The Simple Game System

Second Edition (Release 5)

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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 the website at:

> http://tsgs.atomicunicycle.com

Character Generation

Each character in the game is described by a number of abilities and/or disabilities, chosen from the list below. Naturally, 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; normally, players may only choose one disability unless specifically allowed by the GM.

An ability may be chosen twice, in which case 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

and eras reading and basic 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). When a character picks a skill, this allows that character to use that skill at normal odds (see the Core Mechanic section below for details). 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 annotated with a +1 after the name, for example, "Reading +1."

A character attempting an action that requires a skill he or she does not have suffers a penalty of at least -1, as chosen by the GM; trying to drive a car without skill would probably be at -1, flying a plane at -2, and so on. A penalty of -4 would effectively make an action impossible for all normal characters.

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 +1, but did not have enough picks.

Ugly Jack's player rolls 6 for skills picks. He chooses Sling, Dagger +1, Lock Picking, Pick Pockets, and Sneaking.

Amelia and Barney come from the eastern United States in the 1930's. 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 +1 (costing just one pick since Brawling is considered universal), Dodging +1 (giving an extra die

when avoiding an attack, and also costing just one pick), and Driving +1 (costing two picks this time; he fancies himself a racing driver).

Sample Skill List

Below are listed some 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	Sneaking
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**).

Generally, each roll will be adjusted by an ability score, and possibly further modified by a skill. If the **relevant ability** is normal (i.e. not listed on the character sheet), two dice are rolled; if the character has a disability, only one die is rolled. Characters having a better ability (Strong, Clever, etc.) roll three dice, and if the ability is exceptional (Very Tough, Very Fast, etc.) four dice are used. The following table represents this using strength:

Strength	Dice
Weak	1
(unlisted)	2
Strong	3
Very Strong	4

Generally, skills add one or two dice to this **pool** as explained under Skills, above.

Once the number of dice is determined, each player rolls. Each die rolled may be a **failure** (1-3) or a **success** (4-6); the total count of success dice is the **result** of the roll.

Opposed Rolls

Rolling against another character is resolved by each player (or the player and the game master) rolling dice as explained above. Whoever has the highest result wins the roll. If the results are tied, whichever character rolled the largest number of dice wins. If even the number of dice rolled is equal, the roll is a tie and no winner is determined; resolving a tie is done in different ways for different circumstances, and as always is up to the GM to adjudicate.

Static Rolls

Suppose a character wishes to force a door. Obviously, this is a function of strength, 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 2. The character trying to force the door then must roll a result of 2 or higher to force it. A locked door might have a difficulty of 4 or more, depending on how strong the door is.

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.

There are two special adjustments that may apply, as follows:

Boxcars

Any time a 6 is rolled on a die, the player (or GM) may add a **bonus die** to the pool. The decision of whether or not to add dice does not have to be made right away; the player may wait to see what result the opponent has rolled before choosing whether to add the additional dice or not. Of course, the opponent can do the same thing.

Rolling boxcars on a bonus die does not grant another bonus die, but rolling **snake eyes** (see below) on a bonus die does apply a penalty.

Snake Eyes

Any time a 1 is rolled on a die, the player (or GM) must deduct one point from the success total. Unlike the bonus dice awarded for boxcars, this deduction takes place immediately.

Die Rolling Examples

John and Barney decide to arm-wrestle. This is obviously a contest of strength, and both men are Strong, so each rolls three dice:

> John: 5 2 3　　= 1
> Barney: 4 4 2　= 2

John loses, since he has only one success, while Barney has two. If it went this way:

> John: 6 5 2　　= 2
> Barney: 6 4 1　= 1

Both men have rolled boxcars, but Barney also rolled snake eyes, reducing his total by 1. He chooses to roll another die, leading to these results:

> John: 6 5 2　　= 2
> Barney: 6 4 1 2 = 1

John has won this time, and does not have to roll his available bonus die.

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

> Amelia: 6 6　　= 2
> Barney: 5 2 5　= 2

It's a tie, but Amelia gets two extra die rolls, giving the following final result:

> Amelia: 6 6 4 3 = 3
> Barney: 5 2 5　　= 2

Barney will be buying the drinks tonight, it appears.

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 one die penalty. The character with the highest result attacks first, then the character with the next best result, and so on. Ties result in characters acting simultaneously.

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.

Distance and Movement

Distances in combat are measures in **paces**. A pace is a somewhat elastic measure, being about a yard but ranging from as short as 2½ feet to as long as a meter. The shorter scale is convenient when using maps laid out in 5' or 10' squares, for instance, while the use of meters is handy for science fiction games (or games played or set in countries where metric is the standard). A normal character can move 10 paces in a single combat round. Fast characters can move 12 paces, while Very Fast characters can move 15 paces. Slow characters can move just 7 paces 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 strength or dexterity (at the player's option). Characters trained in martial arts (if such are allowed in the campaign) may use agility for unarmed attacks. Attack rolls with missile weapons are generally made with dexterity, though the GM may allow the use of cleverness for some weapons, possibly at a penalty.

Defense rolls are usually made using agility. A running character may be allowed to use speed (i.e. the Fast ability) instead. It is sometimes possible to use strength for defense rolls in melee, basically any time the character can push 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. One-handed melee weapons wielded by a Strong character do an additional wound point, and larger melee weapons wielded by Very Strong characters do two additional wound points; this only applies if strength is used to make the attack roll. Small melee weapons or hand-thrown missile weapons employed by Dexterous characters likewise do an additional wound point if dexterity is used to make the attack (which would usually be the case for a missile weapon, of course).

Effects of Being Wounded

Immediately upon being wounded, a character must make a toughness 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 such 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.

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 charm 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.

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

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:

Dice	Ability
1	(Disability)
2	(Normal, i.e. Not Rated)
3	(Ability)
4	Very
5	Extremely
6	Super
7	Ultra

NPCs may also have higher than normal skills, if the GM so desires, picking a skill more than twice for a bonus of +2 or higher. Such characters should be rare, representing the top 1% of the population in terms of their skill level.

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 (i.e. "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.