# HEROES & HARDSHIPS®

UNIVERSAL RPG SYSTEM

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# QUICKSTART GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION

Heroes and Hardships is the culmination of many years of experience, development, and play testing. The system insists on gritty, realistic combat where endless hit points will not help you. Wise maneuvers inside and outside of combat help push forward the story, role-play, and plot in meaningful ways.

Skilled characters will conquer obstacles, but even the lowest born peasant can prove their worth. Social manipulations can turn an enemy's sword in a different direction instead of taking the point in the ribs. These are some of the hallmarks you can expect when playing this game.

Heroes and Hardships is setting agnostic; you may use it with any setting you can create or adapt. It is scalable to differing power levels all the way from the average person to godlike heroes. You can explore settings such as sci-fi, fantasy, and horror just to name a few.

Heroes and Hardships is flexible. It is a tool set that allows the Game Master to use sub-systems they enjoy. There is no need to use every sub-system Heroes and Hardships offers. Some sub-systems may be out of scope for your game. Only the Game Master and their players can decide what is best for them.

This document is the Heroes and Hardships Quickstart Guide. This guide is not an exhaustive representation of Heroes and Hardships. Use the quick start guide to experience the system, learn the basics, and enjoy the full game later on. There is still a great deal of Heroes and Hardships content within these pages.

When the core rulebook is released, you will be able to add a wide range of options. These new options will support a diverse range of settings. We hope that you will enjoy Heroes and Hardships as much as we do. Please visit **http://fifegames.com** and register for our newsletter; to provide feedback, email info@fifegames.com.

## INCLUDED IN THE QUICKSTART GUIDE

- The d10 dice pool system that powers Heroes and Hardships
- The Heroes and Hardships' standard character creation
- Deadly combat
- Skills and abilities to overcome most obstacles
- Terrible wounds suffered through perilous adventures

## INCLUDED IN THE CORE RULEBOOK

- Mental horrors and traumas
- Many abilities, skills, and combat actions
- Character advancement
- Ancestry templates
- An alternate character creation method
- And much more

Heroes and Hardships

A D10 DICE POOL RPG SYSTEM

Sample file

## WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

To play Heroes and Hardships you will need a handful of ten-sided dice. We suggest that each player has eight to ten dice. The dice requirement increases as the game's power level increases so keep that in mind. Dice can also be used to track AP positions on the Combat Track.

Each player will need a character sheet which is provided at the end of the Heroes and Hardships Quickstart Guide. You may also download these separately. Everyone should have a pencil to fill out their character sheets and to make notes.

Lastly, bring your imagination as you take on any role you can dream!

## THE BASICS

Heroes and Hardships is full of what we call "sub-systems". These sub-systems are derived from the base system that powers the game as a whole. You will not find various unrelated mechanics required to do different things. Once you learn the basics then all the other sub-systems should be easy to understand. These sub-systems allow you to play Heroes and Hardships in countless ways. If a GM does not wish to incorporate a certain sub-system, then it will not impact the rest of the sub-systems in use.

### SYSTEM OVERVIEW

In Heroes and Hardships you will roll a number of dice based on the combination of your character's attributes and skills. You will keep the total of dice equal to your character's attribute score. Players will compare this number to either a static Target Number, often referred to as a TN, or an opposed roll's total. You may have modifiers that add or subtract to the total of your roll, or add or subtract dice to or from your pool of dice. Once you make your calculations you compare results to your TN. If they meet or exceed that number, then you succeed. If not, then you fail.

### HEALTH

Heroes and Hardships does not use the concept of "hit points". There is no pool of numbers that represent a character's overall health. When a character is struck by a blade, they determine the effect by comparing the total of the attack to certain thresholds. These attacks injure and wound those that fail to defend themselves. Combat can lead to brutal wounds and penalties that could last for a character's lifetime.

### NATURE VERSUS NURTURE

The Standard Method of creating characters in Heroes and Hardships allows fate to shape the beginnings of a character. Attributes are determined randomly by rolling. The Standard Method treats each character's birth as one of chance, but players are given some wiggle room. Each player can adjust their character's interests and early childhood development. This also allows characters to better match any preconceived notions of what the player had envisioned for their character.

