BATTLESTAR GALACTICA
ROLE PLAYING GAME
QUICKSTART GUIDE

Introduction

Welcome to the *Quickstart Guide* for the *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game*. In this booklet you will find simplified rules, pregenerated characters, and a short adventure set in the *Battlestar Galactica* universe—everything you need to run a game! In addition you will find ideas for creating your own stories using the provided characters. But this *Quickstart Guide* is just an introduction to the exciting world of *Battlestar Galactica*. The *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game* sourcebook provides complete rules, in-depth profiles of the characters, information on ships, weapons, technology, politics, ideas for storylines, as well as character and ship creation rules. If the sourcebook is not already available in your local bookstore or hobby store, it soon will be. Ask for it!

Playing the Battlestar Galactica RPG

You can use the *Battlestar Galactica* (BSG) *Role Playing Game* (RPG) to bring to life your own stories set in the fascinating and dangerous universe of the *Battlestar Galactica* television series. The possibilities for adventure are endless. You could reinvent the series from the start to finish—using the heroes of the series or replacing the main characters with characters of your own creation. Or you could play out an entirely different type of story. Perhaps you can tell the tale of brave colonists who refused to leave Cylon-occupied Caprica. Or the story of a group of miners working on a little-known asteroid when the attack occurred. Or perhaps you reveal the struggles of a lone ship lost in space searching for the fleet.

The *Quickstart Guide* presents a short scenario designed to introduce you to the game, one that starts a completely new storyline for four original characters. However, before you play the adventure or create one of your own, read the sections dealing with the basic game rules and style of play. The *Quickstart Guide* version of the rules is intended to be simple and streamlined. They are not nearly as detailed as the rules in the main sourcebook. So use your imagination and feel free to wing it. The most important goal is for you and your players to have fun!

Players and Characters

A BSG game follows the adventures of a group of people we call the Player Characters (PCs). These characters might be admirable or despicable, everyday working class people or elite Viper pilots. No matter what their backgrounds or personalities are like, they are the "heroes" of the story.

These characters are created and controlled by the players, who describe them, give them voices, and determine their actions during the game.

Understanding the basic rules is important in any role playing game, but it is even more important to develop an understanding of your character. A player needs to know what the character looks like, what drives him, his loves, hatreds, ambitions, prejudices, and quirks. While the rules of the game provide structure and a way to resolve actions, the creation of a living, breathing character is the province of the player.

Learning about the character will not happen all at once. Players will discover many interesting things about the character during the course of play. Players will watch their characters deal with misfortune and, from these experiences, learn and grow. The universe of *Battlestar Galactica* is harsh and unforgiving, where even the best people suffer setbacks and experience painful loss.

In the BSG universe, human life has become all but extinct. The Twelve Colonies have been overrun by Cylons. For the

human survivors, life is fraught with peril. The setting is grim, the situation tense, and life for the characters is harsh—all the makings of an interesting, exciting, nail-biting, edge-of-the-seat role playing game! In BSG, characters are put to the test and pushed to their limits. True character is revealed when comfort and safety are stripped away. Those who rise up out of defeat and continue to struggle on are the true heroes. Danger is ever-present, but its constant companion is hope.

The Game Master

Every game requires a Game Master (GM) who narrates the basics of the story, presents each situation, and takes on the role of all the non-player characters (NPCs) the PCs meet during their adventure. The GM creates the story, presents the challenges, reacts to player decisions, and interprets the rules, all the while keeping the game fun and the story moving.

A GM should have material for the game prepared in advance. The adventure might be one such as you will find in this book. It may consist of pages of meticulous notes or it might be a few ideas jotted down on a scrap of paper. Be aware, however, that no matter how much advance planning the GM puts into the adventure, the players will most likely take the story in unexpected directions—which is why a good GM is always ready to improvise and roll with the punches. His job is to set the stage and make sure everyone is having a good time.

The role of GM places a lot of power (in terms of the story telling and game play) in the hands of one person, so the role of a GM should be taken seriously. A GM should make decisions based on the rules as fairly as possible and should always remember that he is telling a story. The players are the main characters. If this were a television show, the GM would be the director and the players his all-star cast.

