in a dangerous business, and must stay alert to survive.

Occasionally, to keep the dramatic pacing, you may want to toss in an extra action or exposition scene which has little or nothing to do with the main plot, just to keep the alternation of scene types going.

This can be some little sequence which only exists to break up two action or two exposition scenes, but this is also a good time to work in a subplot A subplot is a thread of the story which runs through the adventure but is not directly connected with the main story. Subplots can be chosen to provide a change-of-pace from the main story, or can have a theme and tone similar to the main story which parallels the central ideas of the plot.



The gamemaster has created a minor subplot for this adventure. In this case, it is a parallel subplot. As in the main plotline, the theme of the subplot is trust and loyalty to friends, but the subplot is humorous to stand as a contrast to the grim main plot. The gamemaster decides the

subplot will deal with Linda Morales, who is not so much at the center of the main plotline. Linda's 10- year-old niece has her first solo piano recital at 11 am the next day (Linda's day off, normally), and it is very important to the girl that "Tia Linda" (Aunt Linda) be present. During the various short subplot scenes, Linda keeps getting cellular phone calls from the anxious girl and her mother (Linda's sister Rosa) reminding her of the event, as well as the appearance of various duties for Linda that all seem to take place at exactly the same time. (The captain wants a report on an earlier case, the super at her apartment building needs access to her apartment at that time for a periodic fumigation, etc.) Morales must get her co-workers to help her cover all these little nuisance jobs to keep her free for the recital. This can lead to a blackly humorous scene near the end when Morales is worried about the firefight at the climax of the adventure, not because she might be killed but because it threatens to make her late for the recital!

The alternating action and exposition scenes continue, and with each one the stakes should get a little higher or the players should be made to feel increasing pressure of time. Excitement should build with each confrontation until reaching a scene in which the major action of the adventure will occur.

All variations of path and choice should probably be bent to come back to this scene, with the PCs more or less prepared for it depending on how well they have done in previous encounters. This major scene is the climax of the adventure. The climax features the maximum danger and excitement that the player characters will face in the adventure, and the outcome of it should determine their success or failure in their major goals. This is the big challenge which they have been preparing to face.

If they have done poorly earlier, they may not be well prepared to meet this challenge. Maybe they have missed a vital piece of knowledge or an important tool or weapon that will aid them in this last action scene. If so, winning the day may be very hard, or it might even be impossible for them to win without some sort of setback, crisis or personal setback resulting. It should always be possible for the player characters to meet the

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challenge in some fashion, unless they have totally lost track and abandoned their goals. But it is not always necessary that they win a total victory, even with the best of preparation. Sometimes a villain gets away, a valued NPC dies, or the player characters themselves are badly damaged in the process of wrapping up the conflict. Such setbacks should be structured, however, to give the player characters motivation for doing better the next time. It is important that success or failure be completely on the heads of the player characters. NPCs may help them, guide them, even rescue them from death if things go really badly in the climax. But the player characters must be responsible for the major outcome.

It is their adventure, their story.



The climax of this adventure is the murderer's attempt on the life of a selected victim at 9 am the next morning.

If the PCs do not interfere, the murderer will meet with his victim and kill her in her apartment at this time.

Depending on what the players have done previous to this, Decker's ex-agent friend may be alive or dead, and the local precinct cops may or may not be available to help seal off the apartment building or take other actions to prevent the murderer's escape.

The best-case scenario is that the ex-agent provides vital clues and the player characters act as a unit to follow up on them cleverly, leading them to figure out the identity of the next potential victim and set a trap (with the cooperation of the local precinct cops) for the murderer when he comes to call. The worst-case scenario is that the player characters are squabbling among themselves and have completely alienated the precinct cops, leading to the death of the ex-agent and the missing of the clues that would get them to the murderer in time. The murder succeeds, but a chance encounter brings them to the crime scene in time to fight with the precinct cops one last time over a piece of evidence that they have that will allow them to catch the murderer before he escapes the building.

If the PCs do well, the murder is prevented, the ex-agent is avenged for the death of his daughter, and the precinct cops

get the idea that the new squad isn't half bad after all. If the PCs do poorly, a heroic ex-FBI man and an innocent victim die.

