# SimpleTop – GM’s Guide

## What is this?

It’s a Tabletop Roleplaying Game that is easy to play and easy to customize for newcomers and seasoned roleplayers! This book is meant to help GMs understand how to run this game, and how to create fun sessions! The guidance in this book references the rules defined in SimpleTop, but many of the lessons could be translated to any game system.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Table of Contents | |
| **General Help** | pg. 4 |
| *Roleplaying, Asking for Rolls, Inventory, Magic, Encounters, & Combat* | |
| **Zones & Cover** | pg. 6 |
| **Sessions & Gameplay** | pg. 8 |
| *Sessions, Loops, & Preparation* | |
| **Gameplay  Deep Dive** | pg. 10 |
| *Story, Exploration, Roleplay, & Combat* | |
| **Creating Encounters** | pg. 12 |
| *Combat Encounters: Dice, Enemy Health, Difficulty Adjustments.*  *Roleplay Encounters: Goals without Rolls, Character Desires.* | |
| **Enemy Creation** | pg. 14 |
| **Creating a Story** | pg. 16 |
| *Key Moments, Preparation, & Other Story Structures* | |
| **Character Creation** | pg. 18 |
| **Creating Items** | pg. 20 |
| **Tracking Tools** | pg. 22 |
| *Story, Players, Combat, Blank Sheet* | |

# Special Thanks

# General Help for the GM

## Roleplaying

* Discuss situations your group is comfortable with
* Work with Players to tell a story, not against them
* Connect characters and the story to Players through their motivations, personal objectives, and decisions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Suggested Goals** | |
| Very Easy | 3 |
| Easy | 4 |
| Kind of Hard | 5 |
| Hard | 7 |
| Extremely Hard | 9 |
| Heroic | 10 |
| Almost Impossible | 12 |

## Asking For Rolls

Not everything a Player does needs to be rolled. Ask Players to roll if they try do something difficult or that they wouldn’t normally be proficient in.

* Clarify Player Intentions
  + “So, you want to break the wall?”
* Create a Goal the player tries to roll
* Ask them to roll with a Stat you think is relevant, or they request
  + “Give me a Strength roll, with a Goal of 5.”
* Player rolls 1d6 and adds the Stat’s highest, unlocked Roleplay Bonus
* Player succeeds by rolling the Goal or higher
* Roleplay the outcome with the Player
  + “You did it! How do you bust into the room?”

Strength represents power and will.

Skill represents proficiency and introspection.

Support represents extrospection and medicinal prowess.

Scharisma represents social aptitude and conspicuousness.

Mental or magical prowess could be represented by any Stat.

## Inventory

* No explicit rules for inventory management
* Discuss a custom system or ignore it entirely
* Players will be creative with Items, don’t be afraid to say no for the sake of the story

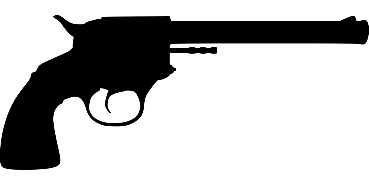
**Magic**

No explicit rules exist for magic.

Players can describe Actions as spells, but for specific rules and effects, feel free to discuss a custom system!

## Encounters

* Roleplay Encounters
  + Show players the consequences of their decisions.
  + Give players a creative problem to solve
* Combat Encounters
  + Teach/challenge players on game mechanics
  + Whittle down player resources



## Combat

* Not required. You can have a fun game without combat!
* Starts with Enemy Phase, followed by the Player Phase
  + Describe Enemy behavior, deal damage with rolls
* Player Phase: Players describe their Actions
  + Players can act at the same time
* If all players reach 0 Health, they lose that fight
  + Doesn’t need to mean death
  + Maybe enemies steal loot or their plan works
* After Combat, it’s normal to completely heal Players
  + Don’t heal them for an extra challenge.

