Riskbreaker

An abstracted combat engine

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Character Creation

All characters start with 4s in four stats: **Muscle, Agility, Wit,** and **Personality**, as well as 10 points.

To increase a stat, pay the amount you're increasing it to – so to go from 5 to 6 costs 6 points. Decreasing a stat gives you the amount of points it started at; thus going from 4 to 3 nets you 4 points.

Skills represent what you can do with your stats. A skill costs 1 point (or 2 points for anything unusual or 'magical'). Each skill is associated with a stat. Some examples:

Muscle: *Fight with <Mêlée Weapon>, Knockdown, Push.*

Agility: *Fight with <Ranged Weapon>, Maneuver, 'Thief' skills such as: Sneak, Pick Lock, Disarm Trap.*

Wit: *All spells, including Fight with <Magical Spell>, Illusion, Heal, as well as Tactics.*

Personality: *All social skills: Charm, Intimidate, Distract, Inspire, as well as perception skills such as Observation.*

Some archtypical characters:

"Fighter"	"Thief"	"Mage"	"Ranger"
M5: *Sword, Knockdown, Push*	M4: *Knife*	M3	M2
A4: *Bow, Maneuver*	A5: *Maneuver, Sneak, Pick Lock, Disarm Trap*	A4: *Maneuver*	A5: *Bow, Maneuver*
W3: *First Aid*	W3	W5: *Lightning*, Illusion*, Heal**	W4: *Tactics*
P4: *Intimidate*	P4: *Observation, Distract*	P4: *Observation*	P5: *Charm, Inspire, Observation*
2 points left over	*2 points left over*	*1 point left over*	*1 point left over*

* Asterisks represent *magical spells* which cost 2 points apiece.

Note: Characters should, at a minimum, have a form of Fight skill as well as Maneuver if they have any intention of being able to fight and move about the battlefield.

1. Declare Fights

Every battle is broken down into individual fights, which are made up of everyone close enough to hit one another and actively involved in same.

At the beginning of every round, players declare which fight they're involved in, if any at all. They also declare how they're fighting. This often will not change from round to round. This system assumes everyone is fighting all the time and abstracts that, basically ignoring it with only a few mechanical effects.

Every fight has only two sides. If there are more than two sides, break the fight down into smaller fights until there are only two.

Characters are rated in skills (such as 'Fighting with Sword') by a Stat rating scale from 1 (mook) to 10 (master). This is their *fight rating*. It represents everything involved in fighting with that weapon: their ability to hit and block and dodge, as well as how long they can stay in the fight.

2. Calculate Advantage

Each fight has an *Advantage* associated with it.   Advantage is scaled around zero, always being positive for one side (and thus negative for the other). A side's *skill level* is the sum of the fight ratings of all characters on that side. The initial Advantage is set at the difference between the two side's skill levels plus any circumstantial elements.

When one side is outnumbered, the opposing side gains +1 Advantage for each additional member. Other elements such as ambushing the other party can gain 1, 2, or 3 further Advantage depending on how large an effect the initial situation has (based on GM fiat).

Subsequent rounds' are affected by this skill level difference. If one side's skill level is greater than the other's by one, its Advantage increases by one during this phase the next round.

Calculating Advantage Example:

A fight between one side with a fighter using (M5: Sword) against another side of two fighters using (M2: Pike) begins equally matched at 0 Advantage (2 + 2 for the pike fighters + 1 for outnumbering the other side by one). If another Pike fighter joined the mêlée, the Advantage for the Sword fighter would be -3 (or +3 for the Pike fighters).

3. Character Actions

Fights are resolved one at a time, with each character taking a single Action in reverse fight rating order. Ties on the same side do not matter. Ties between opposing sides are broken by the side with less Advantage going first.

a. Choose an Action

There are four types of Actions a player can take: Advantage, Skill Damage, Kill Damage, and Special.

Advantage Action Example:

The Fighter decides to lay about in an attempt shove over several of his opponents, gaining Advantage for his side. He declares this, stating he will be using his M5: Knockdown skill.

An *Advantage Action* is something the character attempts (beyond the fighting the system already assumes) to gain advantage over the other side in the course of the fight. Advantage actions can use any skill **other than the fight skill they are already using in battle**.

