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Subterfuge RPG

Game Master Guide

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Subterfuge RPG Game Master Guide

Running a Play Session

As a Game Maser for *Subterfuge RPG* your role is to be the primary storyteller and assume the role of all the NPCs in the game. While there are winners and losers in *Subterfuge RPG* it is important to remember that playing as the Game Master is not meant to pit you against the other players, as *Subterfuge RPG* is a cooperative game and you are there to help tell the story, not to defeat the players.

While playing as the NPCs does mean you’ll be playing as enemies and the main villain, your goal is not to try to make the players fail. The players should all cooperate to achieve success for their characters, with the Game Master making their successes taste that much sweeter by presenting challenges that are just hard enough to make the players work hard to overcome them, not to leave all their characters dead.

Playing the game and having fun should be your upmost important goal as a Game Master. It is just as important for all the players at the table to cooperate and have fun as it is for their characters to succeed in the game. Never forget the reason you choose to play the game in the first place: to all have fun together.

Providing Information

As the Game Master you are in control of all information that is presented to the players of *Subterfuge RPG*. As such, if there is information that the players absolutely must have in order to continue the mission, give it to them. Do not make the players miss a chance at information that they need if they fail a skill check, fail to talk to the right person, or just look in the wrong place. The players should be able to find all the information they need by using their skills and investigation. However, for crucial information, you need a foolproof way to give it to them somehow. Do not neglect to give the players information that they need to have.

Narration

As the Game Master you are responsible for describing the world and providing the narration for what is happening in the game. It is up to you to give the story a believable atmosphere and keep the pacing of the mission in check so as to not wear down your players.

Part of the reason why RPGs are popular is that players want to see what will happen next. Will their characters succeed? Will they ever be able to stop the main villain? This is the kind of suspense you should plan on building throughout the mission.

Be sure to add small doses of uncertainty in your descriptions that will eventually lead to some sort of payout. This will help setup events and build anticipation and suspense in the mission. With this in mind, make sure you keep the big picture in mind for the mission as a whole. The suspense will build as they learn more about the mission and what they have to do to complete it. Try to refrain from tricking the players and instead give them just enough clues until someone starts to piece the clues together.

When the game is not in combat it is a good idea to keep the pacing relaxed. This does not mean the game should be boring, but instead it should be a period of building anticipation. Do not make your players search for the fun in the game and give clues liberally in solving puzzles or overcoming obstacles. When combat does break out communicate the excitement and danger with your storytelling ability using your body and voice. This is an important part of playing a spy game, make it exciting.

Overall remember that the point of playing *Subterfuge RPG* is to have fun with your group of friends. Try your best to create the most dramatic and suspenseful story you can!

Skill Checks

*Skill Checks* are a great tool to help you know how much information to tell the players about an object, situation, or their environment. Be sure to use *Skill Checks* regularly as a way to move the story along and give players a chance to shine. Just be careful not to bog the players down with *Skill Checks*, especially if they are already actively asking to perform them without you asking.  
 *Skill Checks* use both the primary attributes of *Strength*, *Intelligence*, *Willpower*, and *Ingenuity*; as well as the secondary attributes of *Ranged Combat*, *Melee Combat*, *Leadership*, *Deception*, *Reasoning*, and *Awareness.* Refer to the list below to help remain consistent and clear about the *Skill Checks* you ask of your players:

Primary Attribute Skill Checks

The *Primary Attributes* used as *Skill Checks* should reflect general types of *Skill Checks* that are not specific like the *Secondary Attributes*. Use these attributes when a more specific check does not apply well.

Strength

Use the *Strength* attribute for general athletic ability or for trying to overpower an opponent.

Intelligence

Use the *Intelligence* attribute for puzzles or problems that do not involve logic that could otherwise be checked with the *Reasoning* attribute.

Willpower

Use the *Willpower* attribute for checks where morale or a drive to complete a task come into question.