# Zones & Cover

## Zones

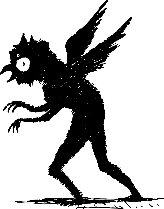
* You define Zones
  + Each Zone represents a distance of 1 **Move**
  + “Your Zone” refers to the Zone you’re currently in
* Zones don’t need to be equal size
* Soft boundaries separate accessible, adjacent Zones
  + Represented by dashed (**- - - - -**) lines
* Hard boundaries block movement and Actions
  + Represented by solid ( ) lines
* Zones can touch without being accessible to each other

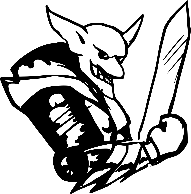
A floor plan of a house

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

## Cover (optional)

If you want to add some extra tactical elements to your combat, you can add cover!

* Represented by wiggly (**~~~~~**) lines
* Blocks damage from sources in a direct line of sight
* During the Player Phase, Players can freely move to Cover in their Zone
  + During the Enemy Phases, they can spend 1AP to move into Cover in their Zone, before an Enemy attacks
  + Damage taken is reduced by their Level
* During the Enemy Phase, Enemies can freely move
  + They can’t move into Cover during the Player Phase
* A black background with a black square

  Description automatically generated with medium confidenceIn this example, the Level 5 Player ( ) is in Cover
  + When the shadow ( ) attacks, the Player takes full damage
  + A map of a room

    Description automatically generatedWhen the goblin ( ) attacks, the Player reduces the damage by 5 (their Level)

# Sessions & Gameplay

## Sessions

* Sessions are like “episodes” of gameplay
  + As the GM, suggesting dates can be helpful
  + Each session has an agreed-on start and end time
  + I recommend planning 1 hour per person + breaks
* Each session should serve a purpose for the overall story
  + Is this session setting something up?
  + Is this session developing something that was set up?
  + Is this session giving closure to something?
* Each session has chunks of gameplay elements, such as:
  + Story, Exploration, Roleplay, and Combat

My group’s gameplay loop starts with **Combat**. After the combat, I reward them with some new **Story** reveals. Players often react to these reveals in ways that lead to **Roleplay** with each other!

* + Players hate, don’t care about, like, or love them

## Loops

Elements of gameplay that are loved by the players should be included in every session if possible. Use the most popular element as the start or end of a gameplay loop

* Hated elements should be avoided or adjusted
* Elements that fall somewhere in-between can be used to mix things up and prevent repetitive session
* If players are evenly divided between hating and loving the same elements, the group might not be cohesive
  + Extra communication can ensure everyone has fun
* Loops will often be cut short by the end of a session. Don’t worry about forcefully restarting the loop each session

## Preparation

You are free to prepare as much content as you want, but I recommend starting with as little preparation as possible, to learn how to be flexible in your thinking. Instead of planning every specific possibility players *might* take, plan broad concepts that you can specify later.

* Zoom Out
  + Start by planning how many sessions will be played
  + Plan 1 Loop per Session (list included gameplay elements)
  + Plan specific Gameplay Chunks in Loops for 1-2 Sessions
  + After a Session, take notes on how things went and how future plans might need to be adjusted
* Create modular Ideas
  + Plans for Sessions can include locations and their theming, but specific Encounters should be generic enough to fit into any of these locations
  + A puzzle could be planned as needing 2 keys for a lock and later described as a statue that moves once 2 magical orbs are placed in its hands
  + A Character could have specific personality traits and goals, then approach the party if they set up camp or get found by the party if they explore a dungeon
* Think about the Players
  + Fun Sessions revolve around Player decisions and agency
  + If Players don’t like the Sessions, it doesn’t mean you’re a bad GM, it just means something needs to change
  + Remember that you’re also playing this game! If *you* don’t like how Sessions are going, something still needs to change

# Gameplay Deep Dive

The **Story** is its own character that wants to be heard. A story that players get invested in revolve around their characters, their backgrounds, and their goals.

* Players who **love Story** care about the 5 Ws of the story
  + Reveal new story information in each gameplay chunk
* Players who **hate Story** want to interact with the people in the group or the mechanics of the game
  + Avoid talking more than players, let them tell the story
  + Focus on connecting story elements to player characters
  + Try rotating which player is the focus of each chunk

A black and white mask

Description automatically generated

A black and white image of a map

Description automatically generated

**Exploration** involves discovering and experimenting. Exploration creates content based on what each player wants to discover. Players get to ask questions that the game answers.