A *Damage Action* is an attempt to press one's advantage into a more permanent form. Advantage ebbs and flows over the course of a battle. Damage Actions are a way of converting that Advantage into either damage that reduces an opponent's effectiveness or damage that takes them completely out of the fight. **Both types of damage actions use the character's current fight skill.**

Damage that removes an enemy from combat is called *Kill Damage*. Each character in a fight can take Kill Damage equal to the fight rating of the skill they're currently fighting with. Thus, taking too much Kill Damage may prevent you from using certain weapons, while switching to a weapon you're better with will allow you to stay in the fight longer.

Kill Damage Example:

The Fighter has M5: Sword and A4: Bow. Fighting with the bow allows him to hit from a distance, but he can only take 4 Kill Damage before being knocked out of the fight. After taking 3 Kill Damage, he switches to his sword so as to stay in the battle longer.

Damage that reduces an enemy's fighting ability without removing them from the fight is called *Skill Damage*. Skill Damage attacks are easier to succeed with than Kill Damage attacks. (See **Roll and Resolve Action**, below).

Special Action Example:
A Mage decides to slow down his opponents by blasting away part of the staircase they're using to reach him. He uses his W5: Lighting skill to do this.

Special Actions are just that: actions that do not fit any of the other three actions. Attempts to slow down or delay opponents, moving around, escaping, or actions which physically transform the battleground are special actions. **Special Actions may use any skill the character possesses.**

b. Establish Risk

After a character has chosen what action they will take, they must decide how much they're willing to risk on the action. Risk is defined in terms of *Risk points* as follows:

- 1 point: smaller, subtler, less effective maneuvers.

- 2 points: bigger actions with the subsequent chance of bigger risk if you fail.

- 3 points: big, flashy moves that can swing a battle one way or the other.

Establishing *Risk* allows characters to tailor how much they're willing to chance in return for how much they can get back. Damage and Advantage gains and losses are bounded by Risk.

In the case of Damage Actions, a character may only establish Risk less than or equal to their side's positive Advantage. A side with no Advantage can only make Advantage and Special Actions.

c. Roll and Resolve Action

Character stats range from 1 to 10. To test a skill, they roll 1d10 against their skill's associated stat. A character succeeds if they roll under (Stat + 2), with a cap of 9. **Rolls of 10 are always a failure.**

If a character succeeds on their roll, their Action has the desired effect: they've slowed down their opponents, or made them less effective fighters, or brought them closer to being knocked out of the fight.

If they fail, not only does their desired outcome not happen, a further *consequence* occurs, indicated by a shift in Advantage, that puts them in a worse position than they were originally.

Stat Rolls

Stat	Roll	Chance of Success
1	<3	20%
2	<4	30%
3	<5	40%
4	<6	50%
5	<7	60%
6	<8	70%
7	<9	80%
8	<10	90%
9	<10	90%
10	<10	90%

Effects and consequences differ from action to action:

Advantage Action: If a character succeeds on an Advantage action, their side of the fight immediately gains Advantage equal to the Risk they established. If they fail, their side immediately *loses* the same amount.

Advantage Resolution Example:
The Fighter declares an M5: Knockdown at Risk 2. Currently, his side is down 2 Advantage. If he succeeds (by rolling less than 7), his side of the fight gains 2 Advantage (for a total of 0 Advantage for both sides). If he fails, his side loses 2 Advantage (giving his opponents 4 Advantage in total).

Kill Damage Action: If a character succeeds on a Kill Damage Action, the targeted opponent(s) take Kill Damage equal to the established Risk. As soon as damage equal to the opponent's fight rating is dealt, that character is removed from the battle. Any remaining damage can be assigned to other opponents. In addition, the Risk established is 'spent': the character's side immediately loses Advantage equal to the established Risk.

If a character fails a Kill Damage Action, not only is his opponent not damaged, but his side immediately loses **twice** the amount of established Risk!

Skill Damage Action: Skill Damage Actions resolve exactly as Kill Damage Actions with two important differences:

1. Skill Damage only reduces the effective Stat (and thus effective fight rating) of a character, rather than bringing them closer to being knocked out of the fight.

2. Skill Damage attacks are easier to make. When resolving a Skill Damage attack, a character adds the established Risk to his Stat for purposes of the roll.