Ingenuity

Use the *Ingenuity* attribute for creative checks or just about anything that is not been covered by the other *Primary Attributes*.

Secondary Attribute Skill Checks

Try to use the *Secondary Attributes* used as *Skill Checks* whenever possible before using the more general *Primary Attributes*.

Ranged Combat

Use the *Ranged Combat* attribute for checks involving ranged weapons like firing guns, throwing daggers, or using mounted weapons.

Melee Combat

Use the *Melee Combat* attribute for hand-to-hand combat checks or skill with close combat weapons.

Leadership

Use the *Leadership* attribute for checks where inspiring others or rallying your team comes into play. Try to use this check at very important moments of courage.

Deception

Use the *Deception* attribute for attempting to fool enemies, successfully lying, and setting traps.

Reasoning

Use the *Reasoning* attribute for seeing through deception or investigating a logical puzzle or trap.

Awareness

Use the *Awareness* attribute for general surveillance or understanding of one’s environment in and outside of combat.

Awards/Rewards/Incentives

Awarding players with *Experience Points* at the end of each chapter helps to motivate players and gives them an idea of the progress they have made in the game thus far. Because earning experience points is a building block towards leveling up, it is important to pace out the dispersion of experience points in a way that all players have will level up by the end of the mission they are on. Doing so gives an extra special reward to players as this will grant them a new ability that they did not have before.

Experience and Leveling

Each mission in a game of *Subterfuge RPG* should consist of 3 chapters that when successfully completed rewards the players with experience that is used towards leveling up their characters. A good model for setting up chapters is to reward the players up to 300 experience points per chapter, with the final chapter adding an additional 100 points of experience as a bonus for completing the mission. This will put players at 1000 experience points, enough to level up one time for every completed mission.

Player Combat

Combat is organized by *Rounds* and *Turns*, with *Rounds* comprised of each participant getting one *Turn* to perform 1 *Move Action*, 1 *Non-Combat Action*, and 1 *Combat Action*. Once every participant has had 1 *Turn* a new *Round* starts unless combat is deemed over by the Game Master. *Turn Order* is based off every character and enemies’ *Awareness* attribute, with the highest *Awareness* attribute value going first. If there is a tie for the highest *Awareness* attribute value, then as the Game Master you may elect to have every character involved roll a D6 with the highest value going first, or you may simply assign *Turn Order* to your choosing.

Step 1: Move Action

The player may choose to move their character equal to the *Move Speed (Move Speed* is the current value of your character’s *Health*). This move may put the player in or out of *Melee Combat* unless you have declared this player as “Pinned Down” and unable to move.

Step 2: Non-Combat Action

The player may choose to take a *Non-Combat Action* with their character. This type of action does not involve directly harming an enemy and involves only the area around the character.

*Examples:*

* Reloading
* Switching Weapons
* Closing a Door
* Pulling out a Grenade
* Yelling to a Teammate
* Ducking into Cover

Your Turn—Step 3: Combat Action

If possible the player may choose to take a combat action involving either their *Melee Combat* or *Ranged Combat* skills. The player may only perform a *Melee Combat* if there is an enemy within arm’s reach of this player, otherwise if they have ammo for a ranged weapon, they may use it for *Ranged Combat*.

Melee Combat

*Melee Combat* is a *Combat Action* that occurs when a character and an enemy are within arm’s reach of one another. Melee weapons are only used in this type of combat, and if the character does not have a melee weapon, then they will fight unarmed, without the aid of a weapon.

The character performing *Melee Combat* is the attacker, with the other character being the defender. Damage is dealt to the defender based on the attacker’s melee weapon plus their *Melee Combat Roll* against the defender’s *Melee Combat Roll*. Note that armor does not factor in *Melee Combat*, making *Melee Combat* potentially very dangerous, but also very effective. Damage is dealt using the following formula:

Melee Attacker Damage Melee Defender Protection

Damage = (Melee Weapon + *Melee Combat Roll*) – (*Melee Combat*)

Damage dealt to the health of the defender is the positive difference between the attacker’s total against the defender’s total. If the difference is not positive, then no damage is dealt. If the damage is not enough to kill the defender then the two characters are still engaged in melee combat.

