D&DZY

D20 MADE EASY

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Overview

Let's start first with the basics. Rather than heaps of detail all at once, let's begin with first principles, the fundamental rules, and go from there. This is what you'll find in this "book", which is the first of many:

✦ differences between games
✦ the basic mechanics
✦ rolling dice, actions and outcomes

That's it. That's all you need to run the game. In future documents we will cover things like journeys and travel, skirmishing, solving mysteries, the magic system, how adversaries and enemies work, and tips for GMs to make running the game easier.

To start, here's some core ideas about the game:

✦ we use **dice** to resolve uncertainties; mostly two (2) twenty sided dice (**d20**), abbreviated as 2d20
✦ some six-sided dice (**d6**) are used, as well as a "**d3**", which is just a d6 halved (results round up)
✦ players practice saying, *my character is [doing X]*, instead of *I use [X skill] to [achieve Y outcome]*; the GM will say what skill is necessary

The mechanics of the game are very simple:

✦ the GM creates a difficulty class (**DC**) based on the TIER of the challenge
✦ the relevant character rolls two dice and adds a single modifier to each
✦ one of the **trinary** results determine the **outcome**

This is the foundation of the entire system, and can be applied to any situation just by allocating a difficulty and selecting an appropriate statistic to **test**. Players can just think about *what their character would do*, rather than what's most mechanically beneficial or efficient. There's no need to have to record or memorise a large number of abilities.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

In *Dungeons & Dragons*, there are a variety of often fairly complex systems which make an effort to *simulate* a particular kind of experience. This game is different because:

✦ **the GM doesn't roll dice**, players do
✦ you'll often only **roll once** to see if something interesting happens
✦ the system is designed around **difficult choices** and compounding problems, rather than combat
  ✦ it utilises a **trinary result system**, which means that instead of "hit or miss" the results offer a dramatic *interpretation* of events
    ✦ the system is so simple that it's basically **impossible to min-max**
    ✦ there are **no levels**; instead, characters become more proficient with **skills**, which play a much greater role
    ✦ all **attributes**, or stats, are associated with an equal number of very useful **skills**, so there's no such thing as a dump-stat
      ✦ there are **no classes**, and most options are available to most characters
        ✦ **combat is vastly simplified**, so rather than standard actions, reactions, bonus actions, free actions, and attacks of opportunity—*every single turn, for every single participant*—there's just... a SKIRMISH. A couple of rolls will sort out a fight
          ✦ there's no hit points, just *stress*, which is a much lower amount; it's **easier to kill, and be killed**
          ✦ while *stress* does recover after a fight, *conditions* and *scars* linger, and can be deadly; extended combat is disincentivised
✦ monsters are no longer a threat simply because they are a massive sack of hit points: even a small amount of *harm* can ruin a character's day (and likewise, it doesn't take a slog to kill monsters)
✦ there's no need to memorise a dozen or more **complex spells**; magic has been vastly simplified, being used much like another skill
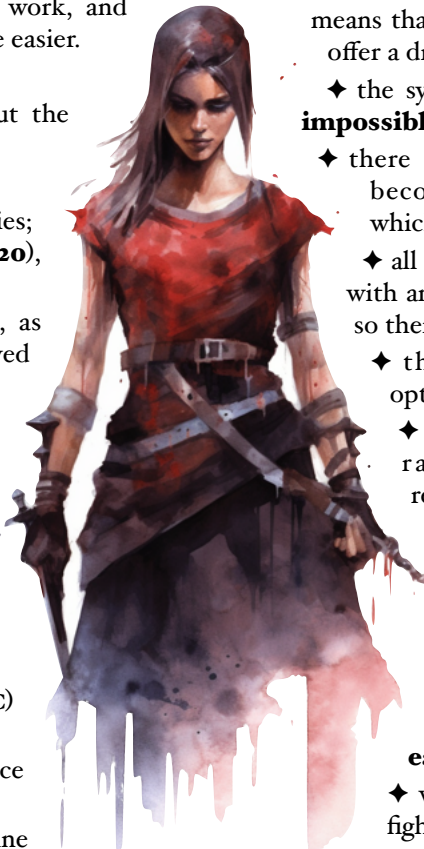
HOW • TO PLAY

For the most part, the game revolves around *players simply describing what their character is doing*, and in many cases, there's no uncertainty or concern around how that comes to pass. In those situations, there's no need to roll any dice.

When to Roll Dice

The situation changes under under particular conditions, called *triggers*. The GM will usually listen to the narrative as the players describe the actions of their characters while the story—the *narrative*—is being told, waiting for one of these *triggers* to take place:

✦ significant *risk*
✦ *drama*, or *trauma*
✦ important *stakes*

The most basic function of the GM is to ask themselves throughout the narrative whether any of these triggers affects the story at its current juncture.

