

The Simple Generic Role Playing System (SIMGENS)

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1. Introduction

This document describes the Simple Generic Role Playing System, or SIMGENS. The purpose of SIMGENS is to provide a simple, flexible, and generic framework for imaginative role play in any desired genre and setting. I've designed the system with the following principles in mind:

1. *Simple rules.* The rules are extremely simple, to maximize the amount of imaginative play and minimize the amount of "rule-crunching" required to play the game. This intentionally isn't war gaming; it's make-believe with just enough rules to make things go. This should make play very fast. It should also create a low barrier to entry for new players: for example, it should be easy enough to whip up a setting, an adventure, and some characters that one could do an evening's play with a group who had never played the game before.
2. *You fill in the details.* The rules are generic and should apply to any genre and setting. This means that a lot of the genre-specific details are left out and will have to be invented by the players and/or game master (GM) in designing specific settings, adventures, and characters. Along the way, I offer some suggestions on how to fill in the details; I also intend to provide a few example settings with more concrete suggestions. This kind of simple rule system works well for fairy tales and other narrative forms (such as *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, and the original *Star Trek*), where atmosphere and story are most important, and precisely how things work is vague and sometimes even inconsistent. The system does not work as well if highly detailed, precise, and consistent simulations are important to the participants.
3. *The players get to help.* Because things are so sketchy, and so many of the details have to be made up by the participants, it is essential that the players, and not just the GM, fill in the details. For example, in a typical RPG, a player creating a character chooses from a smorgasbord of skills and equipment, with dozens or even hundreds of choices laid out in rule books and supplements. That's not how things work here. The GM may provide a few basic choices common in the setting, but the player always has the option to make something up, subject to the GM's approval. For example, if the player wants a certain weapon or spell, he or she should describe it to the GM, possibly based on real-world knowledge or something seen in a book or movie. If the suggestion is reasonable, the GM and player should work out the game attributes. I'll have more to say on how to do this in the appropriate sections. The intent of this approach is twofold: (1) to free the game designer from having to invent hundreds of items and options, most of which are never used; and (2) to get the players more involved in the creative process of designing and developing the setting, instead of just picking things out of a book.
4. *There are no rules, just suggestions.* As should already be clear, the "rules" presented here are really a framework for making up your own settings and rules. Except for the general principles, everything should be construed as a suggestion, not a hard and fast rule. Anything and everything can and maybe should be done differently, based on personal taste. But hopefully these rules have some good ideas and will provide a good starting place to get you going with some fun games! I also hope this system will show that you don't need a lot of complicated rules to have a fun RPG. The original D&D game was extremely simple (and sketchy); but then the complexity and level of technical detail exploded, as the game developed and more and more rules were added. If you like all that complexity, you can play a game such as Third Edition D&D, which boasts an impressive set of detailed and complex yet well-structured and playable rules. SIMGENS is for gamers who are more interested in imaginative role play than in "rule play."

Obviously SIMGENS requires a lot of creative input from its participants. In order for it to work, at least the GM and ideally some of the players must have a good idea of how to run a successful game. If you have never played one of these games before, it might be a good idea to learn a bit about them before using SIMGENS. However, this

is not difficult:

- The basic concept of a role playing game is quite simple. There are several participants called *players* and one participant called the *game master* or GM. Each of the players plays one or more characters in a story or adventure. The GM provides the adventure by describing what the characters experience (including playing all the supporting roles, or *non-player characters*, not played by the players) and adjudicating the action.

The form is very open-ended: within the limits of the “reality” of the fictional setting, as established by the rules and the GM’s judgment, the players may have their characters do anything they wish. Usually dice are used to provide an element of randomness, and this adds to the fun: often a range of outcomes is possible, some favorable and some not, and the precise result depends on one or more dice throws.

Historically, role playing games emerged from two forms of play: (1) war gaming (i.e., combat simulation, often involving complex rules about troop strength and morale, weapon ranges and capabilities, etc.); and (2) immersive make-believe (i.e., making up a story). SIMGENS emphasizes the make-believe part.

Typically the players and GM gather around a table or sitting area to play; but remote play is also possible using a voice or chat connection. I particularly like playing over chat because it provides a written record of the game, and I find that reading the descriptions on the screen helps me imagine the action (it’s like reading a book or play).

- As an example, the following web sites each have lightly edited transcripts of chat games I have run using other game systems:

http://rob-bocchino.net/FASA_Star_Trek/Campaign%20Chronicles.html
<http://rob-bocchino.net/AD&DR/Adventure%20Logs.html>

Reading over those should give you a good sense of what those games were about. The rules were slightly more complex than SIMGENS, but the spirit of immersive make-believe that I am striving for here was very much alive in those games. In fact, my goal with SIMGENS is just to support that kind of play, with even more flexibility to invent new scenarios and operate in different genres.

- Finally, even if you have never played a “role playing game” *per se*, you probably role played as a kid (playing cowboys and Indians, or doll house, or whatnot), and you’re probably familiar with adventure stories from books, movies, TV, etc.; so you will instinctively know what to do.

In fact, the only really necessary ingredient here is an active imagination. The overriding idea behind SIMGENS is that with a good imagination and some organizational skills and common sense, you already have everything you need to run a good game! This document is just here to help you along.

The rest of the material is divided into the following sections:

The Art of Game Mastering: This section gives some notes on the art of running an RPG. Some of the notes are adapted from my Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Revised (AD&DR) rules. They are equally applicable to SIMGENS. This section also explains and justifies the *Rule of Ten*, which is the fundamental principle on which all the rules of the system are based.

Abilities and Skills: This section explains the numerical scores that define what a character¹ can do in the game, and how to use those scores to do things. In a fantasy setting, this section encompasses both mundane and magical functions (e.g., spell casting).

Equipment and Treasure: This section explains the tools that the characters use during the course of their adventures, and possibly the goodies they collect as they go, if that is important to the game (it usually is in fantasy, not so much in other settings). In a fantasy setting, this section covers both mundane and magical items.

Movement and Combat: This section explains the specialized use of abilities and skills in tactical situations. This kind of activity is very important in adventure stories (and in games based on adventure stories), so it gets its own section. However, as noted above, SIMGENS is not about war gaming or detailed combat simulation.

Filling in the Details: Some notes on designing settings, adventures, and characters using these rules.

And that’s it! The rest is up to you, the participants in the game, to develop.

¹ In these rules, “character” means any living being, whether protagonist, opponent, or even monster. Following conventional usage, a character controlled by a player is a “player character” or PC, and any other character is a “non-player character” or NPC.

2. The Art of Game Mastering

The first two subsections below are adapted from my Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Revised (AD&DR) rules:

<http://rob-bocchino.net/AD&DR/AD%26DR.html>

AD&DR is my attempt to preserve the spirit of the original AD&D game by Gary Gygax, while making the rules much simpler and more uniform — in fact making them more like SIMGENS. The third section briefly explains the rationale for the Rule of Ten that I use in these rules (and that you can use to make up your own rules).