Step 1: Melee Attacker’s Damage

Determining the attacker’s damage involves adding the value of their melee weapon and a D6 die roll using the attacker’s *Melee Combat* skill. The *Melee Combat Roll* allows the attacker to test the limits of their abilities to get the most damage possible or get unlucky and bust by going over their *Melee Combat* skill value. The attacker will roll their D6 as many times as they would like, adding the values together until they reach their *Melee Combat* skill value. If the attacker rolls exactly up to their *Melee Combat* skill value, then the damage they add for this is double! If the attacker goes over their *Melee Combat* skill value, then they get no extra damage from this roll.

*For Example:*

*Auston character has a knife with a damage value of 3, so he adds this as his Melee Weapon. Auston’s character has a Melee Combat skill value of 8, so he can potentially roll his D6 up to a maximum value of 8 (adding 16 damage if he gets to exactly 8). Auston’s first roll is a 3. Auston elects to roll again, rolling a 4. Auston’s total damage so far is 7. Rather than risk going over his Melee Combat skill, he accepts this value and has a total amount of damage of 10 (3 + 7 = 10).*

Step 2: Melee Defender’s Protection

Determining the defender’s protection involves adding their *Melee Combat* skill as their Melee Protection.

*For Example:*

*Auston character is under attack. Auston’s Melee Combat skill value is 8, so the amount of protection he has is 8.*

Step 3: Determining Damage to the Defender

Determining the damage done to the defender is the positive difference when you subtract the defender’s protection from the attacker’s damage. If the difference is positive, then that value is subtracted from the defender’s health. If the defender is still alive, then these two characters are still in melee combat. If the defender is a player’s character and this character is now out of health, then they must roll a *Deathblow Check* to see if they are still alive (see Life/Death section below).

*For Example:*

*Auston’s character is under attack from an enemy! Auston’s attacker has a damage total of 13, while Auston’s protection is 8, dealing 5 damage to Auston’s character (13 – 8 = 5). Unfortunately, Auston only had 4 health, so now he must roll a Deathblow Check to remain in the game.*

Ranged Combat

*Ranged Combat* is a *Combat Action* that occurs when a character is out of arm’s reach of an enemy and have ammo for their ranged weapon. Ranged weapons are only used in this type of combat, and if a character does not have a ranged weapon, then they are unable to perform *Ranged Combat* at all.

The character performing *Ranged Combat* is the attacker, with the other character being the defender. Damage is dealt to the defender based on the attacker’s melee weapon plus their *Ranged Combat Roll* against the defender’s armor plus their *Ranged Combat Roll*. While not as effective as *Melee Combat*, *Ranged Combat* is safer for the attacker.

Ranged Attacker Damage Ranged Defender Protection

Damage = (Ranged Weapon + *Ranged Combat Roll*) – (Armor + *Ranged Combat Roll*)

Damage dealt to the health of the defender is the positive difference between the attacker’s total against the defender’s total. If the difference is not positive, then no damage is dealt. If the damage is not enough to kill the defender then nothing extra happens.

Step 1: Ranged Attacker’s Damage

Determining the attacker’s damage involves adding the value of their ranged weapon and a D6 die roll using the attacker’s *Ranged Combat* skill. The *Ranged Combat Roll* allows the attacker to test the limits of their abilities to get the most damage possible or get unlucky and bust by going over their *Ranged Combat* skill value. The attacker will roll their D6 as many times as they would like, adding the values together until they reach their *Ranged Combat* skill value. If the attacker rolls exactly up to their *Ranged Combat* skill value, then the damage they add for this is double! If the attacker goes over their *Ranged Combat* skill value, then they get no extra damage from this roll.