The murderer should still be caught or killed to wrap up the adventure, but it may be the precinct cops (convinced that the PCs are a bunch of useless showoffs) that get the credit even though the PCs should have to do the final dirty work.

After the climax comes the tag, a short scene in which the loose ends of the adventure are tied up.

Most tags are expositional in nature, though some can have a minor action element. The actual nature of the tag may depend on how the climax turns out, but at the end all questions should be mostly answered.

We say "mostly" because it is possible that the tag leaves a loose end or two that will carry over to future adventures — like the mysteriously missing body of the major villain, a clue left behind whose significance is not yet understood, or a result that will create complications for the player characters at a later date. In any event, the tag should be a dramatic release for the player characters, who get the chance to make last dramatic speeches, or (if it is appropriate to the results) participate in a humorous moment which breaks the tension.



If the first adventure has been less successful for the player characters in the police drama, the tag may take place several days after the climax, at the funeral of the dead ex-FBI agent.

Decker and the others can swap a few well-chosen remarks with others in attendance, including the precinct captain who still figures they blew it and a few other former FBI chums of Decker's, who will not exactly be carrying tales of his brilliance back to share in Washington.

If things have gone very well, however, the tag might occur only a few hours later in the PC's captain's office, where he tells the characters about the good report he had from the precinct captain. He may also be willing to ignore that Morales has skipped the debriefing so she can make it across town to her niece's recital on time.

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Tailor campaigns to the needs of the gaming group. If you have a group that meets on a frequent, regular basis with the same players every time, you can successfully run longer adventures that last for a number of gaming sessions, and tie these adventures closer together with sub-plots and running storylines. If your group meets infrequently or irregularly, or the players can't always be counted on to be present for each session, it will be easier and more appropriate to run a series of one-night adventures with a more episodic campaign structure, where plotlines are more or less wrapped up at the end of each evening, with few details being carried over from adventure to adventure.

Campaigns should start simple and become more complex as time passes. If your campaign has a Major Villain, the player characters should not confront him

The PCs may struggle with the minions of this individual for a number of adventures before they come face to face with this threat and fight him. His defeat will, in turn, bring them to the notice of one of the Major Villain's most trusted allies, who might first attempt to recruit, then later try to eliminate the PCs. It may be quite awhile before the player characters find out who their new foe is, and even longer before they fight him directly. The challenge to the trusted ally is the first hint the Major Villain has of the importance of the PCs, and he watches in growing interest to see if the PCs pose any sort of real threat to his plans. Only when the PCs defeat the ally need the Major Villain himself take a hand in the struggle. He may send many allies and hirelings against the heroes before they fight through them all to confront the villain himself, and the villain may escape more than once before the PCs get the chance to put an end to him once and for all. In such ways are sagas born.

Change of pace adventures are especially important to keep a campaign from becoming dull. In dark and dangerous campaigns, the occasional lighthearted comedy adventure can be great fun for players who are overloaded on fear and fighting. When the campaign centers on puzzles, try a straightforward all-out brawl every now and then, so the players have a release in kicking butt and taking names before taking on yet another brainbusting mystery. Where players are used to

combat- heavy adventures, throw them something they'll have to think their way out of instead of fight their way out of to keep them from neglecting the intellectual side of their world. Don't throw the players a change-up too often or such adventures will lose their freshness and impact. Use them only as breaks in the regular tone and theme of things.

During campaigns, allow player characters to work toward important personal goals. Though the game rules provide for accumulation of game-character rewards such as luck points and skill improvements, the real rewards for player characters should be in slow but sure progress toward what their characters want to accomplish in their adventuring careers. This means that gamemasters should keep the player character's background stories and goals in mind when planning adventures and campaign-level subplots.

As characters move toward goals, these goals may conflict with those of other player characters, forcing them to work things out and reach compromises. In some cases, goals may change over time as the character learns more about his game setting and the truth behind the things he has always thought he knew. The ambitious thief may decide to overthrow the despot who keeps the people in poverty. The merchant space captain may seek to uncover the ancient secrets of a long-dead race and his previously-unknown connection to it. The tough cop may meet a gentle young blind woman and

Eventually, the time comes when favored player characters grow stale. If players become tired of their characters discuss the possibility of making a sudden massive change to the character within the game structure. Don't greatly change a PCs life for good without some discussion with the player, but if it will freshen the experience, a player may well be willing to try something different, even if it comes in the form of a disaster at first. Is the naive young police officer getting boring? The player might welcome a chance to get tough, even if the trigger for this is an adventure in which his family is killed or he is disgraced and tossed off the force. These changes should be made with the input and permission of the player in question (though you may not want the other players to know that something is going to happen until it blows up in their faces...)

