
SIMPLE20

WRITING & DESIGN

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EDITING & LAYOUT

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CREATING CHARACTERS

Think of the imaginary world that you will explore as being a canvas, yourself as being a painter, and your character as being a brush. Characters are the most important tools that players have at their disposal in Simple 20. Generally, players other than the Game Master each control one character in Simple 20, while the Game Master may control many at one time.

The method of defining PCs in Simple 20 is designed to be short and to the point. All player characters in Simple 20 are defined in the manner outlined below. That said, NPCs (characters controlled by the Game Master) and creatures are not the same thing as *player characters* and are defined in a different manner that is discussed later.

STEP 1: BASIC ATTRIBUTES

In Simple 20, all characters are initially defined by six different physical and mental qualities that all sentient beings are assumed to possess by default. These six Basic Attributes are outlined below.

Strength is a representation of how physically strong a character is and determines how much weight they can lift and carry, what weapons they are capable of wielding, and how much damage one of their melee blows will do to whomever (or whatever) they are fighting.

Constitution is a measure of health and endurance -general physical fitness. The higher a character's Constitution rating, the farther a character is capable of running or swimming before collapsing, and the more wounds they can sustain before dying.

Dexterity measures a character's reflexes and coordination. Someone with high Dexterity has an edge in weapons use; he's more likely to hit what he's aiming at. Likewise, such a character

will likely cause more damage with a ranged weapon during combat than a character with a low Dexterity rating.

Intelligence is reasonably self-explanatory, although in Simple 20 it is limited to the ability to think logically and express oneself verbally. In Simple 20 Intelligence is *not* connected with a character's ability to work magic.

Perception, the complement of Intelligence, is a measure of a character's spatial perception and awareness of the spiritual or mystical aspects of the universe. Perception governs a character's ability to wield arcane energies in a game that utilizes Simple 20.

Ego measures the mental toughness and willpower of a character. A character with a high Ego rating is less likely to give into their emotions (such as fear), as well as being less susceptible to the effects of madness than a character who possesses a low Ego rating.

Distribute sixty-two points amongst your character's six basic attributes and note the corresponding modifier from the table below on your record sheet.

Attribute Score	Modifier
3	-4
4-5	-3
6-7	-2
8-9	-1
10-11	0
12-13	+1
14-15	+2
16-17	+3
18+	+4

STEP 2: LEARNED APTITUDES

Aptitudes represent learned abilities or skills, areas of expertise that your character is specialized in. The following is a list of learned aptitudes that are available to characters.

Appraise: You have a knack for determining the value of an object by closely examining it.

Balance: You are adept at traversing precarious surfaces such as tight ropes, narrow window ledges, and the like.

Bluffing: You are a skilled liar who knows how to bestow falsehoods with a ring of truth.

Brawling: You are a skilled pugilist and know how to negotiate with your fists.

Climbing: You are adept at climbing cliffs, ropes, and other vertical surfaces.

Computers: You know how to both operate and troubleshoot most computer systems.

Crafting: Crafting is actually a *group* of skills that must be purchased individually (e.g., Painting, Pottery, Rug Weaving, etc).

Disguise: You are skilled at altering your true appearance by applying make-up or carefully coordinating a costume.

Drive: You are skilled at driving motorized land vehicles (e.g., cars, motorcycles, etc).

Forgery: You know how to duplicate things (signatures, works of art, etc) convincingly.

Healing: You know how to clean, bind, and otherwise treat wounds properly.

Hiding: You are skilled at avoiding watchful eyes (organic or computerized).

Intrusion: You are skilled at opening doors, vaults and other things that have been secured with a mechanical lock (or series of locks).

Knowledge: Like Crafting, the Knowledge aptitude represents a group of skills that must be purchased individually (e.g., Cultural Taboos, Occult Lore, Religious Rites, etc).

Language: Like the previous Crafting and Knowledge Aptitudes, the Language aptitude also represents a group of specific skills that must be purchased individually (e.g., English, French, German, Spanish, etc).

Listen: You have finely tuned ears that allow you to hear things that typically go unheard by those who don't possess this aptitude.

Move Silently: You are adept at moving about without making discernable noise.

Performance: Like the Crafting aptitude, the Performance aptitude refers to a group of skills that must be purchased individually (e.g., Harping, Oratory, and Singing).

Ride: You are adept at riding living mounts (e.g., griffons, horses, etc).