The Rules and the Story

Even the most comprehensive game system in the world cannot cover every conceivable situation—especially in the unpredictable universe of *Battlestar Galactica*! The Cortex System rules we use for the BSG RPG are meant to assist good-storytelling, not replace it. If a situation comes up that is not explicitly covered in the rules, the GM should figure out a way to deal with it and move on. Always remember the

most important rule of all: The story comes first. When in doubt, give players the edge.

The rules in the following sections are simple and extremely flexible. You should be able to remember the basic game mechanics without consulting the rules. Only the Game Master needs to be well-versed in the mechanics of game play. While players should understand the basics, they should focus on playing their characters, rather than be over-concerned with dice and numbers.

What You Need

To play out the scenario included in the Quickstart, you will need:

• Pencils and copies of the Character Sheets found in the back.

• Polyhedral dice of different kinds: two-sided (d2), four-sided (d4), six-sided (d6), eight-sided (d8), ten-sided (d10), and twelve-sided (d12). These "funny dice" are available at most hobby shops and game stores. If need be, coins can be used for d2s, you can modify blank dice, or you can visit **www.bsg-rpg.com** to order dice.

• A group of friends to play the game. The *Quickstart Guide* assumes four players and one GM. (The full *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game* will allow any number of players.)

• A good place to relax and play comfortably, preferably with few distractions.

Game Rules

In the following sections are the basic rules of play for the *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game*. Note that the *Quickstart Guide* rules are made simpler than the full game, to make learning the basics easier for new players. First we will provide the rules for characters, including the Attributes, Skills, and Traits that describe the characters in game terms and allow the characters to interact with the game world.

Characters

All characters in the game, whether PCs or NPCs under the control of the GM, are made up of three components: Attributes, Skills, and Traits. Attributes determine a character's raw capabilities (how strong, smart, and agile he might be). Skills represent knowledge and experience (can he fly a Viper or remember passages from the Sacred Scrolls). Traits represent almost everything else, including personality, reputation, social status, and

Steps

Dice in the *Battlestar Galactica RPG* form a kind of "ladder" of ability. Each die type, from two-sided (d2) up through twelve-sided (d12), represents a "step" on this ladder. Higher Steps, in general, represent greater ability, skill, damage, etc. A d6 is better than a d4, and a d8 is better than a d6. This ladder can even extend above d12—at that point, a second die is added, making the next Step "d12 + d2." That makes the first eight Steps: d2 • d4 • d6 • d8 • d10 • d12 • d12+d2 • d12+d4. There is, theoretically, no upper limit, though it would be rare for anything or anyone to begin with a rating higher than d12. Changes to rolls that make tasks harder or easier are called "step modifiers," "step bonuses," or "step penalties." These modifiers move the die type up the ladder if positive or down the ladder if negative. For example, a −1 step penalty would turn a d6 into a d4, a +2 step modifier would turn a d6 into a d10, and so on. While dice can be reduced below d2, at that point they become negated entirely (d0), and any further penalty is ignored.

d2 • d4 • d6 • d8 • d10 • d12

special talents. Characters may also have "Derived Attributes" such as Initiative (how fast a character reacts) and Life Points (how much damage he can endure before dying). These are explained in the combat section.

The *Quickstart Guide* offers four characters that serve as examples of the type of characters players could create using the full rules. The *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game* sourcebook presents complete character creation rules, allowing players to invent just about any characters they can imagine.

Attributes

Characters in BSG have six Attributes: Agility, Strength, Vitality, Alertness, Intelligence, and Willpower. These six define a character's most basic capabilities. If a character is smart, he probably has a high Intelligence Attribute. One who is clumsy has low Agility. All Attributes are rated by the type of dice the player rolls when using the Attribute. In this game system, high numbers are always better than low.

While any die types are possible within the game, an Attribute of d2 would be a crippling deficiency, while anything above d12 would beyond normal human expectations. A score of d6 represents the average for normal human adults.

Agility represents the character's physical quickness, dexterity, hand-eye coordination, and sense of balance. A character with high Agility has an edge with Skills that involve movement, aiming, and fast reaction times.

Strength is a character's physical prowess. A character with high strength can deal more damage in hand-to-hand combat, can lift and carry heavy loads, and can have an edge in certain athletic contests.