One circumstance is when a player character's reckless disregard for his own safety is endangering other player characters who do not have such a cavalier attitude toward their lives. Other PCs will usually sit on such characters to make them behave, but if a player character's actions are so outrageous that it is inconceivable that he would not buy their farm, let him die (legitimately, within the rules) and allow him to start a different character later.

There may also be situations where a player character deliberately sacrifices his life in pursuit of a higher character goal or to save the lives of valued NPCs or other player characters. Sometimes you will want to save him from certain death with a gamemaster-supplied miracle, but other times it is wise to allow the player to have his last moment of glory and revel in it. Dying a hero isn't so bad when you get the chance to sit in on

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the adventure's tag to hear all the great things said about you in your own funeral scene. If the sacrifice moves the rest of the group toward success in a significant way, all the better. Add the hero to the appropriate Hall of Fame for your campaign, allow the player to create another character with equal potential for adding interest and color to the campaign, and continue. Players talk about such grand, heroic deaths for years — far longer than they talk about yet another triumph where they brought home the treasure or downed the latest bad guy.

When a campaign becomes dull despite all efforts, put it aside for awhile before it is so far gone that the players no longer care about it. Play a very different sort of game for a bit with different settings and characters. After while, the old game ideas may become fresh and interesting again. If not, you can retire that game campaign permanently, resurrect it with a different group of players who will find it new and exciting, or let the existing players have the fun of "blowing it up" in a final climactic adventure in which they get to do all the things they couldn't do during the campaign before. All the goals get realized (or forever destroyed or abandoned) and all the rules change during such a final adventure. Who knows, when the smoke clears the situation may be so radically changed that the players are anxious to continue in this new direction after all. If not, at least they've had a really good time ending the series at last.

Epilogue

And there you have it. With these rules and a little creativity, you have all the tools you need to have adventures across all the worlds of your imagination.

But we're not done — not by a long shot! Nothing here is set in stone, and we welcome suggestions for future revisions and editions. Revisions which we adopt as core rules will be made available in updated editions. (Watch the **microtactix.com** website for details and

announcements!) **MicroTactix Games** also plans to actively support *Simply Roleplaying!* and the **PlainLabel Game System** with a series of Expansion Packs which extend the game systems to cover common adventure genres and special types of adventure situations. Expansion Packs will include *Simply Fantastic!* for classic heroic fantasy, *Simply Superhuman!* for four-color comics super hero action, and many, many more. Each Expansion Pack will extend the basic rules provided here and provide new environments in which to adventure and new ideas for stories to tell. These are perfect for the gamemaster who just needs a few additional tools with which to shape the adventures in his imagination.

We will also be producing Accessory Packs to extend specific game information on various topics. Included among these will be Armory packs containing assortments of weapon cards and Bestiary packs featuring animal and monster cards.

Also in preparation are World Packs, which each provide the specific background information a gamemaster needs to prepare campaigns in an exciting and detailed adventure setting. World Packs often build on the more general information in Expansion Packs, and provide entire gameworlds that are almost ready to go, including an adventure outline suitable for the beginning of a new campaign.

Last but not least are the Mini-Packs, which look at one narrow topic and provide a clean close look with emphasis on utility and fun.

But the essential expansion for these rules is your own imagination. Feel free to use and modify these rules and guidelines however you see fit for your own games and the ultimate enjoyment of players and gamemasters alike. All imaginable worlds are yours to live and adventure within. You are the hero in a million and one possible stories. Good luck!

Happy adventuring!

Bob Portnell & Guy McLimore

<http://www.microtactix.com>

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Health: A Primary Stat measuring overall physical fitness. Rated on a closed scale from 1 (feeble and sickly) to 10 (absolutely perfectly fit.) (Abbr. *H*)

Hit Points: A Minor Stat measuring the capacity to endure physical injury. (This is also a Primary Stat for inanimate objects.) (Abbr. *HP*)

Immediate Max Dmg/Effect: A characteristic of poisons and drugs, indicating the initial damage or effect caused by exposure to the poison or drug.