If the answer is no, then there is no need for a dice roll at all.

In other words, there are many times when a player will say *my character is [doing this thing—the action]*, and there is little risk, no drama, and no stakes—so the character simply does what the player has described, and the narrative continues.

If the answer is yes, then begin a test.

In this situation, the player says the same thing, only it's clear that there are stakes, or drama, or risk, involved. So the GM will interrupt the story to say something like, *there's a risk this might go wrong, so make a [skill] test*.

ACTION • TEST

When a character makes a **test**, to see how their **action** affects the ongoing **story**, it means there's something dramatic going on. Otherwise, it wouldn't trigger a **test** at all. *When there's drama, there's a test. And when there's a test, **things will change**, for better or worse.*

A character won't actually say, *I'm using stealth to sneak into this place*; that's unnecessary. They simply say, *my character is trying to get in without being noticed*. See the difference? Players never "use" skills. Their *characters* do, and the GM will say when a roll is even necessary.

The GM picks a difficulty TIER out of ten, and then refers to the **test difficulty table** (*see* APPENDIX I) to work out the **target number** for the test, based on its TIER. Then:

✦ the most appropriate **attribute** determines the **modifier** to be applied to the dice results
✦ the player rolls **2d20** and includes any relevant modifiers to each die
✦ the result of *each die roll* is compared to the **target number**; if it is equal to, or higher than, the number, it is one *count*

*Note that any situation which falls outside the scope of a specific skill can be managed simply by **deciding which attribute applies**, and just using that.*

A test outcome is resolved as follows:

✦ *two-count*: this is a **strong outcome**, and the character acts as the player described; they narrate the outcome based on their described action *before* the roll was made
✦ *one-count*: this is called a **weak outcome**, the character gets some of what they want, but there's a compromise or a cost (almost always including *stress*), or a sacrifice to be made (the GM will say what); or, they get nothing *and* lose the *opportunity* of the moment: the narrative moves on
✦ *no-count*: this is a **bad outcome**, and the GM says what happens

Further Options

The rest of this the rules will outline plenty of other *options* for how to play, but this page is all you fundamentally need. It's loose, but if you don't want to SKIRMISH or use specific skills or the magic system... then don't! There's nothing you can't do with this basic outline, though the rest of the rules aim to add further nuance and clarity to the system.
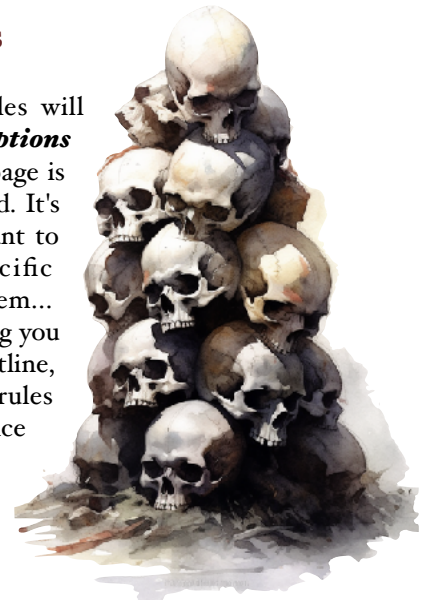
ROLLING • DICE!

The system uses **2d20** to determine the *count* and what kind of *outcome* is created. However, there are some interesting additional features to rolling dice.

The Natural 20

Every player loves a *nat-20*. If one or both of the dice rolls "20" (not including any bonus from a statistic or other benefit), it is kissed by fortune, so it's time to triumph. The *nat-20* generates some kind of outcome that is particularly good; think of it like an immediate **narrative opportunity** as though a **DESTINY** point had just been spent (more on that shortly).

If a fight is going badly, perhaps an opening appears to escape? If the character is hunting down clues, perhaps they pick up the trail of something important? If the character is trying to impress someone with false bravado, perhaps someone else mis-remembers them doing something they didn't, but which reinforces their story?

However, note that only dice which **count** can generate this effect. If a roll is made with **disadvantage**, and a *nat-20* appears but doesn't **count** because it is discarded... bad luck.

The Natural 1

Like yin and yang, the flip-side to the *nat-20* is the *nat-1*, its less helpful counterpart. A natural "1" rolled on a dice (again, ignoring modifiers) not only strongly suggests a poor outcome, but also a particularly nasty one at that. It's time to despair, because this is really going to hurt.

As with the *nat-20*, this *doesn't change the result* itself, so if it's one half of a **weak outcome**, then it remains so; it doesn't make it a bad outcome instead. It simply means that, along with whatever the other results are, something particularly nasty also happens.

Usually, the GM will make a **hard move**.