Vitality measures a character's health and endurance. High Vitality characters can resist disease and toxins, can endure longer without food or rest, and can take more punishment than others.

Alertness covers awareness—both the sharpness of a character's senses and how well he picks up on what others are telling him. A character with high Alertness is more likely to see through a ruse that others would fall for.

Intelligence represents brain-power, the ability to think and understand. A high Intelligence allows a character to solve complicated problems or arrive at conclusions far more quickly than his friends.

Willpower is determination, drive, and strength of personality. Those with high Willpower are often able to persuade others, resist interrogation and intimidation, and overcome fear.

SKILLS

Attributes measure a character's raw capabilities. Skills represent what a character knows. Whether acquired through formal training, schooling, reading books, or hard-earned experience, Skills define the types of actions at which a character excels. Petty Officer Dualla is highly trained in communications, codes, and ciphers. Captain Lee Adama is an expert pilot and forceful leader. Dr. Baltar has a wide-range of technical and scientific expertise.

Like Attributes, Skills are rated by die types. A character with a d2 has only basic familiarity with the Skill. A d6 represents moderate competence, and a d10 represents an expert. Anything beyond d12 is exceptionally rare, making the person a genius in that field.

Certain Skills can be used even without any training. In game terms this means having no rating in the Skill whatsoever. A character doesn't need a cooking Skill to boil water, for example. But some actions can (and should) be attempted only by characters with that Skill. Flying a Colonial Viper or performing delicate surgery should not be undertaken without training!

Skills in the BSG *Quickstart Guide* represent broad areas of knowledge. Because there are too many Skills to list here, each Character Sheet includes the list and descriptions of that character's Skills.

To use as an example, three Skills a character might possess are Athletics, Guns, and Influence.

Athletics are used for actions such as swimming, running, dodging, or playing a game of Pyramid.

Guns cover hand-held weapons, including pistols, rifles, carbines, and submachine guns. The Skill is used when shooting, performing basic maintenance, and in identifying these types of weapons.

Influence covers a character's ability to persuade others, whether it is fast-talking, subtle manipulation, or seduction. This Skill can also be used for intimidation, leadership, and politics.

TRAITS

Characters are much more than a collection of numbers. While Starbuck is a skilled pilot, her recklessness and devotion to Commander Adama are what make her truly interesting. President Roslin is an intelligent leader; her illness and religious beliefs provide depth and interest. In the *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game*, these qualities are called Traits.

Traits are broken down into two categories: Assets, which are generally positive, and Complications, which are generally negative. Traits are also rated as either Major or Minor, which define how strong an advantage (or disadvantage) the Trait is in game terms. All characters have at least one trait, but most have several.

Traits can have a variety of different effects. Some will provide bonuses or penalties to different types of rolls; some might involve new ways to spend Plot Points (see "Story Elements," page 8); some might allow occasional re-rolls for failed results. When creating a character with the complete rules, players will have access to a broad selection of Traits from which to choose. For the purposes of the *Quickstart Guide*, examples of the available Traits are included in the descriptions on the pre-made Character Sheets.

ROLLING THE DICE

When a player wants his character to shoot a Cylon, rewire a Viper's engine, or jump the gap between rooftops while running from a patrol on occupied Caprica, the character is performing an action that might either succeed or fail, and this action will have dramatic consequences no matter what happens. In the BSG RPG, such actions are resolved by rolling dice. Exactly what dice are rolled is determined by the character's Attributes and Skills, and the results are interpreted by the Game Master.

Almost all actions consist of one Attribute paired with one Skill. For example, firing a gun requires the Agility Attribute paired with the Guns Skill. For example, a gun in the hands of someone with a low Agility score means he could drop it or fire wildly. If a character wishes to try an action and does not have the skill, he must roll the attribute die only.

DIFFICULTY NUMBERS

Category	Simple Actions	Complex Actions
Easy	3	15
Average	7	35
Hard	11	55
Formidable	15	75
Heroic	19	95
Incredible	23	115
Ridiculous	27	135
Impossible	31	155

Simple Actions

Most actions are simple actions—an action that is resolved in a short period of time.

