

The Simple Game System

Release 2

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Introduction

You are reading **The Simple Game System**, a role-playing game of supreme simplicity, ease of play, and fast action. This game is distributed for free from my website at:

<http://tower.newcenturycomputers.net/tsgs.html>

These rules have been written without a lot of RPG jargon, but honestly they are still probably not terribly easy to read for a non RPG gamer. If you are just starting out playing traditional paper, pencil, and dice RPG games, I recommend you visit:

<http://www.dragonsfoot.org/forums>

where you can meet (virtually, of course) and interact with fans of truly classic role-playing games. Design and discussion of this game takes place in the Workshop, Dragonsfoot's game development forum.

Character Generation

Each character in the game is described by a number of abilities and disabilities, chosen from the list below. For each ability, the equivalent disability is listed in parentheses beside it. No character may have both an ability and its associated disability.

Ability	Disability
Strong	Weak
Tough	Sickly
Clever	Dense
Wise	Foolish
Dexterous	Fumbling
Agile	Clumsy
Fast	Slow
Charming	Unpleasant
Attractive	Ugly

Beginning player characters select three abilities from the list. Choosing a disability allows the choice of another ability. If an ability is chosen twice, it is noted as "Very X" (for instance, Very Strong) or "V. X" for short.

Example Characters

John Northcrosse, Swordsman
Strong, Dexterous, Tough

Ugly Jack, Thief
Clever, Agile, Fast, Dexterous, Ugly

Barney Black, Boxer
Strong, Very Tough

Amelia Abernathy, Journalist
Clever, Attractive, Very Charming, Foolish

Skills

Skills define things the character knows about. Some things are known by everyone, or almost everyone, as determined by the GM; for instance, anyone can speak his or her native language, and in some places reading and mathematics are universal skills. Other things must be studied, such as history or science, or even driving a car or flying a plane.

Beginning characters may choose a number of skills equal to the roll of one die, plus one (1d6+1). Choosing a skill twice grants a bonus when using the skill; this includes choosing a universal skill once (so that, for instance, a character who would normally know how to read for "free" might choose Reading as a skill in order to speed-read). Skills taken twice are marked with a plus sign (+) after the name (so, "Reading +" is what the aforementioned character would have marked on his or her sheet).

The GM is the final arbiter of what is or is not an acceptable skill in his or her campaign. The only hard-and-fast rule is that no skill should always give a bonus to any given ability (so there is no "Thinking" skill which would always improve Cleverness).

Skill Examples

It is up to the GM to decide what skills are available in his or her campaign world. For example, John Northcrosse and Ugly Jack, above, come from an indeterminate medieval period in Britain. The GM in this campaign has decided that not everyone will be trained with weapons, so each weapon category has its own skill; not having skill with a weapon gives a penalty.

John's player has rolled 3 for skill picks. He chooses Swordsman, Riding, and Bow for his skills; he would have liked to have taken Swordsman +, but did not have enough picks.

Ugly Jack's player rolls 6 for skills picks. He chooses Sling, Dagger +, Lock Picking, Pick Pockets, and Stealth.

Amelia and Barney come from the eastern United States in 1939. The GM in their game has decided that characters don't have to have weapon skills to use most weapons (thus, they are universal skills).

Amelia's player has rolled 4 for skill picks. She chooses Journalism (of course), Driving, Stealth, and Lock Picking.

Barney's player has rolled 4 picks also. He chooses Brawling + (costing just one pick since Brawling is considered universal), Dodging + (giving an extra die when avoiding an attack, and also costing just one pick), and Driving + (costing two picks this time; he fancies himself a racing driver).

Sample Skill List

Below are listed skills. It is up to the GM to choose what skills are allowed in the campaign; what is appropriate to one might be very inappropriate in another.

Animal Training	Perception
Appraising	Perform
Athletics	Persuasion
Craftsmanship	Riding
Disguise	Streetwise
Driving	Survival
Engineering	Seamanship
Etiquette	Seduction
Gambling	Stealth
Knowledge (specific)	Stewardship
Medical	Tracking

Core Mechanic

To resolve any action in the game where there is a significant chance of failure, or any action opposed by another character, dice are rolled. This game uses only standard six-sided dice. There are two main types of rolls: rolls made against a static difficulty number, and rolls made against another character's roll (called **opposed rolls**).