* Players who **love Exploration** are curious and want answers
  + Answer a question, or tease an answer, in the same Session it’s asked. Give the answer as a reward for something
* Players who **hate Exploration** want to focus on the key experience of the game
  + Avoid following tangents and getting sidetracked
  + Instead, focus on creating content that each player would be interested in discovering and obtaining for *progression*
  + Try giving players new information to learn about things they’ve previously discovered

**Roleplay** involves the people in the group playing with each other (remember, you are a part of the group!).

* Players who **love Roleplay** want to pretend with their friends and see what each other can come up with
  + Present prompts that encourage interaction
* Players who **hate Roleplay** don’t like being put on the spot
  + Avoid putting pressure on players to be entertaining
  + Give opportunities for players to roleplay, but don’t expect it
  + A black and white background with icons

    Description automatically generatedTry rewarding players who go out of their comfort zone and try roleplaying without pushing them too far

A black background with a black square

Description automatically generated with medium confidence**Combat** involves risk to overcome a challenge for a reward. Combat can use complex maps with interactable things and strategic enemies to make the game fun.

* Players who **love Combat** want to test their understanding of the mechanics and get rewarded for strategy and teamwork
  + Give them challenges to overcome and rewards to earn
* Players who **hate Combat** don’t want to bog down gameplay
  + Avoid crunchy combat with intricate maps
  + Instead, focus on narrative elements of Combat: lean into development and roleplay when characters fight
  + Consider using the *Non-mapped Zones* custom rule

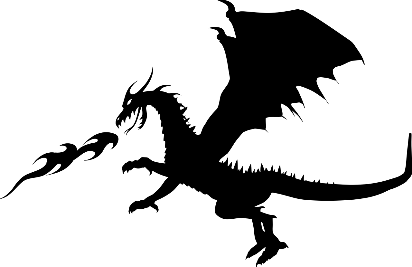
# Creating Combat Encounters

## Dice

Roll 1 or more dice to do an Enemy Action; the sum of all rolled numbers is the value of the Enemy Action.

* You get 1 six-sided die per Player Level
  + 1 Level 5 Player means you have 5 dice
  + 3 Level 2 Players means you have 6 dice
* Once a die is rolled, it can’t be rolled again until the next Enemy Phase

## Enemy Health

* Enemies share a pool of Health that can be distributed
* In Normal Combat, this pool is 12 per Player per level
  + 2 Level 5 Players means this pool is 120
  + 1 Enemy could have 80 while the other has 40
  + A swarm of hundreds of enemies can collectively have 120
  + 6 Enemies could each have 20, etc.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Combat Adjustments for Difficulty Levels** | |
| Easy  (1-2 rounds) | 10 Health per Player Level |
| -1 to all Enemy Rolls |
| Normal (2-4 rounds) | 12 Health per Player Level |
| Hard (4+ rounds) | 15 Health per Player Level |
| +1 to all Enemy Rolls |

# Creating Roleplay Encounters

What do characters want?

*Goals without Rolls, Character Desires.*

# Creating Enemies

* Make multiple types of Actions so Enemies are flexible
  + Action(s) to use on Player(s) in the Enemy’s Zone
  + Ranged Action(s) to use on Players in other Zones
  + Telegraphed Action(s) that deal 2 rounds of damage
* Enemy Actions
  + Think about when/why an Enemy would do an Action
  + Actions can do anything, like dealing damage, healing Enemies, destroying the environment, etc.
  + The numbers rolled determine the Action’s value, so the damage dealt, Health healed, etc.
  + Some effects spend a die without rolling it, like moving Players or making a Zone cost extra AP to move through
* Telegraphed Actions (T**Action**)
  + Roll a die and store the number on the 1st Enemy Phase
  + On the 1st Phase (P1), describe a buildup to the Action
  + Roll another die and add the numbers the 2nd Phase (P2)
  + More than 2 Phases can be involved (P3, etc.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sample Enemy Actions | |
| Grapple | Trigger Competing Roll. If you win, the target can’t Move during the next Phase. |
| Drain | Roll Xd6. Deal some of the total as damage to a target and heal the rest. |
| Fireball | Distribute Xd6 damage across targets in a Zone. |
| Icy Breath | Cover Xd6 Zones with Ice.  Icy Zones cost 2AP to **Move** through. |
| TBig Blast | Phase 1: Roll Xd6. Enemy builds magic energy. P2: Roll Xd6. Distribute both totals as damage across targets within 1 Move. |

## A black background with a black square AI-generated content may be incorrect.Sample Enemies

**Shadow Goblin**

A goblin-like creature that’s entirely black with bright, red eyes.