The GM decides which Attribute and Skill combination is most appropriate for that particular action. The player rolls the dice and adds the result together. If the total is equal to or higher than the Difficulty Number set by the GM, the character succeeds. The Difficulty number is either a static number based on the situation (see the chart below) or by an opposed roll with another character.

Note actions that involve no risk of failure or no dramatic consequence do not require any rolls. A character does not need dice to walk across a room, take a sip of ambrosia, or flip a light switch. Walking across the room during a Cylon bombardment with the floor shaking might require a roll, as would detecting the odor of poison in your drink or re-wiring the light switch. Common sense will generally tell players and the GM whether a roll is needed.

The pairing of a particular Attribute and Skill is always determined by the GM based on the situation. While some combinations come up quite often (Alertness and Perception, Agility and Guns), they are never absolute.

For example, Starbuck is running as fast as she can to reach her Viper during a Cylon assault. When the alarms first sound, she is running down an empty, clear corridor on *Galactica*. She has no obstacles to dodge, so the GM assigns the action the Strength Attribute + Athletics Skill. When Starbuck reaches the hangar deck, she sees live electrical wires have fallen over the stairs, so she must be extremely careful to avoid them as she continues. The GM decides that Alertness + Athletics is the appropriate roll. When she reaches the deck, Starbuck must avoid deckhands and equipment to reach her Viper. The GM decides that this action requires Agility + Athletics.

Complex Actions

While simple actions are resolved quickly, some will take more time. These Complex Actions can be as much about how long the action takes rather than whether or not the PC succeeds. For example, the PCs will almost certainly be able to repair *Galactica*'s FTL drive—but can they do it before the Cylon basestar is in heavy weapons' range? Doctor Cottle will eventually be able to remove a bullet lodged in a

marine's liver, but might not be able to do so before the man bleeds to death.

Complex actions use a difficulty scale much like simple actions, though the necessary totals are much higher (see the Difficulty chart, page 4) and they almost always require more than one roll. A player attempting a complex action must roll the Attribute and Skill during the time allotted, keeping a running total of the results. Each roll represents a set amount of time determined by the GM (five minutes, an hour, perhaps even a full day). Once the threshold of success is reached, the action is completed, and the player knows how much time has elapsed. If any of the rolls are a botch (see below) then the action halts and must be started over if the GM permits.

For example, Chief Tyrol must repair a Viper engine that was damaged during a combat landing. The GM decides that he should roll Intelligence + Mechanical Engineering, and that this is a complex action with a Difficulty of Hard (55). The GM also decides that each roll takes half an hour of game time, and that since the Viper needs to go back out on patrol in 2 hours, the character has only 4 rolls in which to reach the total needed to achieve success. The player makes his first roll and his dice total 10. The second roll adds up to 15, for a total of 25. The third roll gives a score of 13, bringing the total to 38. The Chief had better achieve at least 17 on his fourth and final roll or he'll have to deal with an angry CAG!

BOTCHING

Whenever a player rolls any dice for an action and they all come up as 1, this is called a botch. A botch means something went terribly wrong. A botch might cause a gun to jam or a character to lose his footing. For a simple action, a botch means an automatic failure, plus the character loses his action for the next turn. For a complex action, botching cancels out all rolls and means the character must start over—and if the circumstances are especially bad the GM may decide that the action cannot be re-attempted.

The GM should feel free to let his imagination soar when it comes to describing the results of a botched roll.

COMBAT

Most actions within the BSG RPG can be resolved using the rules above. Combat is a bit more complicated. Whether the PCs are shooting at a couple of toasters or they're involved in a brawl on the flight deck, the GM turns to the combat rules to handle the situation.

COMBAT TURN— INITIATIVE, MOVEMENT, & ACTION

Combat is broken down into turns, each roughly three seconds long. During a turn, all the PCs involved can take actions that will have their own resolutions. At that point, the next turn begins and this continues until combat is over (usually when one side is defeated).

Initiative: PCs and NPCs act in order of Initiative, with higher numbers acting first. Check the Initiative rating for each character (PC or NPC) involved. Each action is resolved before moving to the PC or NPC with the next highest Initiative. If any characters have tied Initiative scores, they may roll Agility dice to determine who will go first for the duration of the current combat. The pre-made characters in the Quickstart Guide have their Initiative scores listed on their Character Sheets.