Sense Motive: You have an uncanny knack for 'reading' people, and discerning whether or not their motives are genuine.

Sorcery: Like the Knowledge and Language aptitudes, the Sorcery aptitude represents a group of specific skills that must be purchased individually (see *The Arcane Arts* for further details).

Spot: You have a keen eye for detail that is trained to recognize concealed objects (e.g., trip wires, laser eyes, etc).

Swimming: You are skilled remaining afloat in and traversing bodies of water.

Weapon: Like several other aptitudes, the Weapon Aptitude represents a group of more specific skills that must be defined individually (e.g., Dagger, Pistol, Rifle, Sword, etc).

Note: This aptitude list is by no means all inclusive. If you feel that I've passed over a dreadfully important aptitude, by all means, expand the list to include it!

You have a number of points that you can distribute among your character's aptitudes equal to their Intelligence *rating* multiplied by 4. The maximum number of points that you can assign to a given aptitude at this time is equal to your characters's Intelligence rating.

The higher a given aptitude's rating, the more notable your character's skill in that area is (e.g., a character with a Forgery rating of 6 is much better at forging documents than a character with a rating of 3 in the same said aptitude). It is acceptable not to assign *any* points to a given aptitude.

STEP 3: HEALTH POINTS

Health Points are a representation of a character's ability to endure damage. The more Health Points that a character has, the more physical damage they will be able to sustain before they take a dirt nap.

Characters begin with a number of initial Health Points equal to twenty plus their Constitution rating. Note your character's Health Points on your record sheet.

STEP 4: COMPOSURE POINTS

Composure Points are a representation of a character's ability to endure psychological trauma. The more Composure Points that your character has, the more psychological trauma

they will be capable of enduring before they succumb to the grip of madness.

A character begins with a total number of Composure Points equal to twenty plus their Ego rating. Note your character's Composure Points on your record sheet.

STEP 4: EQUIPMENT

In Simple 20, pieces of equipment are props – they have no mechanical impact on the game. For instance, in order to shoot an opponent with a pistol, your character must *have* such a weapon in their possession, but how much damage they do with that pistol is determined solely by their level of skill with the pistol, not by the pistol itself.

In Simple 20, how well a character can do something has *everything* to do with ability, and *nothing* to do with the equipment that they carry – even the best pistol in the world can't turn somebody who knows nothing about guns into a crack shot. Record any equipment that your character has in their possession (note that the GM may veto anything thing that they find to be unreasonable).

STEP 5: FINISHING TOUCHES

Give your character a name (if you have not done so already), describe their physical appearance, their social mannerisms, and (if your GM allows you to do so) pen an abridged version of their life history. After you have done these things, you'll be ready to play a game that utilizes Simple 20.

The BASIC RULES

All of the basic rules that you will need to know in order to play a game using Simple 20 are presented here.

ROLLING DICE

Whenever your character attempts to perform an action under duress, the Game Master will ask you to roll a twenty-sided die

and add a number (or numbers) to the result. This process is referred to as 'making a check' in Simple 20.

when to make checks

Making a check means rolling dice and, any time that players are rolling dice, they're not focusing on their character. The only time that players should make checks is when a character is performing action under duress (i.e., when another character, creature, or force is bearing down upon the character who is attempting to take action).

how to make checks

When making a check, a player rolls one twenty-sided die (1d20), adds some numbers to the result of the die roll, and compares the final sum to a Difficulty Class (DC) that is either assigned or generated by the Game Master.

If the combined total of the player's die roll equals or exceeds the assigned DC, then their character successfully performs the action that they were attempting. If the total result of the player's die roll does not meet or exceed the DC, then the character has failed to perform the action being attempted.

Results of 'natural' (i.e., unmodified) 20 are *always* a success and results of natural 1 are *always* a failure.

ATTRIBUTE CHECKS

An *attribute check* is called for when a character is attempting to perform an action that directly relates to one of the six basic attributes (e.g., lifting a heavy object) or when they are attempting to perform an action for which they have no relevant aptitude.

When making an attribute check, the number that the player adds to the result of the d20 roll is the modifier of the single basic attribute most closely related to the action being performed.

APTITUDE CHECKS

An *aptitude check* is called for when a character is attempting to perform an action that directly relates to an aptitude in which they possess levels. When making an aptitude check, the numbers that the player adds to the result of the d20 roll are the modifier of the basic attribute most closely related to the action being performed *and* the rating of the single most relevant aptitude that they possess.