2.1. Random Intervals, or “It’s a _____ to meet you!”

I remember as a neophyte GM reading the AD&D *Dungeon Masters Guide* (hereafter referred to as DMG) and being daunted by all the different places where it says, in a very authoritative way, “in this situation roll $xdy + z$.” It’s very hard to remember all those numbers in the heat of play. It’s even harder to know where those dice ranges come from, or how to generate your own.

In fact, most times I use a simple trick:

1. Figure out the set of possible outcomes.
2. Assign a rough probability distribution to those outcomes.
3. Roll dice.

I call this trick *random intervals*, because the idea is to cover the space of possible outcomes with ranges (or intervals) of dice rolls.

It’s amazing how well this simple trick works. For core mechanics (for example, hit points and damage in D&D), you’ll probably want to stick to the dice ranges given. But for other things, like encounter distance and even monster morale, searching for a precise rule can just waste time and bog things down. For example, in the case of monster morale, it’s much easier to form a rough idea in your mind of how likely those monsters are to run away, and roll against that, than it is to go thumbing through the DMG (p. 67) for the complicated rules on morale there, let alone apply them in real time! (Before I knew any better, I used to do morale calculations on a pocket calculator and drive my poor players crazy.) In fact, I think it’s not an exaggeration to say that *mastering the art of random intervals is essential to being a good GM in any game*.

Fortunately, this is easy! Examples of common random intervals include the following:

- When you need a new person for the PCs to meet, roll d2. On a 1, it’s a man, and on a 2, it’s a woman. You can roll for age, appearance, etc. this way too. Figure out a plausible age range or set of appearances, assign probabilities, and roll. It’s that simple. There’s no need to fuss with complicated NPC charts or tables like the ones provided at pp. 100–02 of the DMG (though those are very good for more detailed NPC generation off-line, of course).
- When you need to locate something in physical space, figure out the set of physical intervals (like feet or squares) it could possibly occupy. Count them and distribute the probabilities evenly. The same trick works in two or three dimensions.
- If you’re trying to figure out what an NPC will do, first determine the set of things he or she could plausibly do, given his or her background and personality, then assign rough probabilities and roll. Here you may want to weight the probabilities so more likely outcomes get a larger interval. For example, if a guard sees an armed group of PCs approaching, you might decide it’s 60% likely he’ll stand and fight, 35% likely he’ll run to warn his master, and 5% likely he’ll pee his pants and surrender.

When designing a scenario for play, it’s often useful to decide beforehand on some of the random intervals that are likely to come up a lot. For example, you can write down a set of appearances or likely reactions from people that the PCs are likely to meet in a particular area, such as a town.

I think my favorite example of random intervals occurs in the *Futurama* episode where Gary Gygax (playing himself) says “Hello, it’s a —,” then rolls dice, reads them, and says, “— *pleasure* to meet you!” It’s a funny joke, of course, but it’s also a perfect example of how these games are played.

2.2. Making Things Up: A GM's Best Friend

The spirit of SIMGENS is not to offer yet more detailed rules, but to provide a framework and suggestions for *making things up*. Making things up is one of the most fun and rewarding parts of any RPG. As noted above, this is especially true in SIMGENS, where everyone has to make up a lot of stuff to keep the game going. In my opinion, this kind of freewheeling improvisation is the part of the game that has the life crushed out of it when the game becomes too detailed and attempts to have a rule for everything. In many respects, the SIMGENS approach harkens back to the very first version of D&D, which presented a sketchy set of rules and guidelines around which players and DMs could invent their own games.

Regardless of the game system, it's not too much of an oversimplification to say that the art of being a good GM is the art of *making things up on the spot*. Preparation is important, of course, but improvisation is much more important. This is true even in a game with copious rules (though too many rules can make improvisation harder, as the players may legitimately object and ask, "Where does it say that in the rule book?"). A good improviser will be able to mask holes in his design, while a poor improviser will be hard pressed to run a good game, even with the most careful preparation. A well-run RPG is a lot like a rally in tennis or ping pong, with the players responding to what the DM has already created, and the DM responding to the players' actions to create new things that the players respond to, etc.

As a corollary, *the dice are there to help you make things up*. A good rule of thumb is, if the players want to do something and you know what will happen, just say it. If you don't know, make up a random interval and roll for it. In fact, that is not a bad summary of the art of GMing.

2.3. The Rule of Ten

Throughout the rules that follow, many classifications are based on a scale of 1–10. I call this the *Rule of Ten*. While there is nothing hard and fast about this rule, I find it very convenient. Our human brains are used to processing the base ten number system, and we are adept at classifying things on this scale. A scale of 1–100 (as in RuneQuest, FASA Star Trek, Legendary Adventure, etc.) also works well, and it provides ten times as many gradations of probability. However, the goal here is to keep things very simple.

The Rule of Ten makes it easy to assign numbers to descriptive qualities (like abilities or skills, discussed in the next section) or sets of possible outcomes (such as initiative or weapon use). In fact, the Rule of Ten is just a special case of a random interval, where we divide the space of possible descriptions or outcomes evenly into 10 increments. Of course more complicated distributions are possible, but in my view they tend to obscure the "reason behind the rule." It is worth stressing again that SIMGENS is a framework designed to help you make up rules, unlike a lot of RPGs that ask you to apply complex rules without telling you how to make up your own.

Armed with just the Rule of Ten, some basic mechanics for resolving conflicts, and a rich imagination, the GM should be able to run a very good game. In fact, that's how I designed most of these rules. For each attribute, function, or situation that typically comes up in role playing, I thought, "How do I apply the Rule of Ten to this?" You can do the same, either to invent new things not covered here, or as a replacement for something from this document that you don't like. Think of all the rest of the rules and discussions in this text as embellishments of this basic principle, and treat them as examples or suggestions if you wish.

3. Abilities and Skills

This section covers the generation and use of the numeric scores that indicate a character's capabilities. The scores primarily related to native aptitude are called *abilities*, while the scores related to learned capabilities are called *skills*.

3.1. Abilities

Like many other games, SIMGENS uses numeric scores called *abilities* to represent a character's native capacities, as opposed to learned skills. All characters have all the abilities, but for NPCs it may not always be necessary to record them all. According to the Rule of Ten, abilities range from 1 (worst) to 10 (human best), with 4–5 being around human average. Nonhuman creatures can exceed 10. There are six abilities in all, three physical and three mental.

The physical abilities are as follows:

1. *Strength*. How much muscular force the character can exert.
2. *Coordination*. Eye-hand coordination, balance, quickness of reaction and movement.
3. *Fitness*. How physically fit the character is, including how much punishment he or she can take before being incapacitated.

The mental abilities are as follows:

4. *Reasoning*. Rational thought and logical reasoning.
5. *Intuition*. Ability to grasp the situation intuitively; non-logical thought and understanding.
6. *Empathy*. Awareness of what others are thinking and feeling.

Nothing says that these six abilities are written in stone; but they seem like good ones to me. Depending on the setting, and your personal taste, you can easily alter or replace the abilities. For example, in a *Star Wars* setting, you could have a Force ability. If a system closer to D&D is desired, then treat Coordination as Dexterity, Fitness as Constitution, Reasoning as Intelligence, Intuition as Wisdom, and Empathy as Charisma.