Advantage & Disadvantage

Characters may find themselves from time to time in situations where they are in a particularly good, or bad, position. This is represented in the game by the twin concepts of **advantage**, or **disadvantage**.

Both concepts use the same mechanic of adding an **extra +1d20** to the dice pool (so, **3d20**), and discarding one afterward:

✦ **advantage** means removing the *lowest* result, which makes getting a good outcome much more likely

✦ **disadvantage** means removing the *highest* result, which makes getting a good outcome much less likely

This is a powerful lever for altering results, as it often shifts a **weak outcome** into its more beneficial or detrimental version. Remember that **advantage** can remove a *nat-1*, and **disadvantage** can remove a *nat-20*.

As a general rule, **re-rolls are for 2d20**, so roll for **advantage** or **disadvantage** first, consider the results, and then re-roll any dice as appropriate. If **both** conditions apply, each iteration of either will cancel one iteration of the other. So, two sources of **advantage** and one of **disadvantage** means that the roll is made with **advantage**.

*This is another lever which the GM can pull which can create a **strong sense of tension** in the case of disadvantage, or **reward clever thinking** in the case of advantage. In other words, the GM should be using it to showcase situations which have a particularly strong sense that the character or even the entire Party are in a very strong, or weak, **position** heading into a given action. So it can sometimes be awarded as a result of an outcome, in order to reinforce the nature of that situation, if it is, for example, particularly dramatic.*

THREE • OUTCOMES

The number one rule of this game is: ***do what makes sense in the narrative***. That is, if it feels right in terms of the story, go with that. When a character takes an action, they ***describe what their character intends to do***. Then, they make the **test** to *see what happens*.

The terminology uses "**outcome**" rather than "**hit**" and "**miss**" or "**success**" and "**failure**" because the **test** will determine what happens, not explicitly "success" or "failure". It is often a bit of both.

In other words: **think of the story first**. *What is happening? How does this consequence affect the story? What makes the most sense here?*

The result *isn't binary*, and so a lot of the outcome will depend on what sacrifices have been made, or who is actually *narrating* the outcome. The results are ***more like a discussion than a ruling***.

Strong Outcome

This is the "best" outcome for the character. That is, they will have achieved what they set out to achieve. The ***player has already described what they said their character is doing.*** So, they *do just that*; and merely embellish in more detail what their character set out to do in the first place.

*The player can't cheat; they've already said out loud, before the **test**, what their character's action actually is; so that's the boundary of what they get to describe now.*

Another way of describing a **strong outcome** is to say that the character is in a ***strong position***, so even if they didn't overcome something, they are well placed to make their next move. Occasionally, they may have exceeded even their own expectations (the GM will say so).

Weak Outcome

While this sounds like it isn't great, just as with a strong outcome, it really just means a ***weak position***. That is, they didn't get everything that they want, or set out to achieve. In almost all cases, the player will need to make some kind of ***sacrifice*** or ***compromise*** to compensate for what they actually achieve.

The weak outcome is almost always a negotiation between the GM and the player, haggling over what price is worth paying for what outcome. Sometimes there are explicit choices on offer based on the skill or another mechanic; or, the GM will simply offer some hard choices.

Options for compromise here might be achieving only ***part of what they wanted***, or perhaps ***losing*** GEAR, or ***taking harm***, or ***becoming stuck in a bad position***, or ***making the situation worse***, or even ***introducing a new threat***, previously unseen.

Sometimes a player may ask if they can just fail; paying the price may be too much. It's not always possible (say, if the character is leaping across buildings to escape capture), but if the GM allows it, they ***lose the opportunity*** instead. *In this situation, the Party can no longer overcome the obstacle before them in the way that was just attempted, if at all; they'll usually need to backtrack and find another way.*

So, for the ***weak outcome***, the player *gets something*, and either *gives something else up* or *creates a new problem*. This is ***by far the most common result***, so this will happen much of the time. That is worth players keeping in mind when making bold proclamations about their character's intent.

Bad Outcome

A **bad outcome** means that, well… it's bad. In this case, ***the player has no direct control*** over the outcome. It is entirely up to the GM to decide, and narrate, what happens. What this looks like will depend a lot on ***context***, and the ***impulse*** of nearby threats.

*An **impulse** is important because it gives a sense of what a threat **wants to do**, how it wants to act: a bandit may take your money and run; a ghoul may want to eat your flesh; a bear may want to drive you away from its den; a forest may block you with dense vegetation.*

The GM will create an outcome ***appropriate to the narrative***, and that's likely to be unpleasant. The response should be framed as, *it makes sense that [outcome] would happen, so it does.*

ACTION • ASSISTANCE

One character may **assist** another; they need only *explain how* they do so, and they do. Multiple characters may offer their assistance in such a way, so long as each offers a *unique* contribution, and it makes sense in the fiction.