SAVING THROWS

Finally, a *saving throw* is a special kind of attribute check made whenever a character is trying to avoid (at least partially) the effects of an outside force or condition (disease, insanity, etc). When making a saving throw, the numbers that a player adds to the result of the die roll are the modifier of the basic attribute used to resist the force or condition (most commonly Dexterity, Constitution or Ego) and any situation specific modifiers imposed or granted by the Game Master.

COMBAT EXPLAINED

Combat in Simple 20 is an extension of the basic resolution rules discussed previously, but with a few added complications. Despite the inclusion of said complications, combat remains quite simple so as to not impede otherwise heroic action.

THE COMBAT TURN

During combat, time in Simple 20 is divided into *Combat Turns*. During any given combat turn, a given character may attempt to perform *one* action. To determine the order in which characters can take those actions, at the start of a given battle, each combatant rolls 1d20 for *Initiative*.

To determine initiative, each player with a character is involved in the combat makes a Dexterity attribute check. Characters act in the order of these check results during a combat,

counting down from the highest check result to the lowest. In every combat turn that follows, the characters act in the same order.

If two or more combatants have the same initiative check result, the combatants who are tied act in order of their Dexterity modifiers (again, highest to lowest). If there is *still* a tie, the tied characters should make another check to determine which one of them goes before the other.

ATTACK CHECKS

An *Attack Check* is called for when a character attempts to attack an opponent. When making an attack check, the numbers that a player adds to the result of the d20 roll are the rating of the single most relevant aptitude that they possess, any situational modifiers that have been imposed by the Game Master, and their Dexterity modifier (for melee and ranged attacks). For example:

Your character is engaged in a few rounds of fisticuffs with a street tough in the city's red lantern district. You decide to swing a haymaker at the scoundrel, so you roll 1d20 and add both your character's Strength modifier and their Brawling rating to the result.

A character's attempt to inflict harm upon another living being will often be resisted. This being the case, the result of your attack check will set the DC for a resisting target's *Defense Check* (see below). Should a target either choose not to defend themselves or be incapable of doing so, a player's attack check need only meet or exceed a DC of 10 in order for an attack to succeed.

DEFENSE CHECKS

A *Defense Check* is called for whenever a character attempts to parry or dodge an attack during combat. Given the spontaneous nature of such a maneuver, a character may

perform it out of initiative order, but doing so counts as their one action for the combat turn, which will leave them open to any subsequent incoming attacks in that turn.

When making a defense check, the numbers that a player adds to the result of the d20 roll are the rating of the single most relevant aptitude that their character possesses, any situational modifiers that have been imposed by the GM, and their Dexterity modifier. For example:

Your character is a swordsman locked in mortal combat with his archenemy, who has just delivered a masterful sword blow aimed at your character. You choose to parry the blow, so you make a defensive check, adding both your character's Long Sword aptitude rating and his Dexterity modifier to the d20 result.

The DC that a player must meet or exceed for a defense check to be successful is, as mentioned previously, the result of the aggressor's attack check. Should a defense check be successful, then the target of the attack has either successfully parried or dodged the incoming blow and avoided any damage that it had the potential to inflict.

ENDING COMBAT

A combat is considered to be over when all opponents have been dispatched by way of violence, fled for their lives, or ceased to attack for any number of other reasons (not limited to being knocked unconscious or being physically restrained).

DEATH AND DYING

Whenever a character or creature is hit by a successful attack in combat, chances are that they will be damaged. Successful attacks in combat inflict damage equal to the amount by which a player's attack check exceeded the intended target's defense check (as you can

imagine, an undefended attack can be quite nasty) and the Strength (for melee attacks) or Dexterity (for ranged attacks) modifier of the attacking character.

non-combat damage

Although the majority of physical damage that characters sustain will arise as a direct result of combat, there are several things outside of combat that have the potential to injure characters, as well (falling from atop a steep cliff, for instance). What follow are the most common examples of non-combat damage that characters will encounter, as well as rules for how to utilize these types of non-combat damage during actual play.

Drowning and Suffocation: Any character trapped in a situation where they are forced to hold their breath may do so for as long as they continue to successfully make a Constitution saving throw against a DC of 15 every turn. Once a character fails this check, they sustain 6 points of damage every turn or portion of a turn that passes until they are again capable of breathing normally – or they die.