3.2. Skills

Again like other games, SIMGENS uses numeric scores called *skills* to represent a character's learned skills. Again, we use the Rule of Ten. A score of 0 in a skill means that the character is totally untrained in and has no experience with that skill. If the character has any level of training or experience, then the score ranges from 1 (most rudimentary skill) to 10 (super-expert). A score of 3 corresponds to a skilled amateur; 4 or 5 is professional level; and 6 and above represents highly qualified professional to expert.

Determining the skills. What the skills are depends on the setting. To determine what skills are allowed in the game, you can do three things:

1. When designing the setting, the GM writes out a list of common skills. Most RPGs involve some sort of combat, so combat skills should be included, including a different skill for each different type of weapon or armor. For a fantasy setting, the list would also include things like magic, wilderness survival, negotiation and trade, seamanship, stealth, etc. For a science fiction setting, the list would include things like science and engineering, starship navigation, etc. See § 6 for some more suggestions on how to do this. Skills can be created on demand (see items 2 and 3 below), so this initial list need not be comprehensive.
2. When designing a character, a player should be allowed to contribute reasonable skills. The GM should look at the character's background and decide whether the skill makes sense in that context. If it does, it should be allowed.
3. When the GM is designing an adventure, he or she can create reasonable skills for the NPCs and opponents.

Correlated ability. When creating a skill, pick a *correlated ability* for it. This is the ability that is most relevant to using the skill. For example, acrobatics skill might use Coordination, while swimming might use Fitness. As described below, the skill and its correlated ability are often used together in determining the outcome of attempted actions.

3.3. Generating Abilities and Skills

PCs. For PCs, generate abilities and skills in any way that seems appropriate for the setting. One good way is to start with $31 + (2d10/2)$ points and allow the player to spread them across the abilities in any way desired. This method gives a spread with an average of 36 total points. This equates to six abilities with score 6 each, which is slightly above average (PCs are generally above average people!). Something similar could be done for skills. Assume a typical starting character will have two very good skills (average score 7), five medium skills (average score 4), and five marginal skills (average score 2), for a total of 44 points on average. So give $33 + 2d10$ points to the player to assign to any skills desired.

NPCs. For human and/or intelligent NPCs, do something similar, or just assign abilities and skills based on the character's background and the needs of the story. For nonhuman and/or monster NPCs, the GM should work out the abilities and skills based on the concept of the monster and its desired capabilities. See § 6 for more suggestions about this.

3.4. Using Abilities and Skills

When a character attempts to do something, the players and the GM use the character's abilities and skills to determine the level of success. The following simple procedure governs all actions in SIMGENS, where "action" means an attempt by a character to achieve some result:

1. If it is clear that the character is able to do the action, then the character can do it; no further determination is required. Usually this means that the character has the relevant ability or skill, and the attempted action is very easy. Optionally, you may want to require a roll if the character's ability or skill is low (1 or 2) even for routine actions (i.e., actions that would be routine for a character of competent skill).
2. If there is any doubt whether the character's attempt will be a success, then do the following:
 - a. Determine the *competency level* of the character attempting the action. For actions involving primarily or exclusively native abilities (e.g., attempting to reason out a puzzle, or holding one's breath), the competency level is the relevant ability (e.g., Reasoning or Fitness). For actions involving skills, the competency level is the average of the most relevant skill and its correlated ability, rounding down.
 - b. Determine the *difficulty level* of the action. If the acting character is being opposed by another character (as in combat), then the difficulty level is just the competency level of the opponent. Otherwise, according to the Rule of Ten, the GM must assign a degree of difficulty for the action from 1 to 10, with 1 being very easy and 10 being nearly impossible for an untrained character.
 - c. Roll d10 twice, once for the character and once for the creature or circumstance opposing what the character is trying to do. The first roll is called the *attempt roll*, and the second roll is called the *opposing roll*. Add the competency level to the attempt roll and the difficulty level to the opposing roll. If the adjusted attempt roll equals or exceeds the adjusted opposing roll, then the action is a success; otherwise it is a failure.

This procedure is called making an *opposed roll*.

Note that if a character is untrained in a skill (i.e., has skill 0), then the competency level will generally be half of the correlated ability (i.e., the average of 0 and the correlated ability). This gives most characters a chance to attempt most things they want to do. The GM may rule that certain actions are impossible without some level of training in the relevant skill.

Optionally, you can have *degrees of success* instead of just a binary state (success or failure) for the result of an opposed roll. There are at least two ways to do this:

1. Look at the difference between the attempt roll and the opposing roll. The magnitude of the difference indicates the level of success (if the rolls are equal or the attempt roll is greater) or failure (if the opposing roll is greater). Think of this magnitude as a 1–10 scale, with 0–1 being bare success or failure, and 10 being spectacular success or failure. This kind of scale won't make sense for all actions, but in some cases it may be useful.
2. If the attempting character rolled a 10 (and succeeded) the success is very good; while if the character rolled a 1 (and failed) the failure is very bad. Again, what "very good" and "very bad" mean depend on the particular circumstances, so you will have to use your imagination and judgment.

Also optionally, if the attempt and opposing rolls are equal, then you can say the attempt neither succeeded nor failed; what this means (and indeed whether it makes sense) must depend on the particular circumstances.

All determinations and rolls should be done by the GM, except when a player character is involved; in that case the player should make the roll (either the attempt roll or the opposing roll, depending on whether the player is attempting an action or trying to prevent an opponent's action). The GM always has the option to make the other roll in secret, so that the player never knows exactly what is going on. For example, if a PC is in a crucial situation, such that failure would be disastrous for the game (e.g., it would end the whole story right there), the GM can make the opposing roll in secret. Then the GM can always say "you barely succeed," even if the dice indicate otherwise. A good GM never lets the dice control his game, and secret rolls are one useful way to maintain this kind of flexibility.

3.5. Common Functions

Here are some concrete guidelines for common actions in a typical fantasy setting (like D&D or RuneQuest). See § 6 for guidance on how to develop skills for other setting types.

Opening doors, bending bars, etc. Use an opposed roll against Strength. A normal door has difficulty 3–4; bars and gates have difficulty 5–6; and locked, barred, or magically held doors have difficulty 7 and up.

Secret doors. To detect secret doors (e.g., by tapping on a wall to find a hollow spot, or simply by noticing a strange crack in the wall), you could use a skill for detecting or noticing, with Intuition as the correlated ability. To figure out how to trigger a secret door, you could use a skill for escape artistry or mechanical devices, with Coordination as its correlated ability.

Surprise and initiative. Surprise comes into play when (1) one party is trying to ambush another, or (2) one party detects the other while the other is still unaware. Sometimes, it will be obvious when surprise occurs — e.g., one party is lying in ambush or making an effort not to be detected, while the other is making a lot of noise, casting light around, not paying attention, etc. Otherwise, it is a simple matter to use skills (e.g., detection and stealth skills) with opposed rolls to make these determinations. See § 5.4 for suggestions about initiative (i.e., order of action when neither side is surprised).

Weapon use. Provide a separate skill for each type of weapon. The correlated ability for striking weapons is Strength, and for missile weapons it is Coordination. Reduce the skill level (e.g., by half) if the character is using an unfamiliar weapon that is similar to a familiar one. See § 5 for more suggestions on how to apply weapon skills in a combat situation.

