Simpler Systems Options: Character Creation and Game Basics

Version 1.1

© Simpler Systems Options

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Introduction:

I found Knave in my search for a BX like rule system for use in my home game that is easy to mod and simple to run.

Knave 1E is a rules toolkit created by Ben Milton for running old school fantasy RPGs without needing classes. Adding, subtracting and modifying rules is both expected and encouraged.
Every PC is a knave, a tomb raiding, adventure seeking ne'er do well who wields a spell book just as easily as a blade. A PCs role in the party is determined largely by the equipment they carry, their characteristic allocations, and perk selection.

Heroes of Adventure is a fantasy role playing game created by the Nameless Designer. This game provided many mechanics, systems, and Ideas incorporated throughout these works.

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My goal is to assemble a rule set for players who like to switch up their character's focus from time to time and don't like being pigeonholed. Perks and Talents are optional. You can follow a class progression or add class talents if you wish. Mix, match, and blend together as you wish.

Knave is a little to bare boned for my tastes. Heroes of Adventure is a distinct game system in it's own right. I find that blending them together brings the right balance for my table. My thanks to both authors for their work and generosity.

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Character Creation:

1. Select a Kindred Perk. Record benefits and penalties.
2. Distribute +3, +2, +1, 0, 0, 0 among the six characteristic bonuses and defenses. The referee will decide if the game use static or variable bonuses.
   A) Static Bonuses are rated at 0 to +10. They are added to a 2d10 roll to determine the success or failure of an attempt to overcome a defense.
   B) Variable Bonuses are added to a 2d10 roll to determine the success or failure of an attempt to overcome a defense. They are rated as:
      - 1 = d3
      - 2 = d4
      - 3 = d4+1
      - 4 = d6
      - 5 = d6+1
      - 6 = d8
      - 7 = d8+1
      - 8 = d10
      - 9 = d10+1
      - 10 = d12
   C) Defenses are 10+the static characteristic bonus. It is the value a 2d10 roll must meet or exceed to succeed. It is the same as difficulty class (DC) or target number (TN) in other games.
3. PCs have a number of item slots equal to their Constitution defense, and items they carry must fit into available slots. Most items take up one slot, but some take up more. Some small items can be bundled together into a single slot. Ask the referee if you are unsure. Item slots make tracking encumbrance very fast and easy, which is important since resource management is an important aspect of the game. They also represent character customization slots, since what a character is carrying goes a long way towards determining their play style and role in the party.
4. Roll 1d8 to determine your PC's starting and maximum hit points. A PCs healing rate is 1d8+ Constitution bonus. All hit dice are assumed to be d8, for PCs, NPCs, and monsters. This simplifies the game and keeps things compatible with the stats in most OSR books. Note that a PCs Constitution bonus is not added to their hit point rolls. Referees who don't want starting PCs to be quite as fragile might want to allow starting HP to be re rolled if it is below 5.
5. Roll for initial armor, helmet, shield and gear.
6. Armor comes with an armor defense value. Note that value on your character sheet. If the PC is not wearing any armor, their armor defense is 6. Armor defense is essentially the same concept as armor class in most OSR games. It's been renamed to emphasize the connection between the way it and ability defenses work.

7. Determine starting Social Class, Culture, Familiar Terrain, and Family Trade. These selections are rated as Good at.
8. PCs start with a weapon of their choosing and two of the following: a knife, club, or staff.
9. Optional: Invent or roll the rest of your PCs traits, such as their physique, face, skin, hair, clothing, virtue, vice, speech, background, and alignment, using the random tables on the following page. Choose a gender and a name for your PC, but don't get too attached. It's a dangerous world out there.
10. All adventurers start out as knaves. They are general purpose, undifferentiated characters.
11. They may improve or find specializations during advancement through:
    A) Adding characteristic improvements during character level advancement.
       1. Strength: Important for fighters.
       2. Dexterity: Important for thieves and rogues.
       3. Constitution: Important for all adventures.
       4. Intelligence: Important for magic users, wizards, and all arcane practitioners.
       5. Wisdom: Important for rangers and all missile users.
       6. Charisma: Important for clerics, leaders, and con men.
    B) Magic section and systems are:
       1. Dark & Dangerous Magic
       2. Book of Spells
       3. Charm Spell Dice Magic
    C) Class Perks: These add class features to a character and are not mutually exclusive. They are rated on a 1-10 level scale and the total class levels may not exceed the total character level.
    D) Class Talents: Adds class like functionality without the level system. A character may not possess more than five at one time.
    E) Skill/Professional/Art/Lore Perks: Give definition and scope to characters.