Exposure: A character that is exposed to freezing cold or burning hot temperatures without the proper protective garb for more than ten minutes at a time, will sustain 3 points of damage per hour or portion thereof that they remain exposed to the elements, until they are either rescued or killed.

Falling: For every three meters of distance that a character falls, they sustain 4 points of damage when they hit the ground. While lots of soft padding may reduce the damage that a character sustains as the result of a fall, metal armor in no way cushions the impact. That said, a player may make a Constitution saving throw versus a DC of 12 to reduce the amount

of damage sustained by half, representing a fortuitously soft landing.

Fire: A character that is covered in flames, sustains 6 points of damage every turn or portion of a turn that they remain exposed to open flame.

TRACKING damage

All damage sustained in this manner is subtracted from the health point total of the character who was successfully struck. Once a character or creature's health points are reduced to zero, they are disabled (not unconscious, but close to it); if their health points are reduced to less than zero, but not less than -10, they are unconscious; and when their hit points have been reduced to less than -10, they are dead.

natural healing

Resting for an extended period of time is usually the easiest way to heal injuries and regain lost health points in Simple 20. Injured characters recover 2 lost health points per 8 hours of uninterrupted rest (not necessarily sleep) that they get. The more uninterrupted rest that a character receives in blocks of 8 hours, the more lost health points they regain. Of all the healing methods available to a character, natural healing is usually the least desirable due to its requirement of bed rest.

medicinal healing

In many instances, due to either time constraints or travel conditions, medicinal healing is the preferred method of treating wounds as it provides more immediate relief than natural healing and more reliable relief than magic healing. Administering medical treatment requires that a *Healing* aptitude check be made versus a DC assigned by the Game Master (said DC reflecting the severity of the injury being treated).

The number of health points regained by a character whose injuries are treated using medicine is directly proportionate to the amount by which the administering character's aptitude check exceeds the DC assigned to the healing attempt by the Game Master. For example:

Doug's character, Darius Thorne, has been injured in combat to the tune of ten lost health points and a nasty laceration across his belly. Luckily, Darius' friend Mortimer is a member of the clergy with a knowledge of medicine. The Game Master decides that the treatment of Darius' wound will require an Aptitude Check and assigns it a difficulty rating of 12, due to the wound's severity.

Mortimer has an Intelligence modifier of +2 and a Healing rating of 4. Mortimer's player rolls 1d20 and achieves a total check result of 18, thus, Mortimer's healing attempt restores six lost health points to Darius (18-12=6), significantly reducing the discomfort that his wound has caused.

magical healing

The last healing option available to a character is that provided by magic. Unlike natural healing, magical occurs instantly and can heal a great deal more damage at one time than medicinal healing can. That having been said, any use of magic (including the healing of the injured or sick), has its own drawbacks. For this reason magical healing is covered elsewhere in this document (see *The Arcane Arts, Healing Magic*).

mental anguish

When confronted with unimaginable horrors of an utterly alien variety, most people typically react in a manner that is completely irrational and frenzied (i.e., they're frightened out of their skull). Player characters in Simple

20 are not most people, however – they are the exception, not the rule. They are *heroes!*

As noted in the *Character Creation* section of these rules, a character's ability to endure psychological trauma is represented by Composure Points. More precisely, these points represent a character's ability to stare madness straight in the eye without flinching. When a character's composure points are depleted, however, their cool demeanor is shattered (at least temporarily).

COMPOSURE CHECKS

A *Composure Check* is a special saving throw made whenever a character is trying to avoid being overwhelmed by fear or madness that comes about as the result of confronting horrible truths or eldritch horror. When making a composure check, the numbers that a player adds to the result of the die roll are their Ego modifier and any situational modifiers that the Game Master assigns to the check.

The DC of a Composure Check is largely dependent upon the exact nature of the horrifying situation with that a character is confronted with, being determined in the same manner as the DC for an action that isn't being actively opposed (see *Game Master Advice*). The following table presents examples of some horrific situations and suggested DCs.

Horrifying Situation	DC
Discovering a Corpse	3
Encountering an Inhuman Creature	6
Discovering a Mutilated Corpse	8
Reading a Tome of Forbidden Lore	10-15
Encountering The Unnameable One	16+

One thing that the Game Master should keep in mind while assigning a DC for composure checks (and one thing that is reflected on the table above), is that the kind of things that would scare a normal person silly

have significantly less impact on those cut from heroic cloth... which brings us to what the results of a composure check entail.