The Alternate Method gives players greater control over their character's attributes and will be included in the core rulebook.

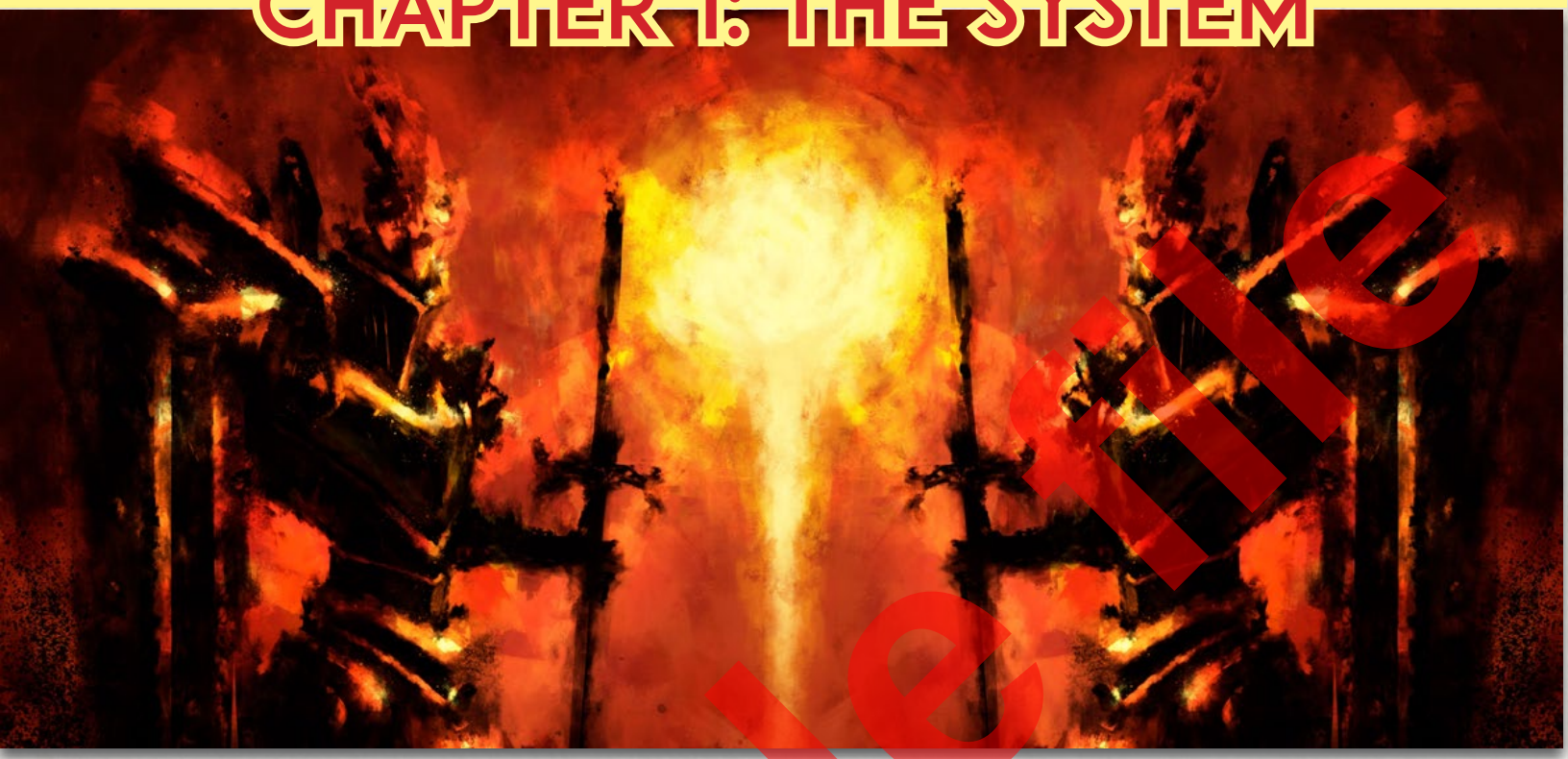
### NO WAITING YOUR TURN TO DO MURDER

Heroes and Hardships attempts to blend realism within the game. Consider combat; the concept of waiting your turn to perform an action is unrealistic. Combatants perform actions and those actions take time to complete. Once they complete an action, then they do something else. The order of these actions depends on the length of time of each action.