Initiative: In combat, the order in which characters may take actions. Determined by a 1D10 roll modified by Combat Awareness Skill Level. The higher, the better.

Intellect: A Primary Stat measuring ability to observe, recall and reason. (Abbr. *I*)

Knockback Check: A Special Check used to determine the power of physical reflexes; based on 2 x S.

Luck Points: A Minor Stat reflecting the possibility of unusually fortunate outcomes. Used to affect Test and Damage rolls.

Max Dmg: Abbreviation for "Maximum Damage", referring to the maximum damage that can be inflicted in a standard roll by a given weapon or form of attack.

Mental Skill: A skill that relies on Intellect and cannot be attempted without training.

Minor Stat: A numerical value assigned to a minor biological trait of the character. Refers to Armor, Hit Points, Fatigue Points, Luck or Speed.

Non-Player Character: A fictional persona assumed temporarily by the GM for the purposes of interaction with player characters. (Abbr. *NPC*)

Observing Task: A very common task, requiring the character to test his Observing skill to perceive or recall details of his environment. Under most conditions such rolls are made by the Gamemaster on the Player's behalf.

Persistence: A characteristic of poisons and drugs, indicating how frequently the Persistent Max Dmg or Effect is applied to the character.

Persistent Max Dmg/Effect: A characteristic of poisons and drugs, indicating any recurring damage or effect caused by the poison or drug.

Personal Skill: A skill that relies on the natural form of the entity and are known to some extent by every member of a given race or culture.

Physical Skill: A skill that relies on Coordination and can be attempted by anyone, although training makes a significant benefit.

PlainLabel Game System: The foundation rules system created by Greg Poehlein used in *Simply Roleplaying!*, *Compact Combat* and *Budget Battlefield*, assuring intercompatibility across all three adventure game domains.

Player: A participant in a roleplaying game who assumes a fixed fictional persona for the duration of the play session.

Race: A group of sentient beings lumped as a category based on species, such as "the Human race".

Racial Ability / Disability: An Ability or Disability inherent in a given race; not counted for Balance.

Round: In combat, the roughly five-second period during which each character may pursue 2 Actions.

Serial Contest: Character interaction resolved using a series of Contests rather than just one. Good for dramatic tension over a prolonged conflict.

Skill Level: A description of skill competency, ranging from Default to Expert. Skill Level is established at the time the skill is purchased; if the skill is not purchased, the level is Default.

Skill Modifier: Adjustments made to a Skill Rating to reflect Task Difficulty, environmental conditions, etc.

Skill Purchase Point: Earned through character play and development; used to acquire new skills or to improve Mental Skills.

Skill Rating: The numerical value measuring skill competency. Used to establish Target Numbers for Tests.

Skill: A learned competency, as categorized and named for game characters. reflects a body of knowledge or expertise acquired by the character during his lifetime.

Special Check: A Test or Contest of raw native competence or resilience. Used only when directed or when no Skill satisfies the needs of the situation.

Speed: A Minor Stat measuring the relative rates of movement in a combat situation. Most bipedal humanoids have a value of 3.

Stamina Check: A Special Check used to determine effects of injury or illness on the character; based on 2 x H.

Stat: (*See Statistic*)

Statistic: A numerical value assigned to a biological trait of the character; usually refers to the Primary Statistics (Strength, Coordination, Intellect, Health.)

Strength: A Primary Stat measuring ability to exert muscular force. (Abbr. *S*)

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Sub-skill: A field of expertise or knowledge related to other similar sub-skills within a broader General Skill.

Success Margin: Target Number minus Die Roll. The amount by which a Test roll improves on the roll needed to complete the Test or Contest.

Target Number: The basic Test value (usually Skill Rating), adjusted by any Skill Modifiers

Task Difficulty Level: The relative degree of challenge associated with a specific task. Used to determine Skill Modifiers.

Task: Anything a character or beast wishes to attempt to do.

Test: A 2D10 roll, compared to a Target Number. If the die roll is equal to or less than the Target number, the Test succeeds and the character successfully completes the Task.