If the result of a composure check equals or exceeds the DC assigned by the GM, then nothing discernable happens. If, on the other hand, the result of a composure check *fails* to equal or exceed the assigned DC, the amount by which it failed to do so is subtracted from the composure point total of the character on whose behalf the check was made. For instance:

Tim's character, Sidhain, comes face to face with a hideous, alien, monstrosity while exploring the catacombs of ancient Rome. The Game Master calls for a Composure Check versus a DC of 6. Tim rolls 1d20 and adds Sidhain's Ego modifier to the result, obtaining a total check result of four. Thus, Tim would subtract two points from Sidhain's composure point total (6-4=2).

LOSING YOUR COMPOSURE

When a character's composure points have been reduced to zero, as the result of a failed composure check (or series of such checks), they are no longer able to maintain a calm countenance in the face of terror and they do what any normal person would do in a unspeakably horrifying situation – they scream loudly and do *whatever they can* to flee from the fear inducing spectacle that has unfurled itself before their eyes.

It probably goes without saying that this panic response makes a character who has lost their composure *extremely* dangerous and unpredictable. Often such characters will lie to others in an effort to flee from the source of their fear, and may even attack friends who attempt to block their avenue of retreat. Remember, a character who has lost their composure will do *whatever it takes* to put

distance between themselves and the source of their discomfort.

The good news here is that, most of the time, a loss of composure is temporary at worst. *Only* if a character's composure point total is reduced to less than -10 are they driven forever mad. When this happens, you might as well flip back to page one of this document. Unlike death, madness is *very* permanent in games that utilize Simple 20.

RECOVERING COMPOSURE

Unlike health points, composure points can be regained in only one way (unless a character has been driven permanently insane, in which case they can *never* be regained). Characters regain lost composure points at the rate of two per day that passes without them failing another composure check.

If a character's composure points have been reduced to less than zero, said character will remain deathly afraid of whatever horrible thing it was that drove their composure point total into negative numbers until such time as they regain enough points to return that point to total to more than zero.

The arcane arts

Arcane energies are both invoked and commanded by audibly reciting syllables that have been chained together to form words. These words have themselves been chained together to form languages over the centuries, the end result of this linguistic evolution being that audibly emphasizing certain syllables, that are found in certain words, that appear in certain tongues can both invoke and control magical energy. Unsurprisingly, it isn't by random chance that such invocations are referred to as "spells" by the uninitiated.

These incantations may be recited extemporaneously or read aloud from a written text to produce the desired results. That said, even very experienced practitioners of magic

eschew extemporaneous spell casting unless absolutely necessary, as the proper recital of the many arcane syllables that compose a spell is very important. As several rather unfortunate incidents have demonstrated, mispronounced syllables can alter the desired outcome of an incantation drastically, causing great harm to the individual performing the recital.

As for the nature and origin of magical energy itself, many theories have been put forth, but the most widely accepted theory is that magic is a singular energy that flows from a similarly singular source, with any differences in application or mode of operation being defined entirely by the practitioner. Magic has no discernable form of its own – it is not good or evil, black or white, necromantic or holy, elemental or formulaic. Magic simply *is*.

MAGICAL APTITUDES

In Simple 20 there are five default magical aptitudes. Should the Game Master decide to include them, there may well be other magical aptitudes in a given campaign, but these rules focus only on the five aptitudes described below.

Alteration: Alteration magic changes the physical properties of a character, creature or object; altering their body. Magical healing and shape changing, for example, fall under this category of magic.

Banishment: Banishment magic compels forces, items, or characters in the caster's immediate vicinity to depart. Examples of Banishment magic at work include dispelling a curse or turning undead.

Conjuration: Conjuration magic creates items or elements (magical or mundane in nature) where none previously existed. The creation of magical fire, for instance, falls under this category of magic.

Enchantment: Enchantment magic endows magical properties upon a character, creature or object that does not usually possess such properties. Magic swords, armor, and cursed objects are all end products of such magic.

Manipulation: Manipulation magic physically manipulates items or elements. For example, causing a flying arrow to stop in mid-flight or drawing shadows to oneself are both examples of Manipulation magic at work.

Summoning: Summoning magic calls to the caster creatures, characters, or elements that already exist but are not in the immediate area. Commonly summoned things include demons and alien gods.

Each of these aptitudes is purchased individually as outlined in these section of these rules detailing character creation (see *Step 2: Learned Aptitudes*).