Static Rolls

Suppose a character wishes to force a door. Obviously, this is a function of the Strong ability; but no other character is resisting the action, so it is not an opposed roll. Instead, forcing the door open requires a roll against a fixed difficulty rating, assigned by the GM.

If the door is just stuck, the GM might rule that the difficulty is 4 (as if a single roll of 4 had been made by

an opponent). The character trying to force the door then must roll 5 or higher to force it. A locked door might have a difficulty of 5, or even 6; if the difficulty is 6, the character forcing the door will need to roll a 6 AND have an additional die in the pool in order to succeed. A high-security door, or perhaps one that has been secured with a heavy oaken bar, might be rated 6 3, requiring the character forcing the door to have two or more dice and to roll at least 6 4 (or 6 3 1) to succeed.

In some cases, a difficulty number will be calculated; numbers higher than 6 must be converted, by subtracting 6 (possibly repeatedly). For example, a calculated difficulty of 7 is equivalent to 6 1; 9 is equivalent to 6 3; 13 is equivalent to 6 6 1.

Opposed Rolls

Rolling against another character is resolved by each player (or the player and the game master) rolling one or more dice. The abilities of the characters will determine how many dice are rolled. If the character does not have the ability which he or she is rolling against, a single die is rolled. Having the ability grants another die, and having the ability twice (Very) grants a third die. A character with a disability in the relevant category has no dice (and thus will likely fail, though skills or other bonuses may grant additional dice, as described below).

The dice are rolled, and the highest rolls are compared; whoever has the highest single die roll wins the contest. If the highest rolls are ties, compare the second-highest rolls, and so on until a winner is determined. If one player exhausts his or her dice "pool" before the other while doing this, the one with fewer rolls loses. If, after all rolls are compared, no winner is determined, the roll is a tie; resolving a tie is done in different ways for different circumstances.

Bonuses and Penalties

The GM may decide that, for a given roll, a bonus or penalty applies to one or the other character. A bonus simply adds a die to the pool, while a penalty subtracts one. The pool may never have less than zero dice, obviously, but there is no limit to the number of bonuses that might apply.

Die Rolling Examples

John and Barney decide to arm-wrestle. This is obviously a contest using the Strong ability, and both men are Strong, so each rolls two dice:

John: 5 1

Barney: 4 4

John wins, since his 5 is higher than Barney's highest roll. If it went this way:

John: 6 5

Barney: 6 3

John still wins, but this time, since the highest for both is 6, the second rolls are compared.

Suppose Amelia wishes to join in. She's not Strong, so she rolls just one die. She wrestles Barney:

Amelia: 6

Barney: 6 2

Amelia rolled quite well, tying Barney's top roll, but since she has no second roll to compare to his, he wins. He was a bit worried, though...

Basic Combat

When in combat, actions are resolved in terms of rounds of combat. Each round, each character may attempt one attack, as well as defending against any attacks directed at the character. Characters act in order of Initiative.

Initiative and Actions

To roll for Initiative, each player makes a standard roll against the Agile or Fast ability (whichever is better), or, at the GM's option, against the Clever ability with a penalty. The character with the highest dice pool attacks first, then the character with the next best pool, and so on. Ties result in characters acting simultaneously.

Each time a character rolls attack or defense dice in a round, he or she suffers one penalty for each such roll already made in the round. Thus, a character who has already attacked suffers a penalty when defending, and a further penalty if he or she must defend again. This is called the subsequent roll penalty. When two characters act simultaneously, each must choose whether to apply the subsequent roll penalty to the attack or defense roll.

Movement

A normal character can move 30' in a single combat round. Fast characters can move 40', while Very Fast characters can move 50'. Slow characters can move just 20' in a combat round. Movement occurs on the character's Initiative, either before or after any attack roll.

How To Attack

In general, attacking with melee weapons, or barehanded, may be done with either the Strong or Dexterous ability (at the player's option). Characters trained in martial arts (if such are allowed in the campaign) may use the Agile ability for unarmed attacks. Attack rolls with missile weapons are generally made with the Dexterous ability, though the GM may allow the use of the Clever ability for some weapons, possibly at a penalty.

Defense rolls are usually made using the Agile ability. A running character may be allowed to use the Fast ability instead. Against melee attacks, it is sometimes possible to use the Strong ability for defense rolls (the character pushes the attacker away by main force).