Armor and shield use. You can have a single skill for armor and shield; or if you want more detail, have a different skill for each kind of armor and shield. The correlated ability is Coordination. See § 5 for further discussion of armor and shield use.

3.6. Improving Abilities and Skills

Player characters should have the opportunity to improve their abilities and skills through play. For NPCs, this usually won't be necessary, though recurring NPCs could see their abilities and skills change too. Abilities reflect the character's native abilities, but they can be improved through training. Skills are improved through a combination of training and practice.

Any reasonable system can be used to improve abilities and skills. Here is one system that I use in my games: At the end of an adventure, for each player character, the GM identifies several skills or abilities that the character put to good use. The precise number depends on the length of the adventure, and also how fast the GM wants the players to progress. For each skill or ability, the character makes an attempt roll with difficulty level equal to the skill or ability score, and competency level equal to ten minus the skill or ability score. A successful roll improves the skill or ability one point. Optionally, the GM can require training for the skill or ability to improve; in this case the player must both find a trainer and pay a fee.

Learning new skills can be done in a similar way. For example, you could require that a character find a trainer, pay a fee, and spend time to learn a new skill. Or you could simply award a certain fund of points for new skills after every adventure, without worrying about the details of how the skills were acquired.

3.7. Magic

In SIMGENS, magic is just another skill, so in principle it works the same way as anything else. However, magic is a bit special, because while other skills generally have well-defined functions and real-world counterparts, spells can literally do anything you can imagine. So there has to be some way of (1) deciding what spells can and can't do and (2) keeping things in balance.

Of course the GM can handle spells any way he wants, as appropriate for his setting. However, one suggested approach is the following:

1. At PC creation time, the player and GM together work out what spells the character knows. The player describes to the GM what he or she wants the spells to do. Based on the description, the GM uses the Rule of Ten to assign a difficulty level to each spell, where 1 is a basic cantrip like cleaning a small apartment, and 10 is an incredibly difficult and reality-altering spell like granting a wish. If the character's magic skill equals or exceeds the difficulty level of the skill, then the player can know the spell; otherwise he or she must learn the spell later, when his or her skill improves. A character could start with say $d10 + 10$ levels of spells. Optionally the GM could prepare a list of common spells in the setting, and the player could pick from those for some or all of his or her starting spells.

2. For NPCs, the same procedure applies, except that the GM designs or picks all the spells.
3. Characters learn new spells by interacting with others skilled in magic and/or magical lore. Here one of two things can happen: (1) the GM can design new spells, and the PCs can encounter them, either by discovering lore or learning from a master; or (2) the players can design spells with the GM's approval, and then seek lore or spell masters from whom they can learn the new spells. The GM can also give player-designed spells to NPCs and even opponents, so that a player might see his or her own spell being used against his or her character! Of course, once the opponent is defeated, then the player's character would have a chance to learn the spell from the opponent's lore.
4. Characters use spells by succeeding at an opposed roll with difficulty spell level and competency skill level. A successful roll means the spell has the intended effect. An unsuccessful roll has no effect. Optionally, a really bad roll has an unintended bad effect!

Spell skills could use either Reasoning or Intuition (or if you like, perhaps some genre-specific ability like Magic) as their correlated ability, depending on the setting and the type of spell. As a rule of thumb, for offensive spells, give one difficulty level to a spell for every normal human it can incapacitate (or confuse, in the case of an illusion), and two levels for every normal human it can kill. Subtract one level if the spell allows a *saving throw*, i.e., an opposed roll that reduces or negates damage if successful. One way to do a saving throw is to let the difficulty be the spell level (or the average of the spell level and the correlated ability of the caster) and let the competency be some ability of the defender, e.g., Coordination or Fitness for physical attacks, and Reasoning or Intuition for mental attacks. For defensive spells, give one level for every level of offensive spell that it could neutralize.

There should also be a limit on how much spell casting a character can do; the game would become quite tiresome, not to mention ridiculous, if a character could cast tens of spells before breakfast! One simple way to do this is to say that every day, the character can cast only as many difficulty levels as spells he or she knows. Or you can use some fraction of that (like half) if you want spell casters to be less powerful.

3.8. Superheroes and Nonhuman Characters

The rules described above are geared to “ordinary people” who have above-average talents and skills. That's fine for many forms of play, such as fairy tales, fantasy, sci-fi, etc., where the protagonists are basically ordinary people, perhaps with exceptional ability. However, sometimes you may want to play “superheroes.” For example, imagine a game that included Captain America, Spider-Man, or Superman as player character choices. In such a case you have to decide whether the 1–10 scale for abilities is geared towards ordinary people (in which case the main characters' abilities would be off the charts) or to superheroes.

Probably the best thing is to keep 1–10 for the ordinary human scale, and make “super” strength equal to ordinary strength +10. For example, Cap might be a 12 or 13 (he's strong but not that strong compared to powerhouses like Superman), Spider-Man might be a 16 or 17, and Superman would clearly be a 20. To create a new superhero, generate the abilities in the same way as for a normal man, but add 10 to the “super” abilities. The same system works well for nonhuman characters in a fantasy setting. For example, a cave troll might have Strength 12 and Fitness 15. To apply the Rule of Ten to abilities and skills like this (e.g., to assign difficulty levels), just think about how difficult a task would be for a character in the +10 category. The same procedure can scale up to higher categories (+20, etc.).

Possibly this system could support the concept of “high-level play” found in some games. For example, 20th-level characters from a traditional D&D campaign are essentially superheroes. To play characters like that, you could give them super-heroic abilities (Strength 20, Fitness 30, or what have you). However, acquisition of wealth and power (“leveling the character”) is not a focus of SIMGENS in the same way that it is, for example, in D&D. Instead, the focus is on imaginative role play. Wealth and power may be acquired, of course, but this happens naturally during the course of imaginative play, and not in a mechanical way (e.g., “leveling” by earning “experience points”).

4. Equipment and Treasure

As in other RPGs, players in SIMGENS need tools with which to fight, explore, etc.; this is usually called *equipment*. In some settings, such as fantasy, adventurers may also accumulate valuable and possibly even magic items, i.e., *treasure*. This section establishes some basic parameters for such objects.