They often attack in groups to try and surround their prey.

**Movement:** After taking damage, it can sink into the ground\*.

\*While in the ground, it can’t take or deal damage.

**\*Rise**: Deal Xd6 damage to a target in your Zone as you rise from the ground. You can’t sink into the ground until the next Enemy Phase.

**Claws:** Deal Xd6 damage to a target in your Zone.

**Toss Stuff:** Deal Xd6 to a target by throwing something

A black background with a black square

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Goblin Boss**

A less short Goblin, this boss has proven to be much stronger than the other Goblins it lives with and orders them around.

**Movement:** It will increase other Goblins’ speed by throwing them.

**Hurl Goblin:** Deal Xd6 damage to a target with a thrown Goblin.

**Headbutt:** DealXd6damage to a Player in your Zone, preventing them from using the same Action twice until the next Enemy Phase.

**TCall Reinforcements:** P1: 1d6 Goblins join the battle on P2.

P2: Roll Xd6. Add the total to the Enemy Health Pool.

**A black background with a black square

Description automatically generated with medium confidence**

**AI Armor**

A futuristic suit of armor that moves on its own, the perfect soldier.

It tries to ensnare victims to absorb their life force.

*Notes: It can’t move while it has a character ensnared.   
Avoid using more than 1 of these in a single combat session*

**Movement**: Faces whoever attacked it last. Move 1 Zone per Phase.

**Ensnare:** If you’re in the Zone of a target you’re facing, ensnare\* it.

\*If a Player is ensnared, they can still damage you, but they cannot Move, help, or heal their allies.

Defeating an Enchanted Armor frees its ensnared creatures.

**\*Absorb:** Deal Xd6 damage to ensnared target. Heal Xd6.

# *Creating a Story*

## Key Moments

When creating a story, or even a single quest, think about the three types of key moments in the story:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Setup** | Teach players about the background |
| Introduce characters & objectives |
| Hook players into story with  attention-grabbing event |
| **Development** | Develop character arcs |
| Raise the stakes of the story |
| Antagonist and/or Players progress towards their objective(s) |
| **Climax** | Development merges into epic moment |
| Returning characters help Players |
| Display Player skills & character growth |
| After Climax, show results of story |

## Preparation

* Fun stories revolve around Player decisions
* Keep basic notes on key moments in story
  + Change these notes based on Player choices
* Keep notes on Characters’ motivations and objectives

## Fantasie, Halloween, Verhaal VertellenOther Story Structures

Other methods can be used to tell stories, too. You can even tell smaller stories within a larger story! For example, maybe a character arc uses Freytag’s Pyramid during the Hook of a Hero’s Journey.

## Hero’s Journey

* Focus on character development and trials
* Meet heroes > Hook > Heroes refuse adventure
* Heroes meet a guide > Begin adventure > Development
* Approach Climax > Climax > Reward from Climax
* Aftermath > True Climax > Results of story

## Kishōtenketsu

* Good for mysteries or stories with a twist
* No antagonists or conflict needed
* Setup > Development (avoid major changes)
* Twist/Reveal > Aftermath of Reveal

## Freytag’s Pyramid

* Stories about drama or tragedy
* Setup > Rise (things seem to be improving)
* Climax > Fall (things head towards tragedy) > Catastrophe

## Fichtean Curve

* Episodic adventures or individual quest story
* Approach Crisis > Crisis (repeat as much as desired)
* Climax > Results of story

# *Creating Characters*

5Ws

Sample Characters

## Sushe

* **Who**: A dwarf that handles the town’s request board
  + Maintains a board filled with many documents
* **What**: 3.5 foot tall dwarf
  + Dresses in fancy clothing
  + Wears a monocle that frequently falls off
* **Where**: In town, frequently traveling back and forth between the request board and their home
* **When**: Young for a dwarf, only 50 years old!
* **Why**: Once dreamed of being an adventurer
  + Got terrified by their first goblin and decided to work in town instead
* **How**: Always in a hurry, but eager to stop and inform whoever has a question

