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SIMPLE RPG

My *"Simple RPG"* has been around in one form or another for about a decade. Originally billed as the product of "literally minutes of testing," it has actually undergone the stress test of being played by a few hundred school children—not all at once, thankfully—about as many college kids, and at least one graduate class. When I created it, it was specifically for the purpose of teaching the basics of storytelling in game design—that is to say, the fundamentals of tabletop roleplaying. It has been run with the scenarios we've included here, on the fly, both with and without heavy lessons on theory attached. (My personal favorite is my lecture "Dice Math and Games," which I've used to teach probability theory to first graders who now know the difference between linear probability and bell curves.) But, the truth is, it's still one of my favorite systems to pull out at the restaurant with friends, in line for the theater, or on a road trip to Grandma's. That's because the simple system is, well, simple! Divide 10 points into the three circles, do a little math, and follow basically one rule: roll 2d6 with your favorite dice app, and if you roll under your stat, you succeed in what you were trying to do. Simple as that! I hope you get some of the same enjoyment from it as we have all these years.

- Doc Brackin

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CHARACTER CREATION

You have **10 character points** to work with. Divvy them up as you choose and put them into your MIND, BODY, and SPIRIT circles. These are your **primary stats**, used for offense.

Example: [MIND 3] + [SPIRIT 5] + [BODY 2] = 10

*Tip: having less than 2 in any stat makes it impossible to succeed when rolling that stat.*

Add each pair of neighboring primary stats and write the sum in the area where those stats overlap. These are your **derived stats**, used for defense.

Example: [MIND 3] + [SPIRIT 5] = [PSYCHE 8]

Add 1 bonus point to the derived stat with the highest value. This is your **speciality stat**. If there's a tie, pick one.

Example: if [PSYCHE 8] is the highest derived stat, adding 1 bonus point = [PSYCHE 9].

You may optionally assign a **class** based on your specialty stat. Write your class or another title next to your name, below.
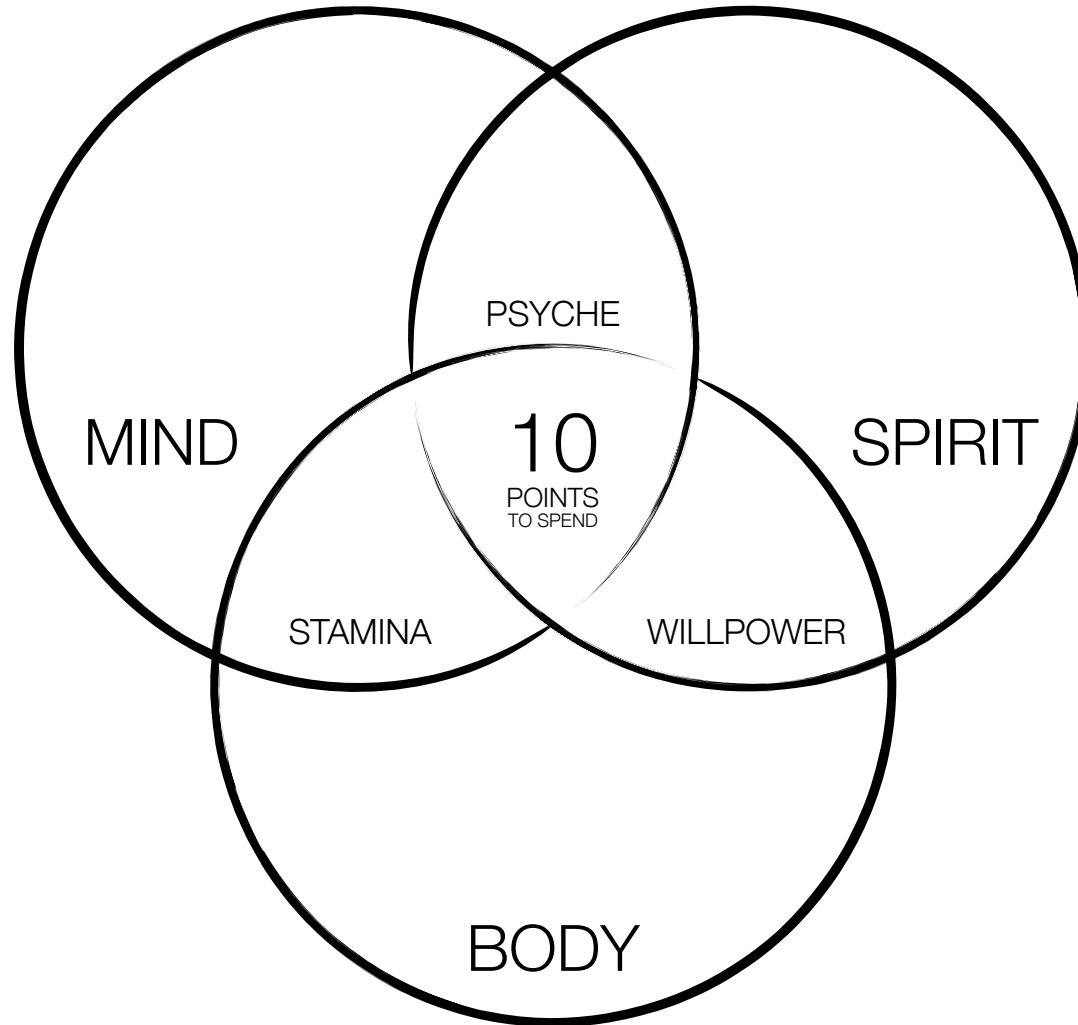
MECHANICS

You'll always **roll two six-sided dice (2d6)** vs. *your own* stats.