World: The environment in which the characters live, work, play, etc. We use "world," even though the action may span a galaxy or not leave a specific city's perimeter. Sometimes referred to as "game universe" or "game world".

Zero-Point Ability / Disability: Non-learned qualitative character traits which do not provide significant advantage or limitation but do serve to make the character distinctive.

APPENDIX A: Master Damage Chart

For those who want to create their own weapons and attack forms, here is the Master Damage Chart used to assign damage according to the damage roll. To find the Damage Chart for a specific weapon, find the Max Dmg for the weapon at left. That line will show the damage scored for each possible damage roll.

Max Damage	—DAMAGEROLL—																			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
5	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5
6	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	6	6
7	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	7
8	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	8	8	8
9	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	7	8	8	9	9	9
10	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	7	8	8	9	9	10	10
11	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	6	6	7	7	8	8	9	9	10	10	11
12	1	1	2	2	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	7	8	8	9	10	10	11	11	12
13	1	1	2	3	3	4	5	5	6	7	7	8	8	9	10	10	11	12	12	13
14	1	1	2	3	4	4	5	6	6	7	8	8	9	10	11	11	12	13	13	14
15	1	2	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	8	9	10	11	11	12	13	14	14	15
16	1	2	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8	9	10	10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16
17	1	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	9	10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16	17
18	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16	17	18
19	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	1	2	3	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	20	21	22	23
24	1	2	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	19	20	22	23	24
25	1	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	13	14	15	16	18	19	20	21	23	24	25
26	1	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	12	13	14	16	17	18	20	21	22	23	25	26
27	1	3	4	5	7	8	9	11	12	14	15	16	18	19	20	22	23	24	26	27
28	1	3	4	6	7	8	10	11	13	14	15	17	18	20	21	22	24	25	27	28
29	1	3	4	6	7	9	10	12	13	15	16	17	19	20	22	23	25	26	28	29
30	1	3	4	6	7	9	10	12	13	15	16	18	19	21	22	24	25	27	28	30
31	1	3	5	6	8	9	11	12	14	15	17	19	20	22	23	25	26	28	29	31
32	1	3	5	6	8	9	11	13	14	16	17	19	21	22	24	25	27	29	30	32
33	1	3	5	6	8	10	11	13	15	16	18	20	21	23	25	26	28	30	31	33
34	1	3	5	7	8	10	12	13	15	17	18	20	22	24	25	27	29	30	32	34
35	1	3	5	7	8	10	12	14	15	17	19	21	22	24	26	28	29	31	33	35
36	1	3	5	7	9	10	12	14	16	18	19	21	23	25	27	28	30	32	34	36
37	1	3	5	7	9	11	13	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	27	29	31	33	35	37
38	2	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	38
39	2	4	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25	27	29	31	33	35	37	39
40	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	38	40
41	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	37	39	41
42	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	19	21	23	25	27	29	31	33	35	37	40	42
43	2	4	6	8	10	13	15	17	19	21	23	25	28	30	32	34	36	38	40	43
44	2	4	6	8	11	13	15	17	19	22	24	26	28	30	33	35	37	39	41	44
45	2	4	6	9	11	13	15	18	20	22	24	27	29	31	33	36	38	40	42	45
46	2	4	7	9	11	13	16	18	20	23	25	27	30	32	34	36	39	41	43	46
47	2	4	7	9	11	14	16	18	21	23	25	28	30	33	35	37	40	42	44	47
48	2	4	7	9	12	14	16	19	21	24	26	28	31	33	36	38	40	43	45	48
49	2	5	7	9	12	14	17	19	22	24	27	29	31	34	36	39	41	44	46	49
50	2	5	7	10	12	15	17	20	22	25	27	30	32	35	37	40	42	45	47	50