If the attacker succeeds (rolls better than the defender), the attack is successful and the defender suffers one wound point. Small melee weapons wielded by a Strong character do an additional wound point, and large melee weapons wielded by Very Strong characters do two additional wound points; this only applies if the Strong ability is used to make the attack roll. Similarly, small melee weapons or hand-thrown missile weapons employed by Dexterous characters do an additional wound point, provided that the Dexterous ability is used to make the attack (which would almost always be the case for the missile weapon, of course).

Effects of Being Wounded

Immediately upon being wounded, a character must roll a Tough roll against the total number of wounds he or she has accrued. Failing this roll renders the character unconscious and possibly dying. If the defender was injured by a barehanded or blunt weapon attack, he or she will merely be rendered unconscious for a number of rounds equal to the total of two dice; if the attack was with a lethal weapon (sword, handgun, etc.) the defender will instead perish in a number of rounds equal to the roll of one die.

A dying character may be tended by another character, who must roll a Clever roll against the victim's total wound points. Success at this roll results in the character remaining unconscious as above.

Wounded characters always suffer a penalty on any roll involving physical activity, particularly Strong, Agile, Fast, Dexterous, or Tough rolls. The exception is Tough rolls against the wound point total, which suffer no further penalty. The penalty to the Fast ability affects the victim's movement rate as if the Fast ability were lowered one level.

Healing

After receiving a normal amount of sleep, an injured character may attempt a Toughness roll against the number of points of injuries he or she has accrued. Success at this roll results in the removal (healing) of one wound point.

In addition, such a roll may be made after receiving treatment from a qualified nurse, doctor, or other properly trained medic. This sort of roll may be made at most once per day *plus* once after each incident (fight, accident, etc.) in which the character is injured.

Some campaigns may have other healing options (for instance, magic might be used in a fantasy world), at the Game Master's option.

Holding an Action

A character who has the Initiative may choose to hold his or her action, waiting until a later moment in the round to attack. If the character waits until another character takes action, and that other character attacks the character holding an action, they act simultaneously. A character who wishes to hold an action may move normally on his or her Initiative, OR may move later before or after taking the held action, but may not move at both points in the round.

Alternate Rolls

The rules above make specific statements about what abilities are used, and when they are used; but ultimately it is up to the players and the GM to decide what ability to apply to any given situation. The player should describe what his or her character is attempting to do; if the player can come up with an interesting and plausible reason why the character should be able to use the Charming ability to defend against an attack, and the GM agrees, then the game should proceed exactly that way.

Character Advancement

At the end of each session, the GM should award from 1 to 3 Experience Points (XP) to each character, based on that character's performance (i.e. level of success).

Experience Points accrue from session to session. At the end of a session, a player may spend 10 XP to purchase a new skill pick.

A character may only acquire new skills in this fashion if he or she had an opportunity to learn from a tutor during play. Existing skills may always be improved in this way, including acquiring the second "level" of a universal skill.

Advanced Options

Non-player characters (NPCs) run by the GM may be allowed to have abilities beyond the normal levels. Specifically, beyond Very is Extremely, then Super, then Ultra. Dice rolled are as follows:

- 0 Disability
- 1 Average
- 2 Ability
- 3 Very
- 4 Extremely
- 5 Super
- 6 Ultra

NPCs may also have higher than normal skills, if the GM so desires. This is represented by a plus sign and a number, signifying the number of dice to add to the pool. Thus, a normal "Swordsman +" skill would be considered "Swordsman +1" and an NPC might have "Swordsman +2," or even more as the GM rules. Such characters should be rare, representing the top 1% of the population in terms of their ability.

Advanced skill levels may be allowed to player characters also, if the GM wishes; it is recommended that some limits be placed on this. For instance, the GM might decide to allow characters to have a single skill at +2 level, but never more than one such skill. Advanced skill levels should never be allowed to beginning characters.

Nonhuman creatures ("monsters") might have abilities not available to normal characters, or special rules appropriate to their natures. For instance, a classic movie Zombie would appear as follows:

Zombie: Strong (or Very Strong), Very Tough, Fumbling, Clumsy, Foolish, Dense, Slow, Ugly, Unpleasant

Well, this is pretty clear; but in addition to the normal rules, a zombie might be allowed to ignore (i.e. deduct) one point of damage from any attack. This would make zombies a full order of magnitude tougher to beat.

Such decisions are, as always, left to the discretion of the Game Master.