Movement: Under normal circumstances a character may both move and take one combat action (attack, dodge, etc.) in whatever order the player chooses. Normal movement allows up to 20 feet at a fast walk, but a PC may go up to 40 feet per turn by running—though doing so means the PC cannot take a combat action for the turn.

Action: Combat actions can be almost anything that can be accomplished in just a few seconds. A character might shoot a gun or throw a punch, dodge his opponent or kick down a door. Note that most complex actions do not work within the framework of combat, unless it's an action in which one turn equals one roll—which is quite unusual.

As you read the Combat rules, they may seem at first confusing or very complicated. In truth, running combat is designed to play fast and easy. So take heart! We will walk you through the combat sequences in the adventure found in this booklet. Just be generally familiar with how the rules work.

Life Points and Damage

Characters in the BSG RPG often get hurt, and how much punishment they can take before succumbing to their wounds is a function of Life Points. A PC with full Life Points is perfectly healthy. A PC missing several points is injured or sick. If a PC is reduced to 0 Life Points, he must receive emergency medical intervention or he will die. Life Points can be restored through rest at a rate of two days per one Life Point. Special medical treatments might speed recovery time.

Damage is most often inflicted during combat, but it can happen in any number of ways. Characters might be exposed to toxins, extreme temperatures, fire, electricity, or radiation. Players should watch their characters' Life Point totals. In the BSG universe danger can come at any moment and life can be brutally short.

The pre-made PCs have their Life Point totals listed on their Character Sheets.

Attacking and Defending

Combat is messy business, with most actions involving a PC either trying to hurt someone (or something) while avoiding damage himself. Attack and Defense are two important concepts that will cover much of what happens during a combat turn.

An attack is a simple action in which the target's Defense is the difficulty number. If the attack roll is equal to or higher than the Defense, the attack is successful and damage must be determined. Defense is the ability of the PC to repel, dodge, thwart or escape an attack.

Attacks

There is nearly an infinite variety of the kinds of attacks that can be inflicted on the PCs, but in the BSG RPG there are only a handful of Skills that normally come into play: Guns (pistols, rifles); Heavy Weapons (vehicle-mounted weapons, shoulder-fired rockets); Melee Weapons (knives, clubs); and Unarmed Combat (brawling, martial arts). The GM assigns an Attribute and Skill pair for the attack action. Strength is most often paired with Melee Weapons and Unarmed Combat, while Agility is usually used for Guns and Heavy Weapons—though other Attributes might be used in unusual circumstances.

An attack uses a character's action for the turn. If someone is attacked before their turn, he may either give up his action in order to defend (see Defense, below), or make no skilled defense to keep his attack action. It's important to remember the game system is somewhat abstract. While an attacker may make only one roll in a combat turn, the PC might be dodging and feinting and fighting for his life. The GM and the players should work together to keep the drama and tension of combat high by being as descriptive as possible. Simply announcing the hit and damage rolls is dull and will take the fun out of one of the most exciting elements of the game.

Defense

When someone is punching or shooting at you, the best response is usually to get the hell out of there. In hand-to-hand fighting, you can block or dodge; while in ranged combat, finding cover will hopefully keep you alive.

If a PC is aware of an attack and has not yet used his action for the turn, he can spend the action for an active form defense. This provides a Skilled action to create the Difficulty for the attack—either a block or a dodge. If the attacker is using Melee Weapons or Unarmed Combat, the defender may use his own equivalent Skill to block the attack, paired with either Agility or Strength (at the GM's determination). Dodging can be used against any kind of attack, with the defender rolling Agility + Athletics. Note that the PC who uses his turn for defense loses his combat action for this turn.

If the defending PC is surprised, restrained, unconscious—or for whatever reason unmoving—the Difficulty of the attack is automatically set to 3. This is why snipers have a significant advantage.

If the defender is engaged in combat, able to move freely, and not using an action to defend himself, he rolls his Agility attribute alone to create the Difficulty for the attack. This is called Innate Defense. It is possible for this to create a Difficulty lower than 3, as a moving defender can sometimes blunder into the direction of an attack.

Calculating Damage

When the attack roll is equal to or greater than the defense, the attack is a hit and may cause damage. Base damage is determined by subtracting the defense roll from the attack roll.