4.1. Value Points

In this game, unlike D&D and some other games, we don't worry about the precise accounting of a monetary system like gold pieces. (Truth be told, this accounting process was always one of my least favorite parts of playing D&D — I just wanted to role play and get in adventures!) Instead, we use a system based on abstract *value points*. The system works as follows:

1. According to the Rule of Ten, every item in the game (of any worth) has a score from from 1 to 10 representing its worth, where 1 is a mundane item like a shovel, a pair of boots, or a lantern; 2 is an item that takes some fine craftsmanship, like an ordinary sword; 3 is a larger crafted item like a suit of armor; 4–5 is a simple magic item (like a healing potion); 6–7 is a magic item of moderate power (like an invisibility ring); 8–9 is a magic item of great power (like a wand of energy blast or transmutation, or some powder that brings inanimate things to life); and 10 is an extremely powerful magical artifact. Of course these ranges are just suggestions, and you can adjust them to suit your taste. For example, in a D&D-like setting, where magic is fairly common, you could adjust the cost of magic items downward (e.g., a suit of plate armor costs much more than a healing potion).
2. Convert the worth score to value points using a logarithmic scale: an item of worth 1 represents 1 value point, an item of worth 2 represents 10 value points, etc.
3. Every beginning character starts off with say $5 + d10/2$ value points of possessions. The character can choose starting equipment equal to that many value points.
4. When treasure is discovered, describe in general terms what it is (a pile of gold, some art objects and gems, etc.) but don't worry too much about the details. Assign a number of value points to the treasure. The treasure can then be converted to equivalent items (compact items such as gems, useful equipment, magic items, etc.) of comparable value points, subject to bargaining, conversion fees, etc., all of which should be role played.

This system nicely handles all the typical game functions like discovering valuable treasures and procuring necessary items for adventuring, without all the hassles of tallying up gp totals and keeping track of who spent exactly what and when. It is totally independent of the monetary system, so you can have any system you like — gold pieces, copper pieces, or whatever. When the adventurers travel to a new locale, if they have to change to a different monetary system, you can just say that a certain fraction of their value points in store are taxed away by the conversion process, without worrying about the details. If you want to worry about the encumbrance effects of heavy treasure like coin, just assign a weight ratio, like one pound for every 10 value points.

4.2. Mundane Items

Basic equipment and tools. Common equipment like weapons, armor, lanterns, backpacks, rope, animals, wagons, tack and harness, etc., should all be freely available in an urban setting. In a more out-of-the-way setting, assign a probability of availability using a random interval and roll for it. You can also add to the price for rare or exotic items, or ordinary items in a remote place.

Weapons. Standard weapons should be available, subject to the same restrictions as stated under **Basic equipment and tools**. The players and GM need to work out precisely what the weapons are and how they work. Every striking weapon should have the following attributes: speed, degree of difficulty, and damage amount. Missile weapons have these attributes plus a range, i.e., a distance beyond which they will not be effective. For more information on how these attributes are used in the game, and how to work out the attributes for specific weapons, see § 5.

Armor and shields. To simulate different armor types, divide all available armor into cloth, leather, and metal. Further divide metal armor into chain, half plate, and full plate if you like. Armor absorbs 1–4 points of damage for every blow, depending on how strong it is (say cloth=1, leather=2, metal=3–4). A suit of armor adds 15 pounds of encumbrance (accounting for both weight and bulk) for every point of damage it absorbs, except that full plate has the same weight as half plate (but is very expensive). Shields are used for parrying, as discussed in § 5.5.

Damage and wear of items. Sometimes it's interesting to simulate the fact that things wear out and break. For mundane items like clothes and lanterns, don't worry about it. For items like armor, shield, and swords that come under heavy punishment during adventuring, you can do the following:

1. If an attacker (with a sword) or defender (with shield or armor) makes a very bad roll (1 on the d10 roll), then require an opposed roll against difficulty 5. Failure means the item is damaged and must be repaired to be

effective again.

2. After every adventure, assume a cumulative 10% chance that any high-stress item (sword, shield, armor) that was used in the adventure needs repairs.

4.3. Magic Items

In SIMGENS, magic items are like magic spells. As part of the setting, the GM can prepare a list of available magic items; or the GM and the players can just make it up as they go. A magic item normally has an associated degree of difficulty, just like a magic spell. So you can think of using a magic item as pretty much like casting an equivalent spell, except that it doesn't count against the total difficulty level of spells that can be known. Some items can be used by persons unskilled in magic; in this case, use an ability (like Reasoning) as the competency, instead of magic skill.

4.4. Money and Treasure

Most settings will have some form of money. For a fantasy setting, valuables in the form of gems, jewelry, art objects, etc. will also exist, and naturally one of the rewards of adventuring will be to collect such goodies. Exactly what items are in a cache of treasure may or may not be important to the setting or adventure; the GM must decide, based on his taste and the needs of the players. In any event, the value points system described above abstracts the "value" of the treasure from "what the treasure is," so that as much or as little detail as desired can be given. The GM can do anything from saying "you find a pile of gold" to giving a precise inventory.

5. Movement and Combat

This section covers some basic game mechanics for movement and combat.

5.1. Time and Movement

As in most RPGs, time exists at various scales in SIMGENS. At the largest scale, time proceeds in years, months, weeks, and days. The precise length of a week, month, or year depends on the setting. For example, in a game set on Mars, the number of hours per day, days per year, etc. would be different than on Earth. Of course other divisions of time than weeks, months, etc. can be used, but it is usually easiest to stay close to the divisions that the participants are familiar with from their everyday lives.

Large scale. Typically an adventure will take one or more days, and a string of adventures will take weeks, months, or years. Sometimes an adventure can take longer than a few days, even up to months or years, particularly if long-distance travel is involved. In any event, at this scale, it is not usually important to work out the details of speed and distance; you just need a rough idea of how fast long-distance travel is. For example, an average human walks at 4 mph, while an average horse trots at 8–10 mph (this information is easily available via google). Over long distances, figure that about 1 hour in every 4 will be spent resting, so reduce the average speed by 3/4. Difficult terrain and/or weather also reduces the average speed.

Medium scale. At a medium scale, it is easiest to keep track of time in hours. Again, precise detail is not needed. You just need a rough idea of how the day is progressing. It is usually best to divide the day's activities into morning, afternoon, evening, and night. As the characters do things in the adventure, keep track of roughly where in the day they are, using common sense and experience to estimate how long their activities take. This procedure also helps keep track of meal and rest times and when the characters will be hungry if they have not eaten, or tired if they have not rested. Again, if travel is involved, use speed of travel to keep track of time. Lack of food and/or rest will reduce the characters' effective Coordination and Fitness (to simulate physical effects) as well as Reasoning and Intuition (to simulate mental effects). Assume a 0–2 point reduction ($d3 - 1$) for each half-day without food and/or rest, or use any other system you wish.

Tactical scale. The smallest time scale is the tactical scale. Only at this scale is it really important to keep track of exactly what is happening when, because it may be important to know, for example, whether a character can cross the room to aid a friend before an enemy's axe drops. The unit of tactical time in SIMGENS is the second. For tactical situations, it is usually enough to imagine the actions in your mind; but if more precision is desired, or as an aid to visualization, you can use a square grid of 1/2" on a side, where each square represents about five feet or 1 1/2 meters (depending on whether you prefer English or metric units). Assume that an average human can move one square in one second in a tactical situation. This is a little slower than normal walking, but in a tactical situation one

is remaining alert and on the defensive.

5.2. Encumbrance and Movement Rates

A heavily encumbered character moves more slowly than an unencumbered one. Assume that every point of Strength represents 10 pounds (or 5 kilos) that the character can carry comfortably. For every 10 pounds above the comfortable level, add an extra second to travel one square. Adjust the movement rates accordingly for larger-scale movement. Optionally, for every 10 pounds above the comfortable level, also reduce the character's Coordination and Fitness by one.