Heroes and Hardships does not use rounds like most other role-playing games. Characters act based on the length of time it takes them to perform whatever action they are attempting. This allows everyone to act more frequently, and change their plans based on the evolving situation.

Sample file

# CHAPTER 1: THE SYSTEM



## A D10 DICE POOL SYSTEM

Heroes and Hardships utilizes a Roll and Keep system using ten-sided dice. A ten-sided die is referred to as a "d10". Heroes and Hardships will never require another type of die. Rolls typically combine Attributes, Skills, Benefits, and Hardships.

### ROLLING DICE

Heroes and Hardships refers to dice rolls with specific terms.

**Skill / Attribute** - This indicates what skill and attribute make up the roll. This may also be expressed as a Skill Check, but not all rolls are Skill Checks. A skill is always matched up with its governing attribute.

| EXAMPLE |
| --- |
| **Swords / Dexterity** is an expression to roll the Swords skill along with the Dexterity attribute. The same could be expressed as a Swords Skill Check. |

**Roll / Keep** - This indicates how many dice are being rolled and how many are being kept. This is typically expressed with a lowercase r and k.

| EXAMPLE |
| --- |
| **r6/k3** means to roll 6 ten-sided dice, and keep the three highest of them. Total the dice you keep. |

### ROLLED DICE

The first thing a player or GM must do when making a roll is form their dice pool. A dice pool is the combination of all the dice you will roll. To build a dice pool, follow these steps exactly.

- Determine what skill is being rolled.
- Determine the governing attribute.
- Add the attribute score and skill rank to determine the amount of rolled dice.

Sample file

- Add an additional rolled die for each benefit added to the check

### KEPT DICE

Once the dice pool has been created, determine the number of kept dice. To determine kept dice, follow these steps exactly.

- Determine the associated attribute.

### BENEFITS

Benefits grant bonuses to rolls. Various situations may call for a Benefit to be added. When a Benefit is applied to a dice pool, add another die to the pool for each Benefit added. A Benefit never changes the number of kept dice.

| EXAMPLE |
| --- |
| A dice pool of r4/k2 with a benefit would be changed to r5/k2. |

### HARDSHIPS

Hardships are penalties that increase the difficulty of a roll. Hardships can be applied for various reasons, such as Wounds or various situational penalties. For every Hardships applied to a roll, increase the difficulty by 1 Penalty Die. Add that Penalty Die to the difficulty of the roll regardless of how that difficulty is set.

### PENALTY DICE

Penalty Dice are d10s that explode, and are added to the difficulty of a roll. Some Penalty Die include, Hardships, Range Dice, Magic Dice, etc. There is no limit to how many Penalty Dice a roll can have.

## SKILL CHECKS

When players roll a dice pool that consists of an attribute and a skill, this is called a Skill Check. The bulk of rolls in Heroes and Hardships are skill checks. These skills checks can be Unopposed or Opposed.

### UNOPPOSED SKILL CHECKS

When players make rolls against challenges that are not directly opposed by another entity (character, creature, force, et al.), they are considered Unopposed. Unopposed checks must be equal to or greater than a Target Number set by the GM. Target Number is often abbreviated as TN.

### POWER LEVELS

Each game in Heroes and Hardships is assigned a Power Level. The Power Level represents how powerful characters are and how difficult challenges can be. Only difficult challenges require a skill check; average or easy tasks are simply assumed to be successful.

The difficulty of a TN scales between these Power Levels. Power Level can be abbreviated as PL.

Sample file

| Table 1-1: Power Level 1 Target Numbers | |
|---|---|
| **Challenging** | **15** |
| **Hard** | **20** |
| **Desperate** | **30** |
| **Impossible** | **40** |

| Table 1-2: Power Level 2 Target Numbers | |
|---|---|
| **Challenging** | **20** |
| **Hard** | **30** |
| **Desperate** | **40** |
| **Impossible** | **50** |

Power Level 3 TNs will be included in the Heroes and Hardships Core Rulebook.