EXTEMPORANEOUS RECITAL

When a character recites an incantation extemporaneously, their player states the intended effect of the spell that they are casting and makes a *Sorcery* aptitude check versus a base DC of 16 (naturally, the GM may alter this difficulty class as they see fit). Characters add their Perception modifier to spell casting checks made on their behalf.

If the total check result generated by the player of the casting character either meets or exceeds the DC assigned to the casting by the GM, the spell effect occurs as it has been described by the player. If the total roll result obtained by the player of the casting character fails to meet or exceed the assigned DC of the casting, the spell effect varies wildly from the intended result, as described by the Game Master (yes, the exact effect is entirely up to them, should a spell misfire).

RECITING FROM INSCRIPTION

As a rule, an incantation inscribed upon a piece of parchment or in a book is always more reliable than even the most experienced sorcerer's mastery of impromptu spell casting. Whenever a character attempts to recite a written incantation, their player makes a Sorcery aptitude check against a base DC of 10 and adds the character's Perception modifier to the die roll result.

If the total check result generated by the player of the casting character either meets or exceeds the final DC assigned to the casting by the Game Master, the spell effect occurs as it has been described by the player. If the total check result obtained by the player of the casting character fails to meet or exceed the assigned difficulty class of the casting, the spell effect deviates from the intended result and is described by the Game Master.

ABOUT SPELL EFFECTS

Maybe you're still wondering "What *exactly* happens when a character recites an incantation?". The answer is that, if invoked correctly, the desired effect of the incantation as described by the player of the casting character is produced without negative incident. If invoked incorrectly, the effect of a given invocation is a completely undesirable circumstance as described by the Game Master (a very bad thing).

Whether good or bad, the most important thing about spell effects is that they should always be *magical*. Whether you're a Game Master or a player, when describing the effects of an incantation, get creative, get detailed, and get *weird*. Take this opportunity to flex your creative muscle!

MAGICAL COMBAT

Spell effects that inflict damage to a target work a wee bit differently than physical attacks do. Any spell designed to cause injury

that is successfully cast causes an amount of damage to the intended target equal to the amount by which the player's check result exceeded the assigned DC for casting the spell, plus both their Intelligence *and* Perception modifiers.

That said, if such a damage causing spell is *not* successfully cast, it inflicts damage to the *caster* equal to the amount by which the DC exceeded the player's check result (again, after modifiers have been applied), minus the caster's Ego modifier. Combat magic is dangerous and unpredictable stuff.

HEALING MAGIC

In many fantasy games, magic fills the niche typically occupied by medicine in the real world. Often this magic takes the form of 'healing spells' or 'miracles' in a given setting. In Simple 20, a spell designed to heal damage that is successfully cast restores a number of health points to the intended target equal to the amount by which the casting player's check result exceeds the spell's assigned DC, plus their Intelligence *and* Perception modifiers.

Like combat spells that are not cast successfully, healing spells unsuccessfully cast have dire consequences. A healing spell that is unsuccessfully cast actually *causes damage* to its target equal to the amount by which the spell's assigned DC exceeded the player's check result (again, after modifiers have been applied), minus the unfortunate targets's Ego modifier. As has been stated elsewhere, a single mispronounced syllable can cause a dire magical backlash.

UNSKILLED CASTING

Like, other learned aptitudes, casting a spell may be attempted by an unskilled individual, but special circumstances attach. Unskilled spell casting always defaults to a Perception Attribute Check versus a DC of 21 if casting from inscription and versus a DC of

26 if casting from memory or attempting to weave a spell extemporaneously.

Calling upon energies that one does not understand is very risky. If an unskilled casting attempt fails, the casting character's player must make a composure check versus a DC equal to 10, plus the amount by which the initial attribute check fell short meeting the casting attempt's DC (see *Mental Anguish, Composure Checks*).

GAME MASTER ADVICE

This section of Simple 20 includes rules for assigning Difficulty Classes, creating NPCs (including creatures), implementing skill-based character growth, and tweaking Simple 20 for use with any genre.

DIFFICULTY CLASSES

Assigning DCs is a simple affair. The rule of thumb is that the easier an action is, the lower its DC should be, while more difficult actions are assigned a higher DC. The table below provides some sample DCs.