5.3. Initiating and Breaking Off Combat

Combat typically starts in one of two ways: (1) two groups encounter each other and a fight breaks out on more or less equal terms; or (2) one group sets a successful ambush or otherwise has a tactical advantage over another (as discussed in § 3.5). In the first case, no complicated rules for encounter distance or position are needed; just figure out where the parties would likely be when they first notice each other, based on terrain, visibility, etc. If necessary, use a random interval (see § 2.1) to determine distance and position. In the second case, use a similar rule for encounter distance and additionally give the side with the advantage a free turn.

Combat typically continues until one side is defeated, surrenders, or flees. Players should generally decide when their characters surrender or flee. For NPCs, the GM can reason out what the character would do based on its characteristics and motivation (for example, a fiercely loyal underling who believes in his master's cause might fight to the death, while a poorly paid mercenary would be more likely to surrender or even switch sides if faced with imminent defeat). Again, if necessary use a random interval.

In a flight situation, the non-fleeing side may elect to pursue. In this case, the faster side generally wins, unless issues such as obstacles, visibility, or concealment are relevant. If the two sides are equally fast, then pursuit continues until one side tires or decides to give up. You can easily simulate tiring by using an opposed roll based on Coordination. The loser tires first.

5.4. Combat Sequence

The basic unit of time in combat situations is the *turn* (call it a round if you prefer the D&D terminology). A turn consists of three seconds of time.

What each character can do in a turn. In one turn, each character can do either (1) a total number of things equal to or less than three seconds (e.g., move up to three squares) or (2) one thing totaling more than three seconds. In the latter case, the activity takes a whole number of turns equal to the number of seconds taken by the activity divided by three and rounded up. For example, a four-second activity takes two full turns.

The GM has to determine the length of time (in seconds) of any possible activity a character could take. Use common sense and experience here. How long would the activity take in real life? Here are some concrete suggestions for attack actions:

1. For weapon attacks, you can divide weapons into three categories: fast, medium, and slow. A fast attack (e.g., punch or dagger) takes one and one-half seconds; a medium attack (e.g., sword) takes two to three seconds; and a slow attack (e.g., pole arm) takes four to six seconds. Note this means that two dagger attacks or punches are possible in a turn, one sword attack is possible in a turn, and one pole arm attack is possible every two turns.
2. For missile attacks, consider what is involved in making the attack. Slings and bows are probably fast, while crossbows are likely medium (they have to be wound). A heavy crossbow might be slow (but do more damage). A weapon that requires rearing back to throw, like a javelin or spear, is probably medium.

To simulate the fact that some creatures are very fast and others are very slow, you could adjust these times by half or double (or more) for various creatures. For example, a giant troll might take three full seconds to throw a punch, allowing a man to get in twice as many punches as the lumbering troll (but watch out if that troll connects!).

If you are unsure exactly how long a particular action should take, you can always use the following simple trick. First, forget about the problem "How long does action X take?" and focus instead on the problem "Can the characters do what they want, in the time they want to do it?" That's the problem that really matters, anyway. Then assign competency and difficulty levels, as discussed in § 3.4, and use an opposed roll to determine the outcome.

Order of actions within a turn. Many games use an “initiative roll” (or something similar) to determine order of actions. In this game, no initiative roll is usually required. Just use the following procedure:

1. At the start of each combat turn, all combatants announce what they are doing.
2. Assume that everyone’s actions start at the same time, and use the durations of the actions to figure out what happens when. For example, if combatant A is running away as combatant B throws a dagger at him, assume that A’s running and B’s throwing start simultaneously. Then A gets in one and one-half seconds of movement before B’s dagger throw arrives.

Notice that this system neatly handles the interleaving of different events (hand-to-hand attacks, missile attacks, movement, etc.) that can occur during combat. Also, it is perfectly acceptable for two actions to occur at the same time, for example if they start simultaneously and have equal duration. In particular, if an attacker and defender are using weapons of similar length and speed, then as discussed in § 5.5, typically both would attack simultaneously (but at most one would succeed). So order of action is usually not relevant in such cases.

In some cases you might want to make exceptions to this rule:

1. Weapon length can come into play. For example, you could say that upon first engagement a pole arm attacks first against a sword or dagger, because of the longer length. However, once the combatants are engaged the weapon speeds would function normally. This assumes, of course, that there is sufficient time to get the pole arm into position in the first place. That would probably be true if the combatants engaged each other on equal terms, but not (for example) if the pole arm-wielder were caught unawares (§ 3.5).
2. Similarly, the size or “reach” of an attacker can have a similar effect to weapon length. For example, you might decide that upon first engagement a giant attacks first against a man trying to land a blow, because of the giant’s longer reach.
3. Sometimes the order does matter for otherwise simultaneous actions. For example, suppose person A is incapacitated and lying on the ground. You might want to determine whether A can unholster a pistol and fire before B can bring down an axe. The resolution of such cases is simple: just use an opposed roll based on Coordination, or any other relevant skill or ability.

5.5. Attacking and Defending

There are three basic types of attacks in SIMGENS: weapon-on-weapon attacks; attacks against a defending opponent; and attacks against an opponent that is not defending (e.g., because it is incapacitated, or unaware of the attack).

Weapon-on-weapon attacks. This is the procedure to use when two characters are brawling or fighting with striking weapons of roughly equal length and speed (e.g., to resolve a straight fist fight or sword fight). If one character is fighting several others, then typically one of the interactions would be weapon-on-weapon (the outnumbered character gets to choose which opponent he is attacking), while the others would be defended.

Make an opposed roll, using the characters’ skills with the weapons they are using. The winner has breached the opponent’s defense: if desired, he can then attempt to do damage by making an attack that treats the opponent as undefended, as described below, using the roll already made as the initial attempt roll. Alternatively, the winner can opt to deflect the opponent’s attack without doing any damage (effectively a “weapon parry”).

Attacks against a defending opponent. This is the procedure to use when one character attacks another and the second character is aware of the attack and defending, but not using a weapon to defend the attack. Examples include the following: (1) the defender is defending against several attackers at once; (2) the attacker and defender are using weapons of differing lengths or speeds; or (3) the defense is against missile fire; or (4) the defender is using a shield (see below).

The attacker makes an attempt roll, with weapon competency (i.e., the average of weapon skill and correlated ability) as the competency level. The defender makes an opposing roll with Coordination as the difficulty level. If the attempt roll succeeds, then the attacker can make an attack that treats the opponent as undefended, as described below.

A defender can generally only defend against attacks from the front or flank, i.e., rear attacks are undefended. The defender gets to choose how many opponents he is defending against. For each opponent after the first, the defender’s effective Coordination score for all attackers is reduced by 2. (So the maximum number of opponents the defender can defend against is $\text{Coordination} / 2$.)

Attacks against an undefended opponent. Use this procedure when the attacker has already overcome the defender's defense, as stated above (e.g., in a sword-on-sword fight, the winner of an opposed roll gets one of these attacks); or there are too many attackers for the defender to defend against all of them; or the attacker is surprised, ambushed, or otherwise unaware of the attack.