**EXAMPLE**

In a Power Level 1 game, the GM calls for a Challenging Skill Check. A player makes a Skill Check for Athletics/Strength. Their pool is 4r/k2 and they roll.

Their 4 dice are: 6, 4, 3, 8. They keep the 2 highest dice: 6 and 8. This equals 14. Their roll of 14 equals the required Challenging TN of 14 for Power Level 1.

### OPPOSED SKILL CHECKS

Skill Checks where two forces are actively working against each other require an Opposed Roll. Both sides roll their relevant dice and whomever has the highest roll is successful.

In the case of a tie, the participant with the highest skill rank succeeds with 0 levels of success. If there is still a tie, compare attribute scores. If after these two steps there is no winner, roll again.

**EXAMPLE**

The player Brandon rolls a Courage/Willpower Skill Check against an NPC's Intimidation/Presence Skill Check. Brandon rolls a 9. The GM rolls a 12 for the NPC. Brandon's character is cowed, falling victim to the NPC's intimidation attempt.

### LEVELS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Sometimes it is important to know how well a roll did versus a Target Number. This is true for things such as combat, or any other scenario the GM can envision.

For the Level of Success, subtract the TN from the roll. The result is the Level of Success. For the Level of Failure, subtract the roll from the TN. The result is the Level of Failure.

**EXAMPLE**

A Skill Check total of 23 against a TN of 14 results in 9 Levels of Success. A Skill Check of 11 against a TN of 14 results in 3 Levels of Failure.

### STATIC MODIFIERS

There are times when a roll is modified by adding or subtracting from the roll's total. These Static Modifiers can be applied in two ways.

A Pre-Roll Modifier aids or hinders characters in succeeding their task. Pre-Roll Modifiers add or subtract to the total of a roll before success is determined.

Post-Roll Modifiers modify the total of a roll after success is determined. This could be a positive or negative modifier. A Post-Roll Modifier determines how well a character succeeds in their task.

Sample file

Sample File

### EXAMPLE

Jason's character, Malek, uses his spaceship's impulse thrusters to avoid small asteroids flying in his path. The thrusters grant +3 to his Piloting/Agility Skill Check. Malek rolls r6/k4 which totals 30, his Skill Check is granted a +3 Pre-Roll Modifier, which equals 33.

Later, Malek is forced to use his ship's blasters. He makes his roll to see if he hits an oncoming asteroid, and the GM declares he hits. Malek then adds the damage rating of his blasters as a Post-Roll Modifier to the Skill Check in determining how many Levels of Success he did to the flying hunk of space rock.

## EXPLODING DICE

Often times, when a player rolls a 10 on a d10 that die is said to "explode". When a die explodes, the player rolls again and adds the extra die to his total already rolled. If the die is a 10 again, the player continues to roll until the die is not a 10.

There are some instances where d10s do not explode. Some rolls on tables, for instance, will not explode. Those situations will be detailed in their specific sections. If a roll does not indicate if it explodes or not, it is assumed that a 10 does explode on that roll.

### UNTRAINED SKILL CHECKS

A player or GM can make an attempt at any Skill Check even if the character has no Skill Ranks in that skill. These are called Untrained Skill Checks. When rolling a 10 on Untrained Skill Checks the 10 does not explode.

### EXAMPLE

A Skill Check dice pool of 6r/k3 results in the following dice: 5, 10, 8, 2, 1, 1. The player keeps the 5, 10, and 8. The 10 explodes and the player rolls it again. The next result is also a 10, and so they roll once more. The last roll is a 1, therefore there are no more exploding die left to roll.

The player totals the first three dice as normal; they add 5 + 10 + 8, for a sum of 23. They then add the exploding dice totals: 23 + 10 + 1. The total of the Skill Check is 34.

## ROUNDING

Unless the rules specify otherwise, if the result of a roll or calculation is not a whole number, then round down to the nearest whole number.

# CHAPTER 2: CHARACTER CREATION

Sample file

## THE STANDARD METHOD

There are twelve standard attributes and one optional attribute. Ask your GM if you will be using the Fate attribute or not. Once decided, roll to generate all attributes needed.