Perceived Difficulty of Action	Recommended Difficulty Class
Simple	2
Easy	5
Average	10
Hard	15
Near Impossible	20

Naturally, a given Game Master is free to alter these sample DCs however they see fit, but I recommend using these defaults for at least a few sessions in order to gain familiarity with how the systems work during play.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

The term "Non-Player Character" is a catch-all term in Simple 20, used to denote all

characters or creatures controlled by the Game Master. There are three different types of NPCs utilized in games of Simple 20, as explained directly below.

Principle NPCs

A principle non-player character is a character controlled by the Game Master that plays an *important* role in the campaign, roughly the equal of player characters where level of skill is concerned. The main villain of a given campaign is, perhaps, the most common example of a principle non-player character.

Principle non-player characters are created *exactly* as player characters are (see the character creation process outlined on pages 1-3). That said, Game Masters may take some liberties with such NPCs to shake things up – and this is perfectly acceptable so long as said characters don't overshadow the PCs on a regular basis.

Supporting NPCs

Supporting non-player characters exist to lend external definition to a principle NPC or one of the player characters. For example, the dependent sibling of a protagonist and the vast majority of monsters that heroes fight serve as common examples of supporting NPCs in both film and literature.

Supporting non-player characters are less skilled than those characters that they exist to provide external definition for. A supporting NPC has *only* basic attributes ratings and health points. By default, supporting NPCs do not have aptitude ratings or composure points, although a Game Master should feel free to bestow these things upon a supporting NPC if they feel that it makes sense to do so.

Incidental NPCs

Incidental non-protagonist characters exist purely as scenery for a given locale and play no significant role in the larger campaign.

Barkeeps, serving wenches, and other similar characters serve as examples of incidental NPCs. Incidental non-player characters are, simply put, not very important.

Incidental non-protagonist characters are defined by a name and the function that they fulfil in society (e.g., Willy, the Burger Flipper). All it takes is a single successfully placed blow to fell an incidental non-player character in combat.

None of the NPC categories is static – a principle NPC is only one plot twist away from becoming a supporting NPC for the *real* villain, and the lowly barkeep is one burning resentment away from becoming the next major villain to orchestrate the downfall of the protagonists.

Game Masters are encouraged to exploit the dynamic nature of non-protagonist characters, closely monitoring the interaction between these denizens of the campaign setting and the PCs, twisting perceived NPC status as drama demands it.

CHARACTER GROWTH

Characters in Simple 20 grow, not by virtue of arbitrary experience awards, but by virtue of the deeds that they actually perform during a given game. Specifically, whenever a character either botches an action attempt or succeeds brilliantly, they learn something.

Any time that a player rolls a 'natural' (i.e., unmodified) result of either 1 or 20 when making an attribute check, they need to place a checkmark next to the attribute involved. Similarly, should a player roll a natural result of 1 or 20 when making an aptitude check, they need to place a checkmark next to the aptitude that was being tested.

At the end of a game session, a player needs to roll 1d20 for each checkmark on their record sheet, one at a time. If they roll a result that either equals or exceeds the rating of the

attribute or aptitude that the checkmark is next to, then the player may raise the rating of that attribute or aptitude by 1 point.

Finally, new aptitudes are earned via actual play, a character actually studying them in-character. New aptitudes pursued in this manner always begin with a default rating of 1, with this rating being raised in the manner discussed above.

TWEAKING THE SYSTEM

Adapting Simple 20 to be used with a given genre or setting is, for the most part, a matter of ignoring certain rules. For instance, if you want to use Simple 20 to play a game set in the world of Howard Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu Mythos', you'll likely want to ignore the rules provided herein for recovering lost composure points in the face of madness.

Naturally, a GM may also want to add to these rules in order to facilitate certain genres. Most of the time, you'll only need to add aptitudes to the pre-existing list (e.g., if you're playing in a space opera campaign, you may want an *Astrogation* aptitude). As you can see, expanding the core Simple 20 rule set is... well... *simple*.

FINAL WORDS

This set of rules was inspired by several pre-existing works, including the World's Most Popular Roleplaying Game (now in its third edition), the World's Most Popular Percentile-Based Roleplaying Game (recently released under the OGL), *Core Elements*, and Scott Lininger's *The Window* (no kidding).

If you use Simple 20 to run a game (as I will be doing very soon), or simply have some question about the system that you would like to have answered, feel free to drop me a line via [email](#) (please place the words "Simple 20" in the subject line of your email so that my very efficient spam filter doesn't block it).

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