Initial Equipment:

Armor: Roll a d20

1-3: No armor	4-14: Quilted	15-19: Brigandine	20: Chain

Helmets and Shields: Roll a d20 and a d6 if needed

1-9: None	10-16: Helmet	17-19: Shield	20: Helmet and Shield
	1-3: Non Metal	1-3: Small	Roll on the left two tables.
	4-5: Metal, Light	4-5: Medium	
	6: Metal, Heavy	6: Large	

Starting Dungeoneering Gear: Roll a d6

1-2: Normal Clothing for Social Station, Backpack +5 bonus slots, Belt Pouch, Bedroll, Rations (4 Days), Waterskin, Lantern, Oil (3 Flasks), Flint and Steel, Pole (10'), Rope 50', Crowbar, Ram (Portable), Signal Whistle.	3-4: Normal Clothing for Social Station, Backpack +5 bonus slots, Belt Pouch, Bedroll, Rations (4 Days), Waterskin, Tent, Torch (6), Flint and Steel, Rope 50', Grappling Hook, Pitons (3), Hammer, Chalk, Hand Mirror, Pry Bar.	5-6: Normal Clothing for Social Station, Backpack +5 bonus slots, Belt Pouch, Bedroll, Rations (4 Days), Waterskin, Lantern, Oil (3 Flasks), Flint and Steel, Rope 50', Caltrops, Shovel, Chain 10', Small Game Trap.
5 Slots used.	5 Slots used.	5 Slots used.

General Gear 1: Roll twice on a d20

1	Rope, 50ft	6	Crowbar	11	Lantern	16	Pole, 10ft
2	Pulleys	7	Tinderbox	12	Lamp oil	17	Sack
3	Candles, 5	8	Grappling hook	13	Padlock	18	Tent
4	Chain, 10ft	9	Hammer	14	Manacles	19	Spikes, 5
5	Chalk, 10	10	Water skin	15	Small Mirror	20	Torches, 5

General Gear 2: Roll once on a d20

1	Air bladder	6	Saw	11	Fish. rod	16	Net
2	Bear trap	7	Bucket	12	Marbles	17	Tongs
3	Shovel	8	Caltrops	13	Glue	18	Lock picks
4	Bellows	9	Chisel	14	Pick	19	Metal file
5	Grease	10	Drill	15	Hourglass	20	Nails

General Gear 3: Roll once on a d20

1	Incense	6	Bottle	11	Fake jewels	16	Face paint
2	Sponge	7	Soap	12	Blank book	17	Whistle
3	Lens	8	Spyglass	13	Card deck	18	Instrument
4	Perfume	9	Tar pot	14	Dice set	19	Quill & Ink
5	Horn	10	Twine	15	Cook pots	20	Small bell

Social Class and starting SP: Roll a d20

1-2: Noble	3-6: Clergy	7-11: Crafter	12-15: Merchant	16-20: Farmer
2d20+Charisma SP	1d20+Charisma SP	1d10+Charisma SP	1d12+Charisma SP	1d8+Charisma SP

Culture: Choose or roll a d20

1-5: Civilized	6-10: Barbarian	11-15: Nomad	16-20: Primitive

Familiar Terrain: Choose or roll a d10

1. Arctic
2. Agricultural Countryside
3. City
4. Coast
5. Desert
6. Forest
7. Grasslands
8. Mountains
9. Swamp/Marsh
10. Subterranean