Each attribute is rolled randomly. This simulates having no real choice in a baseline of physical, mental, and social aspects of yourself at birth and throughout early childhood.

Roll 1d10 for each Attribute in order, and consult Table 2-1 or Table 2-2 depending on Power Level.

The order of attributes are listed by the four attribute categories: Physical, Mental, Social, and Fate.

- Physical: Strength, Agility, Dexterity, and Endurance.
- Mental: Intelligence, Knowledge, Senses, and Willpower.
- Social: Presence, Empathy, Communications, and Influence.
- Fate: Fate

Character creation differs slightly depending on what Power Level the game is using. Lower Power Levels will have lower attribute scores, while higher Power Levels will have greater attribute scores.

### POWER LEVEL 1

Mundane settings like modern police detectives, the Hundred Years' War, or the American Frontier could all fall under the Basic Power Level.

However, the lack of the fantastical is not required to use this Power Level. Any sci-fi, fantasy, or street-level superhero setting could easily use Power Level 1 as well. Power Level 1 characters are fallible and less capable than characters from other Power Levels.

| Table 2-1: Power Level 1 Character Creation Attributes | |
|---|---|
| **Roll** | **Attribute Score** |
| **1-2** | **1** |
| **3-7** | **2** |
| **8-9** | **3** |
| **10** | **4** |

### POWER LEVEL 2

Highly trained wizards, powerful super heroes, and technologically advanced secret agents could all fall into Power Level 2. Cinematic characters are more capable than basic characters and can easily succeed where those characters would likely fail.

## DETERMINE ATTRIBUTES

Ultimately it is the decision of the GM and players to decide what sort of game they are looking to play. Power Level 1 is recommended for a gritty game of any setting. Power Level 2 is better suited for heroic games where the characters are far more capable than the average person.

Power Level 3 will be introduced in the core rulebook. This power level explores incredibly capable characters such as demigods, galactic powered superheroes, or fantastical wizards of near infinite power.

| Table 2-2: Power Level 2 Character Creation Attributes | |
|---|---|
| **Roll** | **Attribute Score** |
| **1** | **1** |
| **2-3** | **2** |
| **4-7** | **3** |
| **8-9** | **4** |
| **10** | **5** |

### THE ATTRIBUTE FLIP

Self-determination and interest can help develop attributes through training, study, and other means. You may flip two attribute rolls of your choice.

**EXAMPLE**

Jarrod and his friends will be playing a game set in the American Frontier in the year 1890. The GM decides that the game will be grounded in reality with characters true to the era. The GM chooses Power Level 1.

Jarrod uses the Standard Method character creation of rolling for each attribute. The Gm decides to use Fate in order to give characters a little luck from time to time. Jarrod rolls a 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 1, 6, 8, 10, 3, 4, 7, and 4.

There are no exploding dice during character creation. Therefore, his attribute scores are: STR 2, AGI 2, DEX 2, END 3, INT 3, KNO 1, SEN 2, WIL 3, PRE 4, EMP 2, COM 2, INF 2, and Fate 2.

With these rolls, Jarrod decides a mentally strong character would work well. He uses his attribute flip to swap his WIL score of 3 with his KNO score of 1. His KNO is now 3, and his WIL is now 1.

Sample file

### FREE ATTRIBUTE POINT

Players are given 1 Attribute Point to add to their Attributes while adhering to the following rules.

You may add 1 point to any attribute after flipping if an attribute flip is completed. The maximum value of an attribute is 4 for Power Level 1 characters, and 5 for Power Level 2 characters during attribute generation. You may not increase any attribute score higher than those limits.

**EXAMPLE**

Jarrod decides to raise his INT from 3 to 4, the maximum attribute score for Power Level 1. His INT is now 4.

GMs that wish to allow their players more control over their characters may allow them to use the Alternate Method. The Alternate Method allows players to select the arrangement of their attribute points.

The Alternate Method will be included in the core rulebook.

## DETERMINE SKILLS

A character's skills are what helps separate them from everyone else. These skills can be learned from formal education, work, trial and error, or any other way that reasonably represents your character's background.