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Max Damage	—DAMAGEROLL—																			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
51	2	5	7	10	12	15	17	20	22	25	28	30	33	35	38	40	43	45	48	51
52	2	5	7	10	13	15	18	20	23	26	28	31	33	36	39	41	44	46	49	52
53	2	5	7	10	13	15	18	21	23	26	29	31	34	37	39	42	45	47	50	53
54	2	5	8	10	13	16	18	21	24	27	29	32	35	37	40	43	45	48	51	54
55	2	5	8	11	13	16	19	22	24	27	30	33	35	38	41	44	46	49	52	55
56	2	5	8	11	14	16	19	22	25	28	30	33	36	39	42	44	47	50	53	56
57	2	5	8	11	14	17	19	22	25	28	31	34	37	39	42	45	48	51	54	57
58	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	31	34	37	40	43	46	49	52	55	58
59	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	53	56	59
60	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27	30	33	36	39	42	45	48	51	54	57	60
61	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27	30	33	36	39	42	45	48	51	54	57	61
62	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27	31	34	37	40	43	46	49	52	55	58	62
63	3	6	9	12	15	18	22	25	28	31	34	37	40	44	47	50	53	56	59	63
64	3	6	9	12	16	19	22	25	28	32	35	38	41	44	48	51	54	57	60	64
65	3	6	9	13	16	19	22	26	29	32	35	39	42	45	48	52	55	58	61	65
66	3	6	9	13	16	19	23	26	29	33	36	39	42	46	49	52	56	59	62	66
67	3	6	10	13	16	20	23	26	30	33	36	40	43	46	50	53	56	60	63	67
68	3	6	10	13	17	20	23	27	30	34	37	40	44	47	51	54	57	61	64	68
69	3	6	10	13	17	20	24	27	31	34	37	41	44	48	51	55	58	62	65	69
70	3	7	10	14	17	21	24	28	31	35	38	42	45	49	52	56	59	63	66	70
71	3	7	10	14	17	21	24	28	31	35	39	42	46	49	53	56	60	63	67	71
72	3	7	10	14	18	21	25	28	32	36	39	43	46	50	54	57	61	64	68	72
73	3	7	10	14	18	21	25	29	32	36	40	43	47	51	54	58	62	65	69	73
74	3	7	11	14	18	22	25	29	33	37	40	44	48	51	55	59	62	66	70	74
75	3	7	11	15	18	22	26	30	33	37	41	45	48	52	56	60	63	67	71	75
76	3	7	11	15	19	22	26	30	34	38	41	45	49	53	57	60	64	68	72	76
77	3	7	11	15	19	23	26	30	34	38	42	46	50	53	57	61	65	69	73	77
78	3	7	11	15	19	23	27	31	35	39	42	46	50	54	58	62	66	70	74	78
79	3	7	11	15	19	23	27	31	35	39	43	47	51	55	59	63	67	71	75	79
80	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36	40	44	48	52	56	60	64	68	72	76	80
81	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36	40	44	48	52	56	60	64	68	72	76	81
82	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36	41	45	49	53	57	61	65	69	73	77	82
83	4	8	12	16	20	24	29	33	37	41	45	49	53	58	62	66	70	74	78	83
84	4	8	12	16	21	25	29	33	37	42	46	50	54	58	63	67	71	75	79	84
85	4	8	12	17	21	25	29	34	38	42	46	51	55	59	63	68	72	76	80	85
86	4	8	12	17	21	25	30	34	38	43	47	51	55	60	64	68	73	77	81	86
87	4	8	13	17	21	26	30	34	39	43	47	52	56	60	65	69	73	78	82	87
88	4	8	13	17	22	26	30	35	39	44	48	52	57	61	66	70	74	79	83	88
89	4	8	13	17	22	26	31	35	40	44	48	53	57	62	66	71	75	80	84	89
90	4	9	13	18	22	27	31	36	40	45	49	54	58	63	67	72	76	81	85	90
91	4	9	13	18	22	27	31	36	40	45	50	54	59	63	68	72	77	81	86	91
92	4	9	13	18	23	27	32	36	41	46	50	55	59	64	69	73	78	82	87	92
93	4	9	13	18	23	27	32	37	41	46	51	55	60	65	69	74	79	83	88	93
94	4	9	14	18	23	28	32	37	42	47	51	56	61	65	70	75	79	84	89	94
95	4	9	14	19	23	28	33	38	42	47	52	57	61	66	71	76	80	85	90	95
96	4	9	14	19	24	28	33	38	43	48	52	57	62	67	72	76	81	86	91	96
97	4	9	14	19	24	29	33	38	43	48	53	58	63	67	72	77	82	87	92	97
98	4	9	14	19	24	29	34	39	44	49	53	58	63	68	73	78	83	88	93	98
99	4	9	14	19	24	29	34	39	44	49	54	59	64	69	74	79	84	89	94	99
100	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100

APPENDIX B: Weapon Tables

Here are some sample weapons, as they appear on the weapons cards included with this game.