Make an opposed roll using the attacker's competency vs. the weapon's difficulty. A successful roll deals the weapon's damage amount, as discussed in the next section. Armor (see § 4) reduces the total damage done by a successful hit. For missile weapons, range (see below) increases the difficulty level for a successful attack.

Cover and concealment. To handle cover and concealment, estimate the amount of cover or concealment on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being minimal and 10 being near-total. The attacker must make an opposed roll with weapon skill versus the cover or concealment score. If the attacker fails, his weapon hits the cover, or he has failed to see the concealed opponent. Otherwise, the attacker can make a normal attack as described above.

Shields. A combatant using a shield is a defending opponent (the weapon-on-weapon rules are not used) except that the shield skill, instead of Coordination, is the difficulty level. If the attacker's attack fails, then his weapon has hit the shield. Otherwise, the shield was ineffective (it did not go up in time to deflect the blow), and the attacker may make an attack that treats the defender as undefended. A defender may use a shield against any attacker against which he or she could otherwise defend, as stated above.

5.6. Weapon Attributes

Here are some suggestions on how to work out the attributes of weapons in the game.

Speed. As discussed above, divide weapons into fast (1 1/2 seconds, e.g., dagger or fist), medium (2–3 seconds, e.g., sword), and slow (4–6 seconds, e.g., pole arm).

Degree of difficulty. Divide weapons into easy (difficulty 1), medium (3), and hard (5) to use effectively. Usually shorter weapons (like daggers) and simpler weapons (like slings) are easy, whereas weapons that require careful balance (swords, pole arms) are medium, and weapons that require advanced technique to be effective (bows) are hard. In general, the harder weapons are also more deadly. A firearm is easy yet deadly, and that is why firearms are used today and longbows are not (in the hands of a skilled user, a longbow can be just as deadly as a pistol). The difficulty can change based on circumstance. For instance, simply thrusting a pole arm at an onrushing attacker is easy, while close fighting with a pole arm (once the attacker has survived the initial thrust) is medium.

Damage. An easy rule for calculating damage is as follows: (1) determine the positive amount by which the attack roll succeeded, treating 0 as 1 (see **Attacks against an undefended opponent**, above); (2) multiply that amount by a *deadliness factor* from 1–10 that depends on the weapon; and (3) divide the result by 10 and round up (so the minimum damage for any successful hit is 1).

Under this approach, we just have to assign a deadliness factor (DF) to each weapon, using the Rule of Ten. For fantasy-type weapons of the ordinary sort (sword, dagger, etc.) you can base the DF on the speed of the weapon. For example, fist might have DF 1, a mailed fist 2, a dagger (thrown or striking) or arrow 3, a sword or crossbow bolt 4–5, and a pole arm or heavy crossbow bolt 6–7. An extremely deadly weapon, like a firearm, would have DF 8 and up. The same rules can apply to claws or natural weapons, by comparing them with similar man-made weapons. For technologically advanced weapons (such as a disintegration ray) or magical weapons, the damage amount can be even greater, of course.

Magic can increase the damage amount. For example, you might have magic items similar to the “+*n* swords” from D&D. Or you might have a spell like *Bladesharp* from *RuneQuest*, which temporarily increases the damage done by a weapon.

Range (missile weapons only). Determine the effective range of the weapon (i.e., the longest distance at which it can be effective). As a rule of thumb, assume a range of 100 yards for a bow and 100 feet for a thrown weapon. If more accuracy is desired, you can look up the effective ranges of common weapons, or use the stats from other games. Divide the maximum range into three, and call the increments short, medium, and long. Add 2 to the difficulty level at medium range, and add 4 to the difficulty level at long range.

5.7. Injury, Incapacitation, and Death

Damage is subtracted from a character's Fitness. When a character's Fitness reaches 0, he is unconscious, and when it goes below 0, he will die unless healing skill or magic is brought to the character's aid. For every two points of

Fitness below the character's normal maximum, decrease the effective Coordination and Strength by 1. If Coordination or Strength go to zero or lower, the character is incapacitated.

Note that in some situations soft blows (e.g., with a bare fist) won't have any effect. For example, an attacker punching at metal armor with bare knuckles would probably just break his hand — unless magic or some other strange ability is involved (e.g., the monk's open-hand combat in AD&D).

5.8. Healing

Magic or advanced technology (e.g., as seen on *Star Trek*) can heal a character quickly. Otherwise, it takes a long time to heal wound damage — say two days of complete rest to recover one point of Fitness. You can have a Medicine skill, successful use of which can prevent a character from dying, or speed healing.

5.9. Large-Scale Battles

Here are some suggested rules for handling engagements involving large-scale forces, i.e., regiments or armies containing tens, hundreds, or even thousands of individual fighters.

1. If each of the opposing forces can be divided into roughly uniform groups (e.g., all humans, or all monsters of the same type) that are opposing each other, then you can just scale everything up. For example, you can say that for a particular battle, a map square represents 3 meters on a side, and a counter occupying a square represents a regiment of 10 fighters. Then you can give each regiment attributes and skills, just like an individual fighter; when the regiment's Fitness goes to zero, all its members have been incapacitated or killed. At this scale, a regiment of pikemen do the same amount of damage in numerical terms as a single pike; but the damage is scaled up, so that each point represents a point of damage to the whole regiment. For siege weapons like catapults, ballistas, flaming oil, etc., just assign a regimental damage amount to them (e.g., amount of damage to a 10-man regiment) based on how deadly they are.
2. If the opposing groups are non-uniform, or you want an even simpler system, then just use the Rule of Ten to assign a relative strength to each opposing group. When two groups clash, make an opposed roll using their relative strengths after each interval of fighting (say 10 minutes). The loser's relative strength goes down by one for the rest of the battle. When any group's strength goes to zero, that group is defeated. The relative strength score can take into account terrain, elevation, troop morale and fatigue, etc. If a group finds itself divided, or fighting on several fronts, just divide its total strength accordingly. Later, if it's important to know how many troops were injured or killed on each side, then you can make up a random interval and roll for it separately.

6. Filling In the Details

As discussed above, SIMGENS is only a skeleton; most of the details need to be filled in by the players and GM. Here are some suggestions on how to do that. In fact, here's a little secret: all RPGs, even ones with lots of complicated rules, replace or supplement many of the core rules with new, special-purpose rules tailored to particular settings or adventures. Did you ever notice that? So in fact most RPGs create the illusion of a well-developed rule system, but in fact they are a lot like this one: you just make it up as you go along, using the core rules as a framework. The benefit of this kind of system (and the reason why all RPGs do it) is that it's impossible for any set of core rules in the abstract to treat all the situations that can come up in actual play.

6.1. Designing a Setting

Before beginning play, the GM needs to do a little work to establish the setting that will support the game.

Genre. First, pick a genre. This establishes the most basic parameters of the game. If you are doing a sword-and-swordcery game, then there probably won't be any laser guns involved (but see Gary Gygax's brilliant *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* adventure for AD&D). Typically the genre comes from familiar literature: fantasy/fairy tale, sci-fi, mystery, etc.; but it can be anything that the participants can imagine and that seems interesting to play. It can also be a prepared setting from some other RPG, or a setting based on a TV show, movie, or book involving colorful characters getting in adventures (*The Dukes of Hazzard*, *Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and the Oz stories would all make good choices). One advantage of using SIMGENS is that it should be easy to generate a setting based on your favorite show, movie, or book.