## Marun McCullough

* **Who**: A fairy that runs a local ice cream shop

**Ice Cream Flavors**

Archer Almond Barbarian Blueberry

Bard Bubblegum Villain Vanilla  
Clerical Cookie Dough Druid Dark Chocolate

Fightin’ Fudge Monk Mint

Paladin Pecan Ranger Rocky Road

Roguish Raspberry Sorcerer Strawberry

Warlock Wild Surprise Wizard Walnut

# Creating Items

## **General Guideline**

Items have a cost to use them in Combat (if they can be) and effects in their description. If an Item can be used in Combat, clearly state how much Health is affected (healed, damaged, etc.); this should scale based on Player Level. If an Item is not meant to be used in Combat, describe how it is meant to be used.

## **Fast Items**

* Cost 1 AP and are rather weak
  + Affect 1 Health per Level, with or without a minor effect
* Powerful Fast Items can be used multiple times

## **Normal Items**

* Cost 2 AP and are average strength
  + Affect 3 Health per Level, with or without a minor effect

## **Slow Items**

* Cost 3 AP and are strong
  + Affect 4 Health per Level
  + Minor or Major effect

## **Special Items**

* Cost 4 or more AP and are very strong
  + As powerful as similar cost Actions
  + Can persist multiple Phases or be used multiple times
* Very impactful and deliberately given
  + Prep for an extra hard encounter
  + Special reward

# Sample Items

* (**1** AP)**Fast Potion**: Heal 1 Health per Level
* (**2** AP)**Potion**: Heal 3 Health per Level.
* (**3** AP)**Slow Shield**: Heal 4 Health per Level.  
  You can use this heal above your maximum Health, up to 10 Health above your maximum.
* (**4** AP)**Turret**: Drop a turret in your Zone that has Health equal to your level. When an enemy enters the turret’s Zone, it deals damage equal to your level to that enemy.
* (**1** AP)**6-Pocket Grab-Bag**: Reach into one of the 6 pockets, which each holds a random Item. You can only use this Bag 6 times before it vanishes. Roll 1d6 to see which Item you grab:
  + 1: A handful of marbles
  + 2: A handful of Bees
  + 3: A rock the size of your palm
  + 4: A kitten the size of your palm
  + 5: A torch that stays lit for 12 hours and cannot be extinguished; its fire also does not harm any who touch it
  + 6: A sentient, duck-sized robot that will do your bidding for 1 hour before exploding
* (**3** AP)**Jug of Mysterious Liquids**: Twice a day, you can use this Jug to create a gallon of one the following liquids:
  + Acid, Alcohol, Mayonnaise, Water, Oil, Molasses
  + In combat, it creates enough of the liquid to coat the ground of an entire Zone.
* (**0** AP)**Communication Earpiece**: Allows the user to communicate at a whisper through someone else’s Earpiece if that person is within range (3 Moves) of this Earpiece.

# 

**Session Notes**

**Climax/Resolution**  
(Development > Epic Moment, Show off Players, Results)

**Development**   
(Developer Character, Raise Stakes, Objective Progress)

**Setup**   
(Teach Background, Intro Characters & Objective, Hook Players)

# Player Tracker

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Combat Adjustments for Difficulty Levels** | |
| Easy | 10 Health per Player Level |
| -1 to all Enemy Rolls |
| Normal | 12 Health per Player Level |
| Hard | 15 Health per Player Level |
| +1 to all Enemy Rolls |

Enemy Health

Dice (1 per Player Level)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sample Enemy Actions | |
| Grapple | Trigger Competing Roll.  Win: target can’t Move during the next Phase |
| Drain | Roll Xd6. Deal some of the total as damage to a target and heal the rest |
| Fireball | Distribute Xd6 damage across targets in a Zone |
| Icy Breath | Cover Xd6 Zones with Ice.  Icy Zones cost 2AP to Move through |
| Big Blast | Phase 1: Roll Xd6. Enemy builds magic energy. P2: Roll Xd6. Distribute both totals as damage across targets in any adjacent Zones. |