ARCHAIC WEAPONS

Dagger

Range S: 3 M: 10 L: 18 X: 30

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	5
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	6	6	7	7	8	8	9	9	10	10

Broadsword

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21

Longsword

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	2	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	9	10	10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16

Staff

2 Handed Weapon • Same Turn Attack/Defend

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16	17	18

Light Crossbow

Bolts • 1 shot/action • Reload: 1 bolt/2 actions • 2 handed weapon

Range S: 20 M: 50 L: 90 X: 135

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16	17	18

Target Shield

1 point protection vs. all attacks • Damage on shield smash only

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	6

Large Shield

2 point protection vs. all attacks • -1 penalty all Defend Actions

Min Strength 5 or -1 Coordination • Damage on shield smash only

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	4	4
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	8	8	8

Warhammer

Min Strength to use = 6 • 2 Handed Weapon

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	7	9	10	12	14	16	18
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	19	21	23	25	27	28	30	32	34	36

Greatsword

Min Strength to use = 6 • 2 handed weapon

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	7	9	10	12	14	16	18
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	19	21	23	25	27	28	30	32	34	36

Club

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20

Mace

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	13
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	14	15	16	18	19	20	21	23	24	25

Battle Axe

Min Strength to use = 6 • 2 handed weapon

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	6	8	9	11	13	14	16
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	17	19	21	22	24	25	27	29	30	32

Longbow

Arrows • 1 shot/action • Reload: 1 arrow/0 actions • 2 handed

Range S: 40 M: 125 L: 250 X: 350

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	1	2	3	4	4	5	6	6	7
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	8	8	9	10	11	11	12	13	13	14

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SCIENCE FICTION WEAPONS

Energy Rifle

Energy Pack • 1 shot/action • Reload: 100 shots/1 action

2 handed weapon

Range S: 50 M: 100 L: 200 X : 400

Roll 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Dmg 2 5 7 10 12 15 17 20 22 25

Roll 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Dmg 27 30 32 35 37 40 42 45 47 50

Pulse Pistol

Energy Pack • 1 shot/action • Reload: 50 shots/1 action

Range S: 15 M: 40 L: 80 X : 150

Roll 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Dmg 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20

Roll 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Dmg 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40

MODERN ERA WEAPONS

Bowie Knife

Roll 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Dmg 1 1 2 2 3 4 4 5 5 6

Roll 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Dmg 7 7 8 8 9 10 10 11 11 12

Colt Peacemaker

.45 Colt • 1 shot/action • Reload: 6 rounds/2 actions

Range S: 10 M: 25 L: 50 X : 100

Roll 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Dmg 1 3 5 7 8 10 12 13 15 17

Roll 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Dmg 18 20 22 24 25 27 29 30 32 34

Derringer

.25 • 1 shot/action • Reload: 1 round/1 action

Range S: 4 M: 10 L: 20 X : 40

Roll 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Dmg 1 1 2 2 3 4 4 5 5 6

Roll 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Dmg 7 7 8 8 9 10 10 11 11 12

Winchester Rifle

.44 -.40 • 1 shot/action • Reload: 6 rounds/2 actions • 2 handed

Range S: 40 M: 100 L: 200 X : 400

Roll 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Dmg 1 3 5 7 9 10 12 14 16 18

Roll 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Dmg 19 21 23 25 27 28 30 32 34 36

CARD EXAMPLE

Weapon Name

Weapon Illustration

Ammo Type

Weapon Notes
Special information about this weapon

Damage Table
Indicates damage scored by damage roll.

Max Dmg
Last number in bottom row is weapon Max Dmg

AK-47

7.62mm • 8 Shot Burst / Action

Reload 30 Rounds / 1 Action

Range: S-45 M-115 L-225 X-450

2 Handed Weapon

ROLL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DMG	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20

ROLL	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
DMG	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	38	40

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Firing Characteristics
Indicates how many shots can be fired in a single round. Also indicates if shots are fired as a burst or individually.

Reloads
Indicates how many rounds can be reloaded at once, and how long it takes to reload.