Family Trade: Choose or roll a d30

1. Acrobat
2. Alchemist
3. Animal Trainer
4. Bard
5. Blacksmith
6. Champion/ Knight/ Noble Warrior
7. Courtier
8. Craftsman
9. Diplomat
10. Explorer
11. Farmer
12. Fisherman
13. Government Employee
14. Herdsman
15. Hunter
16. Mercenary
17. Merchant
18. Miner
19. Physician
20. Priest
21. Sailor
22. Scribe
23. Shaman
24. Soldier/Warrior
25. Spy
26. Thief
27. Tracker
28. Witch
29. Sorcerer
30. Woodsman

Optional Family Reputation: Roll a d10

1: Poor reputation. 1D3 Enemies or Rivals.	2-4: Average reputation but a few skeletons and secrets in the background. 1 Enemy or Rival.	5-7: Average reputation.	8-9: Good reputation but a few skeletons and secrets in the background. 1 Contact or Ally.	10: Reputation of excellent standing. 1D3 Contacts or Allies.

Optional Family Connections: Roll a d10

| 1: No connections worth mentioning. | 2-4: Family has reasonable connections within the community. No significant contacts. | 5-7: Family is considered well connected with other families and persons holding local power. 1 Contact and 1 Rival. | 8-9: Family is considered well connected with other families and persons holding local and regional power. 2 Contacts, 1 Rival and 1 Enemy. | 10: Family is considered well connected with other families and persons holding local, regional and national power. 2 Contacts, 2 Rivals and 2 Enemies |

Optional Character Traits:

Physique: Choose or roll a d20

1	Athletic	6	Hulking	11	Short	16	Stout
2	Brawny	7	Lanky	12	Sinewy	17	Tiny
3	Corpulent	8	Ripped	13	Slender	18	Towering
4	Delicate	9	Rugged	14	Flabby	19	Willowy
5	Gaunt	10	Scrawny	15	Statuesque	20	Wiry

Face: Choose or roll a d20

1	Bloated	6	Elongated	11	Impish	16	Sharp
2	Blunt	7	Patrician	12	Narrow	17	Soft
3	Bony	8	Pinched	13	Ratlike	18	Square
4	Chiseled	9	Hawkish	14	Round	19	Wide
5	Delicate	10	Broken	15	Sunken	20	Wolfish

Skin: Choose or roll a d20

1	Battle Scar	6	Oily	11	Reeking	16	Sunburned
2	Birthmark	7	Pale	12	Tattooed	17	Tanned
3	Burn Scar	8	Perfect	13	Rosy	18	War Paint
4	Dark	9	Pierced	14	Rough	19	Weathered
5	Makeup	10	Pockmarked	15	Sallow	20	Whip Scar

Hair: Choose or roll a d20

1. Bald	6. Disheveled	11. Limp	16. Ponytail
2. Braided	7. Dreadlocks	12. Long	17. Silky
3. Bristly	8. Filthy	13. Luxurious	18. Topknot
4. Cropped	9. Frizzy	14. Mohawk	19. Wavy
5. Curly	10. Greased	15. Oily	20. Wispy

Clothing: Choose or roll a d20

1 Antique	6 Elegant	11 Foreign	16 Patched
2 Bloody	7 Fashionable	12 Frayed	17 Perfumed
3 Ceremonial	8 Filthy	13 Frumpy	18 Rancid
4 Decorated	9 Flamboyant	14 Livery	19 Torn
5 Eccentric	10 Stained	15 Oversized	20 Undersized

Virtue: Choose or roll a d20

1 Ambitious	6 Disciplined	11 Honorable	16 Merciful
2 Cautious	7 Focused	12 Humble	17 Righteous
3 Courageous	8 Generous	13 Idealistic	18 Serene
4 Courteous	9 Gregarious	14 Just	19 Stoic
5 Curious	10 Honest	15 Loyal	20 Tolerant