World. Next, have some idea of what the physical world (and, if it is important, other planets, the galaxy, etc.) is like. This doesn't have to be in any great detail. For example, you could just start adventuring in a city, with some idea of what the parts of the city are, but little or no idea about the outside world. That can be developed later. Or you can sit down and design a detailed world, mapping out continents and oceans, political and geographic divisions, etc. If you use a prepared setting, or a setting from a movie, show, or book, then much of this work will have been done for you. Just be careful that you provide enough detail about the area where the PCs are located so that you can have a fun adventure. That's usually much more important when starting out than knowing what the rest of the world or the universe looks like. In a sci-fi setting, like *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, or *Doctor Who*, "planet" usually takes the place of "city" or "locale," and "quadrant" or "galaxy" usually takes the place of "world."

For example, in the show *The Dukes of Hazzard*, we knew details about the Hazzard Town Square, the Boar's Nest, the Commissioner's Office, and the Duke Farm. The rest of it was a lot of roads, with creeks and other obstacles to jump over; how all those roads were laid out was never even very clear (and may not have been consistent from show to show). We also knew there were neighboring counties, like Chickasaw. And this meager amount of setting got them through seven seasons of the show! So you could easily do something similar for your stories. Or, if a complicated large-scale setting is desired, then find one or make one up. It's really up to you.

Skills. Before creating adventures and characters, you should have some idea of what the core skills are in the game. If you use a prepared setting, you can look at the skills that are already in that setting or the game system it is based on; it will be a simple matter to convert them to this system. If your setting is based on a TV show, movie, or book, think about what the characters routinely do in that setting. For instance, in *Star Trek*, Mr. Spock is always consulting his sensors, so there should be a sensors skill; Mr. Sulu is always struggling to maneuver the ship, so there should be a helm skill; there should be various skills for physical and medical science, etc. You can divide these skills up very finely (see FASA's *Star Trek* game for a nice example of this) or leave them vague and general. Again, it's up to you. For a fantasy setting, my AD&DR rules (q.v.) provide a convenient set of skill "bundles" that you can easily adapt for fantasy play using these rules.

Equipment, Treasure, and Magic. As discussed in § 3.2, you can list out some basic items of equipment, treasure, and magic when starting out, using a prepared setting, your knowledge from books, movies, and other games, or just your imagination. Or you can just make it up as you go along. This could be more fun! Most settings will have some notion of "equipment" and "money," which can be used to buy equipment and other necessities, like food. For example, the "equipment" in *The Dukes of Hazzard* consists mostly of cars and related tools, and simple weapons like bow and arrow or dynamite. Money consists of those green pieces of paper that Boss Hogg is always fondling. In *Star Trek*, the equipment consists of star ships and related technology (phasers, transporters, etc.), together with all the handheld weapons and devices that the characters routinely use (tricorder, medical devices, communicator, etc.). The categories of "treasure" and "magic" are usually applicable only in a fantasy setting, though other settings could have fantastic technology or powers that works similarly to magic. (In many of the old *Star Trek* episodes, the aliens encountered by the crew had powers that could be described as magical.)

6.2. Designing an Adventure

Designing an adventure for SIMGENS is the same as for any other RPG, except that the game system is probably much simpler, and you may have to make up spells, monsters, and other game elements as you go, instead of picking them out of a book. A good adventure usually starts with a good idea for a story, but an interesting character, place, or situation can also serve as an adventure seed. Many early RPG adventures (e.g., for D&D and RuneQuest from the 1970s and 80s) are simple "dungeon crawls" in which the PCs invade some location (typically an underground dungeon complex, but also possibly a ruin or other structure) and clear out the bad guys. That can make a good adventure, but there should be something interesting about the location — interesting puzzles to solve, interesting characters to meet, or interesting tactical problems — or the whole thing may become an exercise in killing monsters and getting treasure, which isn't that much fun.

More recent adventures tend to be story-based, leading the PCs through some sort of plot. Typically these adventures have a setup or "hook" to get the characters involved; some middle portion where there may be a good deal of confusion as to what is going on and why; and finally some resolution. The danger here is that you don't want to just lead the players by the nose through a story that's obviously predetermined. If you do that, then there's little point to role playing at all; your players may as well be sitting and listening to you tell them a story. Instead, you have to respond to different ways that the story could go depending on what the PCs do. I often find a "build as you go" approach works well for this kind of adventure, where you write out in some detail the places, situations, and

NPCs the characters will meet in the first session or two, then build on that for subsequent sessions after seeing how the story is playing out. But it's usually best to have at least a rough outline of the whole story, including some idea about what the major conflicts are and how they might be resolved.

Existing stories can also make good adventures. For example, I have adapted the story *The Marvelous Land of Oz* by L. Frank Baum for play using SIMGENS. Similarly one could adapt a story from a book, movie, comic book, or episode of a TV show. One might even take "adventure modules" from a favorite game (D&D, say, or RuneQuest) and try playing through them using these rules. Of course some adaptation of the mechanics (character classes, monsters, magic, etc.) would be required; but that should be straightforward. The result would almost certainly be a very fast-paced and imaginative game!

6.3. Designing Characters

Designing PCs. As in any RPG, start with a conception of the character's basic background and personality. Develop the abilities first, and then the skills, keeping in mind the basic conception of the character. Add equipment and spells (if appropriate) as suggested in the previous sections.

Designing human NPCs. Designing human (or human-like) NPCs is similar to designing PCs, except that for all except major NPCs, only a few key skills (such as combat skills) need to be given.

Designing non-human characters, including monsters. Designing non-human creatures takes a little more creativity. Here you can use for your inspiration, among other things, (1) myths and legends, (2) literature and movies, and (3) other RPGs (such as D&D) that draw on these primary sources. Or, of course, you can just use your imagination and make up something completely new!

For most monsters, all that really matters in game terms is combat ability. Of course you need a conception of how a monster will behave, what it wants, whether it will negotiate or fight, whether it is protecting its lair or young, etc.; but none of that needs to be described in terms of game statistics. For standard attributes like attack and defense, you can either (1) give creatures standard weapons and armor that human characters use too; or (2) give the creatures natural weapons (claws, teeth, etc.) and armor (fur, hide, etc.) equivalent to the standard ones in game terms. For example, claws or teeth might function like a dagger; fur or hide might function like cloth or leather armor; etc. Then you don't really have to invent any new stats for the monster's weapons and armor.

Of course part of the fun of monsters is that they can have unusual abilities, and you will just have to work these out using your imagination and common sense. Usually this is easy to do, using the skill system. For example, a monster with tentacles might be able to envelop a character on a successful hit. In that case, the character is immobilized until he or she makes an opposed Strength roll against the tentacle to break out. The beauty of a skill system like this one (supported by the Rule of Ten) is that it's usually obvious what to do from the conception of a creature or situation: so as long as the creature or situation itself is well thought out (and you've thought through some of the interesting actions that could occur in the game session), then the rules almost take care of themselves.