Use **primary stats** to do things. Pick the stat you want to use, and roll *lower* than or match that number to succeed.

Use **derived stats** to stop things from happening to your character. Roll *lower* than or match the stat to succeed.

If two characters are directly opposed, the "attacker" always succeeds unless the "defender" successfully rolls a derived stat.

Players competing or indirectly opposed each roll primary stats. Whoever rolls furthest below their own stat wins. Re-roll ties.

Example: P1 rolls a 5 vs. her [MIND 7] for a margin of 2. P2 rolls a 3 vs. his [MIND 4] for a margin of 1. P1 wins.

Stats do not change. If the story or a key roll calls for a character to be removed, roleplay it out.

*Large group variant: only the GM rolls; rolls set the **obstacle**. All players of [a class] with [stat] over the obstacle succeed.*

PSYCHE

MIND

SPIRIT

10
POINTS
TO SPEND

STAMINA

WILLPOWER

BODY

My character: _____ the _____

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AN OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD ALIENS SCENARIO

(Originally for teaching open RPG design in the classroom)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Players should follow the instructions under CHARACTER CREATION on their character sheets.
   (Important: make sure everyone finishes this step before moving on.)

2. Assign a character class to each player based on their specialty stat:

   a. Psyche: Alien Prisoner
   b. Stamina: Human Trooper
   c. Willpower: Human Scientist

3. In larger groups, the person with the single highest derived stat is the "leader" of their class.

4. Whoever's specialty stat is a 9 or lower is a child or new recruit of their class and will be treated as such.

SETTING: AREA 42

(GM reads aloud to the players)

You are at work in a secret government building known as "Area 42." Your mission is to study a group of alien prisoners. Unless, of course, you *are* one of the aliens currently being held behind a forcefield in a holding cell...

NPC SUGGESTIONS

Non-player characters (NPCs) you might use, and their stats (**B**ODY, **M**IND, **S**PIRIT):

- Men In Black: B8, M1, S2
- Alien Leader: B1, M8, S8
- Civilians: B5, M1, S2
- A Rival Alien Race: B10, M10, S10

STORY SUGGESTIONS

Other than the setup, there is no specific plot or action that *must* occur, but there should be some resolution by the end of your time playing. It is up to you, the game master (GM) to decide what should happen moment-to-moment to cause conflict using a "yes, and" approach: reacting to what the players say and do. Go crazy!

No single scene should last more than a few minutes, especially toward the end.

If the story seems to be going nowhere, introduce one of these (or your own) elements as appropriate:

- An explosion rocks the facility
  (Roll SPIRIT to identify the source: the alien mother ship!)

- A gas leak has begun
  (Roll STAMINA to defend against it)

- Steal a helicopter
  (Roll MIND to fly it)

- Mutate in the laboratory
  (Roll MIND to use the machines there)

- UFOs
  (Roll SPIRIT to mind-meld with them)

- Computers
  (Roll MIND to use them)

- Anti-air Guns
  (Roll BODY to fire them)

- Base's Self-destruct
  (Roll MIND to arm it)

Illustration by Randall Worley

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A MYTHICAL, MONSTROUS, EGYPTIAN SCENARIO

(Originally a cooperation exercise for the classroom)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Players should follow the instructions under CHARACTER CREATION on their character sheets.
   (Important: make sure everyone finishes this step before moving on.)

2. Assign a character class to each player based on their specialty stat:
   a. Psyche: Vampire
   b. Stamina: Mummy
   c. Willpower: Werewolf

3. In larger groups, the person with the single highest derived stat is the "leader" of their class.

4. Whoever's specialty stat is a 9 or lower is a child or newcomer to their class and will be treated as such.

SCENARIO

(GM reads aloud to the players)

This is ancient Egypt. You monsters have been summoned by the pharaoh's dying wish through an ancient, magical artifact. *His one desire is for eternal life*. You stand in the royal antechamber of his palace. Guards stand between the pillars and block the doors, guarding the pharaoh.

Each race has brought a gift to the pharaoh:

a. Vampires: Fine black silken shrouds
b. Mummies: Wrappings and funerary spices
c. Werewolves: (Normal) *PUPPIES*!

Each race has a desire that burns within you. It is your "price" for cooperation:

a. Vampires: Sunscreen!
b. Mummies: Your old guts (Canopic jars)
c. Werewolves: Fancy grooming supplies

Illustration by Adam "Doc" Brackin

NPC SUGGESTIONS

Non-player characters (NPCs) you might use, and their stats (**B**ODY, **M**IND, **S**PIRIT):

- Guards: B8, M1, S2
- Pharaoh: B1, M8, S8
- Citizens / Slaves: B5, M1, S2
- Gods(?): B10, M10, S10

STORY SUGGESTIONS

Other than the setup, there is no specific plot or action that must occur, but there should be some resolution by the end of the time allotted (we suggest 30-45 minutes). It is up to you, the game master (GM), to decide what should happen moment-to-moment to cause conflict if the major conflict is not enough: only one race will get its reward, if they are picked by the pharaoh as the solution to immortality. Go crazy!

No single scene should last more than a few minutes, especially toward the end.

If the story seems to be going nowhere, introduce one of these story elements as appropriate:

- A human slave runs into the room and dies. He is clutching an important message from the land of the dead.

- One of the Egyptian gods appears in a cloud of smoke and lightning bolts and bellows, "STOP!"

- The pharaoh gets angry with the monsters' negotiating and arguing and sends in slaves to fight them!

- The pharaoh decides that *all* the [werewolf/vampire/mummy] children must be saved!

- The ancient artifact glows and sparks—another wish is available!

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