Vice: Choose or roll a d20

1 Aggressive	6 Deceitful	11 Lazy	16 Suspicious
2 Arrogant	7 Flippant	12 Nervous	17 Vain
3 Bitter	8 Gluttonous	13 Prejudiced	18 Vengeful
4 Cowardly	9 Greedy	14 Reckless	19 Wasteful
5 Cruel	10 Irascible	15 Rude	20 Whiny

Speech: Choose or roll a d20

1 Blunt	6 Droning	11 Mumbling	16 Dialect
2 Booming	7 Flowery	12 Precise	17 Slow
3 Breathy	8 Formal	13 Quaint	18 Squeaky
4 Cryptic	9 Gravelly	14 Rambling	19 Stuttering
5 Drawling	10 Hoarse	15 Rapid-fire	20 Whispery

Misfortunes: Choose or roll a d20

1	Abandoned	6	Defrauded	11	Framed	16	Pursued
2	Addicted	7	Demoted	12	Haunted	17	Rejected
3	Blackmailed	8	Discredited	13	Kidnapped	18	Replaced
4	Condemned	9	Disowned	14	Mutilated	19	Robbed
5	Cursed	10	Exiled	15	Poor	20	Suspected

Playing the Game:

Abilities:

Each of the six abilities is used in different circumstances.

- Strength: Used for melee attacks and saves requiring physical power, like lifting gates, bending bars, etc.
- Dexterity: Used for saves requiring poise, speed, and reflexes, like dodging, climbing, sneaking, balancing, etc.
- Constitution: Used for saves to resist poison, sickness, cold, etc. The Constitution bonus is added to healing rolls. A PC's number of item slots is always equal to their Constitution defense.
- Intelligence: Used for saves requiring concentration and precision, such as wielding magic, resisting magical effects, recalling lore, crafting objects, tinkering with machinery, picking pockets, etc.

- Wisdom: Used for ranged attacks and saves requiring perception and intuition, such as tracking, navigating, searching for secret doors, detecting illusions, etc.
- Charisma: Used for saves to persuade, deceive, interrogate, intimidate, charm, provoke, etc. PCs may employ a number of henchmen equal to their Charisma bonus.

Note: The system relies heavily on the six abilities. They each play an important role, there are no dump stats.

Item Slots:

PCs have a number of item slots equal to their Constitution defense. Most items, including spell books, potions, a day's rations, light weapons, tools and so on take up 1 slot, but particularly heavy or bulky items like armor or medium to heavy weapons may take up more slots. Groups of small, identical items may be bundled into the same slot, at the referee's discretion. 1,250 small coins can fit in a slot. 250 Large coins fit in a slot. As a general guideline, a slot holds around 5 pounds of weight. Slots are also the key to character customization, as a PC's gear helps determine who they are. Raising Constitution, therefore, will probably be a priority for most characters.

Saving Throws, Skills, Combat, & Spells:

If a character attempts something where the outcome is uncertain and failure has consequences, they make a saving throw, or "save". To make a save, add the bonus of the relevant ability + relevant perk die or level to a 2d10 roll. If the total is equal to or greater than DC 14, the character succeeds. If not, they fail. The referee may adjust this number up or down if the task is easier or harder than usual. See the Task DC Numbers in the Perk System Expansion. In combat this DC is the Armor Defense (AD) total of the opponent.

These numbers reflect the general pattern found in the save mechanics of early role playing games.

If the save is opposed by another character, then instead of aiming to exceed 14, the side doing the rolling must get a total greater than the opposing character's relevant defense score in order to succeed. If they fail, the opposing side succeeds. This type of save is called an opposed save. Note that it doesn't matter which side does the rolling, since the odds of success remain the same.

Example: A mage casts a plasma bolt spell at a goblin, who gets a saving throw to avoid. This is resolved as an opposed save using the wizard's Intelligence versus the goblin's Dexterity. The goblin may roll plus their Dexterity bonus, hoping to exceed the wizard's Intelligence defense or the wizard may roll plus their Intelligence bonus, hoping to exceed the goblin's Dexterity defense.

An ability's defense score is essentially its average roll. Requiring the rolling side to beat the opposing defense allows contests to be settled more quickly. It eliminates the possibility of ties.