Range Table
Indicates Short, Medium, Long, and Xtreme ranges

Card Number
All PlainLabel Weapon Cards are numbered sequentially. Not all numbers appear in this product.

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27) Brass Knuckles

Max Dmg 9. Characters with Strength 8 or more roll 1D10 on their unarmed damage and add to weapon damage.

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	5
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	5	6	6	7	7	8	8	9	9	9

28) Colt Army 1911

.45 ACP • 2 shots/action • Reload: 7 rounds/1 action

Range S: 10 M: 25 L: 55 X: 110

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	6	8	9	11	13	14	16
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	17	19	21	22	24	25	27	29	30	32

29) Garand M1 Rifle

.30-06 • 1 shot/action • Reload: 8 rounds/1 action • 2 handed

Range S: 70 M: 175 L: 350 X: 700

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	2	4	6	8	11	13	15	17	19	22
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	24	26	28	30	33	35	37	39	41	44

30) Double Barrel Shotgun

12 gauge shot • 2 shots/action • Reload: 2 rounds/1 action
2 handed weapon

Range S: 5 M: 12 L: 25 X: 50

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	6	8	9	11	13	14	16
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	17	19	21	22	24	25	27	29	30	32

31) 1928 Thompson

.45ACP • 9 shot burst/action • Reload: 20 rounds/1 action • 2 handed

Range S: 15 M: 35 L: 75 X: 150

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	6	8	9	11	13	14	16
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	17	19	21	22	24	25	27	29	30	32

32) 30.06 Rifle

.30-06 • 1 shot/action • Reload: 1 round/1 action • 2 handed

Range S: 80 M: 200 L: 400 X: 800

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	2	4	6	8	11	13	15	17	19	22
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	24	26	28	30	33	35	37	39	41	44

33) Colt Python

.357 Magnum • 2 shots/action • Reload: 6 rounds/2 actions

Range S: 12 M: 30 L: 60 X: 120

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	7	8	10	12	13	15	17
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	18	20	22	24	25	27	29	30	32	34

34) S&W Model 29

.44 Magnum • 2 shots/action • Reload: 6 rounds/2 actions

Range S: 15 M: 35 L: 75 X: 150

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	7	9	10	12	14	16	18
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	19	21	23	25	27	28	30	32	34	36

35) Browning High Power

9mm • 2 shots/action • Reload: 13 rounds/1 action

Range S: 10 M: 25 L: 50 X: 100

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	4	6	7	8	10	11	13	14
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	15	17	18	20	21	22	24	25	27	28

36) Walther PPK

.32ACP • 2 shots/action • Reload: 7 rounds/1 action

Range S: 8 M: 15 L: 35 X: 75

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20

37) M16 A1 Rifle

.223 • 3 or 10 shot burst/action • Reload: 30 rounds/1 action
2 handed weapon

Range S: 55 M: 135 L: 275 X: 550

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	1	3	5	7	8	10	12	13	15	17
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	18	20	22	24	25	27	29	30	32	34

38) AK-47

7.62mm • 8 shot burst/action • Reload: 30 rounds/1 action
2 handed weapon

Range S: 45 M: 115 L: 225 X: 450

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	38	40

39) Mk2 Grenade

Explodes on the turn following the one in which it is thrown.

Full damage (roll 2D10) to all targets within 15 yards.

Half damage (roll 1D10) to all targets between 15-30 yards.

Range S: 3 M: 10 L: 18 X: 30

Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dmg	3	7	11	15	18	22	26	30	33	37
Roll	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Dmg	41	45	48	52	56	60	63	67	71	75

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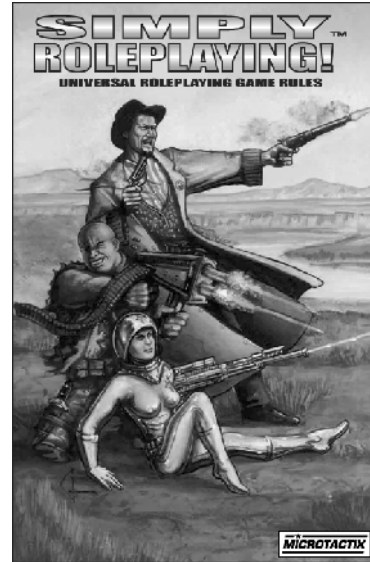
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