Assisting costs **1-*poise*** (you will learn about *poise* in the next book). The assisting character must be capable of actually improving the outcome by providing aid. *If a player cannot **easily** explain how their character might assist, then they probably **can't** assist.*

✦ the **test is resolved** by the initiating character
✦ for each character who assists, add +3 to any *one* die roll
✦ each character who assists may (but not *must*) **suffer any consequences** of the outcome

If multiple characters assist, this means multiple +3 bonuses, which can be applied to the same, or different, results.

Summary: Actions & Tests

When a character takes an **action**, it already has, or is given, a **TIER** of difficulty, which sets the base target number; the **difficulty class** (**DC**).

The roll may be modified by various factors:

✦ **trained** in the skill reduces the **TIER** by **1**
✦ an **expert** reduces the **TIER** by **2**
✦ if a character has **advantage**, they add +1d20 and *subtract the lowest result*
✦ if a character has **disadvantage**, they add +1d20 and *subtract the highest result*
✦ other characters may **assist**, which grants +3 to one die

Any dice roll (plus modifiers) which is **equal to or greater than** the target number is called a *count*. That's what the player wants!

✦ **two-count** is a **strong outcome**; usually the player describes the results based on their stated intent
✦ **one-count** is a **weak outcome**; usually a hard choice needs to be made, or to abandon the challenge
✦ **no-count** is a **bad outcome**; the GM narrates the results based on the **impulses** of threats

WHAT'S • NEXT?

There are a couple of other notes here, but next we will cover the all-important **character creation** process. Thankfully, that's pretty easy. So these are the basic rules, and next time we'll cover how to make characters to play within those rules.

We'll also go over some key elements of characters like the *skill* list, *stress*, and *backgrounds*, and how they might impact the gameplay. In the meantime, here are a couple of last tips and ideas to think about:

Players and the Game Master

The game is just a big story being told by a group of people. Some of these people are **players**, who are responsible for the protagonists of the story. One person becomes the **Game Master** (**GM**), who sets the scene, adjudicates anything confusing, and speaks with the voice of anyone who isn't a player-character.

Remember, the number one rule of this game is: *do what makes sense in the narrative*. The players, including the GM (who is just a decision-making player with more characters), are here to *tell a story*. That's the overarching objective (as well as having fun, of course).

If a rule doesn't work, change it. If something happens ad there isn't a rule for it, just *go with what makes sense*. It's less important to follow specific rules, and more important to do what the story demands, and perhaps most of all, what is most satisfying for players.

Appendices

At the end of each Book there may be an appendix (or two) with some reference material relevant to that section. In this case, it's *Tiers & Targets*, to get a sense of how the TIER of a **test** impacts its difficulty class (DC).

APPENDIX I • TIERS & TARGETS

The following table outlines the ten **TIERS** of difficulty and their associated **target number**, which is what players will be trying to meet, or exceed, so their character succeeds at a given action. Essentially, a **target number** is just three times the **TIER**, though other elements of the game or narrative may increase or decease these figures slightly.

There's nothing to say that a **TIER III** check *must* have a **target number** of exactly 9 every time. Perhaps it's slightly easier, or there's a mitigating circumstance of some sort? It can easily be 8, or 10, or 11. The actual **TIERS** are really just a starting point. By default, the **target numbers** probably should be consistent, so that players understand them, but don't

be afraid to modify them from time to time if it's appropriate.

In regard to describing or naming **TIERS**, some groups may want to modify them to their own taste. That's perfectly okay; they only need to describe a *common understanding* of its relative difficulty.

As a general rule, anything over **TIER V** will be quite challenging without the right gear, cooperation, or multiple positive modifiers. Certainly to begin with, focus on **TIER II**, **III** and **IV** unless an obstacle is meant to be especially difficult.

Table I: Test Difficulty

Tier		Target	Description
0	Routine	0	*This is so basic that it doesn't even require a roll*
I	Easy	3	*Almost anyone could complete this task without difficulty*
II	Simple	6	*A task requiring a degree of effort most people can manage*
III	Testing	9	*A distinct challenge which most people could manage about half the time*
IV	Challenging	12	*Something quite difficult which only trained people could complete often*
V	Difficult	15	*Even those with training will only manage about half the time*
VI	Demanding	18	*Anyone without specialist training or skill will almost certainly fail*
VII	Formidable	21	*Impossible for anyone without a high degree of preparation*
VIII	Daunting	24	*An extremely challenging task which very few could hope to pull off*
IX	Heroic	27	*Only the best of the best could dare to even hope to succeed at such a task*
X	Impossible	30	*Largely beyond the realm of mortal capacity*

Book I: The Basics