Advantages/Disadvantages:

If there are situational factors that make a save significantly easier or harder, the referee may grant the roll advantage or disadvantage. If a roll has advantage, roll 3d10 and use the better two dice. If it has disadvantage, roll 3d10 and use the worse two dice.

Reactions:

When the PCs encounter an NPC whose reaction to the party is not obvious, the referee may roll 2d6 and consult the following table.

2: Hostile   3-5: Unfriendly   6-8: Unsure/Neutral   9-11: Talkative/Friendly   12: Helpful/Positive

Combat:

See Simpler Systems Options: Arms, Armor, & Combat.

Morale:

Monsters and NPCs all have a morale rating, usually between 5 and 9. When they face more danger than they were expecting, the referee will make a morale roll by rolling 2d6 and comparing the result to the NPCs morale rating. If the roll is lower than the rating, the NPC will attempt to flee, retreat, or parley. Morale rolls can be triggered by defeating half of an enemy group, defeating a group's leader, or reducing a lone enemy to half HP. Other effects may trigger a morale roll at the referee's discretion. Hirelings also make morale rolls when they aren't paid, their employer dies, or they face extraordinary danger. Morale may also be improved by paying hirelings more and treating them well.

Healing:

After a meal and a full night's rest, PCs regain lost hit points equal to a d8 plus their Constitution bonus. Resting at a safe haven restores all lost HP. Constitution bonuses do not affect maximum hit points like in most OSR games, but it is a big help when it comes to healing. Wound penalties are removed when the wound they are derived from heals or 1 point per day, whichever is slower.

Monsters:

The Monster Compendium from Heroes of Adventure has been adapted for this purpose. See Simpler Systems Options: Tome of Monsters & Creatures for specifics. Otherwise, all monsters from OSR bestiaries should work as is with no major conversion needed. Here are some guidelines.

- Hit Dice/Hit Points: All monster hit dice can be assumed to be d8s unless otherwise specified. To get the monster's hit points, just multiply the number of hit dice they have by 4 (or 5 if you're feeling mean.)
- Armor: Monster AC (if ascending) is identical to Armor Defense. If the AC is descending, subtract it from 19 (if it is from the first games) or from 20 (if it is from later games) to find its ascending equivalent.
- Attack Bonus: Any attack bonus given is unchanged, and can be added to both melee and ranged attacks. If an attack bonus is not given, assume that it is the same as the monster's number of hit dice.
- Damage: Damage remains the same.
- Morale: Morale rating remains the same.
- Saves: Since OSR monsters usually don't come with ability scores, assume that monsters have ability bonuses equal to their level, with the corresponding ability defenses.

Example: A typical 4 HD monster would have a bonus of +4 and a defense of 14 in all of its abilities by default, unless modified by the referee.

Advancement:

See Simpler Systems Options: Perk System Expansion.

As a guideline, PCs receive 50 XP for low risk accomplishments, 100 XP for moderate risk accomplishments, and 200 XP for high risk accomplishments. The referee should freely notify the PCs of how much XP different objectives are worth when asked. All character level, class level perks, perks, and talents are purchased with XP. When a PC gains a character level, they roll a number of d8s equal to their new level to find their new HP maximum. If the result is less than or equal to their previous maximum, their maximum HP increases by 1. They also raise the defense and bonus scores of 3 different abilities of their choice by 1 point. Abilities may never be raised higher than 20/+10.

Magic:

See Simpler Systems Options: Dark & Dangerous Magic, Book of Spells, Perk System, and Charm Spell Dice Magic.

When a spell allows for a save, make an opposed Intelligence save against the defender's relevant ability, usually Dexterity for ranged attack spells, Constitution for life draining spells, Intelligence for mind altering spells, or Wisdom for Illusions.

Charm Magic: The higher the level of the spell charm, the rarer and more valuable it is. PCs openly carrying high level spell charms are likely to be hounded by bandits and wizards looking to "acquire" them.

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Change Log:

February 13, 2024: Minor edits and added variable vs static bonuses.