Rank in a skill is rated from 0 to 10. When selecting a skill, you are choosing to have a level of expertise in that skill. A skill may never have a rank greater than the associated attribute score.

### GAINING SKILL POINTS

In order to determine how many Skill Points a character has and where they can be spent, total the attribute points in each attribute category. These include the Physical, Mental, Social and Fate attributes.

**EXAMPLE**

Jarrod adds up the attribute scores from each attribute category.

Physical: STR 2, AGI 2, DEX 2, END 3. The total Skill Points from the Physical category is 9.

Mental: INT 4, KNO 3, SEN 2, WIL 1. The total Skill Points from the Mental category is 12.

Social: PRE 4, EMP 2, COM 2, INF 2. The total Skill Points from the Social category is 10.

His Fate score is 2, which is also the Skill Points in the Fate category.

### SPENDING SKILL POINTS

Skill Points spent on skills within the associated attribute category cost one Skill Point per rank regardless of the rank, unless the rank equals the associated attribute score. When increasing a skill to a rank that would equal the attribute score, double the cost of that rank.

The exception to this rule is if the attribute score is 1. Increasing a skill rank to 1 in an attribute that is also 1 costs 1 skill point. Whereas, increasing a skill rank to 2 in an attribute that is also 2 costs 2 skill points for that rank.

**EXAMPLE**

Jarrod begins to spend Skill Points on his character. He spends 2 Physical Skill Points for Resilience 2, a skill associated with Endurance. Jarrod wants to add another skill rank to Resilience, but going to rank 3 would cost 2 Skill Points because a skill rank of 3 would equal the Endurance attribute score of 3. Jarrod completes the purchase, which costs 2 Skill Points for that rank. The total spent on Resilience Rank 3 is 4 Skill Points, 1 for Rank 1, 1 for Rank 2, and 2 for Rank 3.

He also purchases one Rank of Courage, which falls under WIL. Since WIL is 1, even though the skill rank equals the attribute score, the cost is only 1 Mental Skill Point.

Sample file

### CROSS CATEGORY SKILL SPENDS

Skill Points may be used across attribute categories. However, Skill Points originating from different attribute categories than the purchased skill rank costs double whatever the normal cost is.

If using the Fate attribute, you will also have Fate Skill Points. Fate Skill Points work differently than other Skill Points. Fate Skill Points can be used for Fate based skills as normal, but also can be used in other attribute categories as if they belonged to that attribute category. You may not use non-Fate Skill Points to purchase any rank in Fate skills.

Skill Points cannot be saved for advancement later. Any Skill Points unspent are lost upon moving to the next step of character creation.

**EXAMPLE**

Jarrod wants to spend some of his Social Skill Points on a Mental Skill. He purchases Healing Rank 1 for 2 Mental Skill Points.

Buying the Axe skill, associated with Strength, with Social Skill Points costs 2 for Rank 1. His Strength attribute is 2, so buying Axes Rank 2 costs an additional 4 Social Skill Points. His total Social Skill Points spent on Axes is 6.

Each Skill Rank is purchased separately. There is no limitation on buying a Skill Rank with one type of Skill Point, and a different Skill Rank of the same skill with a different type of Skill Point.

## CALCULATE CHARACTERISTICS

There are several statistics that are derived from both attributes and skills. These are called characteristics. Characteristics should be calculated before purchasing abilities, as some abilities can modify characteristics directly. If abilities are selected that modify a characteristic score, the player should update the characteristic as necessary when the ability is purchased.

### COMBAT CHARACTERISTICS

- **Wound Level (WL)**: The opposing Levels of Success required to force a character to take a Wound.

**4 + STR + END + WIL + RESILIENCE**

- **Injury Level (IL)**: The opposing Levels of Success required to force a character to take an Injury.

**WL / 2**

- **Wound Threshold (WTh)**: The baseline maximum number of Wound Hardships a character can take is 2.

**2**

- **Base Defense (BD)**: The basic defense score of a character.

**(AGI + SEN + DODGE) X 2**

- **Mortality Threshold (MTh)**: The Levels of Successes required for a defender to make an instant Death Roll.

**WL X 2**

Sample file