*For Example:*

*Auston character has a pistol with a damage value of 5, so he adds this as his Ranged Weapon. Auston’s character has a Ranged Combat skill value of 8, so he can potentially roll his D6 up to a maximum value of 8 (adding 16 damage if he gets to exactly 8). Auston’s first roll is a 3. Auston elects to roll again, rolling a 6. Too bad! Auston’s total damage is 9, putting him over his Ranged Combat skill. Auston only adds the damage from his pistol to do 5 damage total (5 + 0 = 5).*

Step 2: Defender’s Protection

Determining the defender’s protection involves adding a character’s armor along with their *Ranged Combat* skill for their Ranged Protection.

*For Example:*

*Auston character is under attack. Auston’s character has armor with a Kevlar Vest worth 5 protection and his Ranged Combat skill value is 8, so the amount of protection he has is 12 (5 + 8 = 13).*

Step 3: Determining Damage to the Defender

Determining the damage done to the defender is the positive difference when you subtract the defender’s protection from the attacker’s damage. If the difference is positive, then that value is subtracted from the defender’s health. If the defender is still alive, then nothing else happens. If the defender is a player’s character and this character is now out of health, then they must roll a *Deathblow Check* to see if they are still alive (see Life/Death section below).

*For Example:*

*Auston’s character is under attack from an enemy! Auston’s attacker has a damage total of 11, while Auston’s protection is 13. Since the difference between the damage and protection is -2, no damage is dealt (the damage is not positive).*

Life/Death

When a character’s health reaches 0 (having no more hearts left on their character sheet they have reached the tipping point of life and death. Thankfully, our highly trained spies are extremely lucky and difficult to kill. This player must now roll a *Deathblow* *Check* for their character based on their character’s *Willpower* attribute.

The player subtracts the value of their *Willpower* attribute from 11 to get the *Deathblow Number*. The player must roll their D6 higher than this number to continue to live. If the player beats this number with their D6 roll, then their character lives and their health is raised to the difference that was greater than the *Deathblow Number*. If the player fails then their character dies and is no longer usable in any mission.

Step 1: Get the Deathblow Check number

Take the character’s *Willpower* attribute value and subtract this from 11 to get the *Deathblow Check* number.

*For Example:*

*Auston character, Agent Laz0r*, *has run out of health! Auston’s character has a Willpower of 9. Auston subtracts his Willpower attribute of 9 from 11 to get 2 (11 – 9 = 2).*

Step 2: D6 Roll against the Deathblow Check number

The player will try to roll higher than the *Deathblow Check number* using a D6. Rolling higher than the *Deathblow Check* number means this character lives and now has health equal to the difference between the *Deathblow Check* number and the D6 roll. If the D6 roll is equal to or less than the *Deathblow Check* number then sadly this character’s luck has run out and has died.

*For Example:*

*Auston must roll higher than a 2 on his D6 roll. Auston beats the Deathblow Number with a D6 roll of 5! Auston’s character is still alive with 3 health left (5 – 2 = 3).*

Enemy Combat

As the Game Master it is your responsibility to play out the actions of the enemies that the players come into combat with. It is important to remember that the players are playing as highly trained spies in *Subterfuge RPG*. For this reason, enemies do not have the same options available to them as our players do. When playing out the enemies, there are a few things to consider

How to Play an Enemy in Combat

Step 1: Who is this Enemy?

Is this enemy a basic foot soldier? Is this enemy a low-level henchmen or the main villain’s right-hand man? The type of enemy is important for considering what this enemy is capable of doing. A basic enemy may only understand pointing his gun and shooting, and may not consider running for cover. Try to take appropriate actions for the type of enemy and do not play them too smart compared to the players.

Step 2: Combat Type

After determining what the enemy is capable of, it is important to have them take actions based on what weaponry they have. For example, an enemy with a rifle will want to keep distance from the players to shoot at long range while an enemy with a knife would rather close the distance and get into melee combat, instead. Do not surprise the players with weaponry they do not know about in ways that they would not expect.