Special Action: A Special Action resolves much like the others: roll against the requisite Stat and see if you succeed. The results depend on the individual action:

Maneuvering: The most common Special action is attempting to move around the battleground – either away from or towards the enemy. The move itself is always successful. Whether or not the character manages to keep away from their enemies and whether the new position they are in helps or hinders them is up to the roll.

Risk in a maneuver represents distance: Risk 1 is easily accessible, Risk 2 less so, Risk 3 covers an incredibly far or difficult distance.

When making a maneuver, a character rolls against their current effective Agility. Succeed or fail, they make it to the location. However, a failed roll indicates that the character's current physical position is not to their advantage: they must subtract the established Risk from their side's Advantage at the beginning of the next turn.

If the maneuvering character is currently in a fight, each member of the other side has the option to attempt to move with them. If the opponent succeeds on their Agility rolls **and roll lower than the maneuvering character did**, they succeed at keeping pace and end up in the same location, ready to fight next turn.

Alteration: A character may attempt to alter the physical battlefield through the use of skills like Push or even Fight skills (see example). Such alterations can be used to do things like delay or outright halt enemy movement between locations. As always, the established Risk should equal the possible reward. A possible delay of 2 turns should probably be a Risk 2 action. Outright stopping movement between areas should be Risk 3.

On a success, the Action is successful and the battlefield changes as the character intended. On a failure, the change still

occurs, but not to their side's benefit. In one fight (the most likely one, depending on the action), the acting character's side loses advantage equal to the established Risk, or is forced to deal with the delay the character intended for their enemies.

Tactics: Dealing with large numbers of enemies is difficult, particularly given the +1 Advantage that each additional enemy gains. Using Tactics, characters can funnel their enemies into situations more to their advantage. On a successful Tactics roll, a character manages to change the situation such that characters are either effectively removed or can now gain access to a fight. Risk should, as always, be commensurate with the attempt. A failed roll results in an Advantage loss equal to the Risk.

Recovery: If a character manages to get away from a fight, they can catch their breath and recover. In such a situation, a character can declare a Recovery Action. During such an action, the character regains 2 lost Skill Damage, and may either make an additional Advantage Action **using only Wit or Personality skills** or instead regain an additional 1 Skill Damage (for a total of 3). This action is only available if the character is not currently fighting and is not including their fight rating in any fight.

Kill Damage is only recoverable through a skill such as First Aid or Medicine or magic such as Healing. Use of such skills requires that both parties are not currently fighting.

4. Mark combat counters/damage

At the end of every round of combat, every character who fought marks a combat counter on their sheet. When all three are filled, that character immediately takes one point of Kill Damage. Then all three counters are cleared.

This represents the wounds characters are taking while fighting and puts an upper limit on how long a character can last in battle. Mooks (with a Stat of 1 in their Fight skill) can only last three turns before being knocked out of battle. Masters (at Stat 10) could theoretically last for 30 turns, though it's much more likely that they'll take Kill Damage from other sources or take so much Skill damage that they can no longer effectively fight back.

At the start of the next round, all characters declare their fights and the process continues until one group flees, surrenders, or receives full Kill Damage, knocking them out of the battle.

Skills, Risks and Rolls Outside of Combat

Though this system is primarily concerned with combat, during an adventure, characters can obviously roll against their skills to accomplish their goals. Risk in this case should be narrative rather than numeric, with counter-stakes declared by the GM in the case of failure.

Inspirations

Altonomy, Heroquest, Moldvay Edition Red Box, Red Box Hack,

This Game Currently Has No Name, Over the Edge, The Shadow of Yesterday, Vagrant Story

Intentions

Having tried Moldvay's Red Box with my Gamist-oriented friends, I found I really enjoyed the idea of a boardgame-like RPG with quick character creation and hack-and-slash action paired with the system's wonderful random dungeon generator, but found that I didn't really enjoy the "Rock-Em Sock-Em Robots" approach to combat. Roll, miss, roll, miss, roll, hit, damage.

We tried RBH and found that while it was definitely a step in the right direction, perhaps it wasn't *quite* abstract enough.

Hence this attempt.

The idea (inspired by Heroquest's concept of advantage) was to pull back the metaphorical camera to the point where individual blows weren't taken into account unless they were particularly dramatic. Everything else would be the parts of combat we found more interesting – tactics, diversions, knockdowns and set ups for coups de grâce.

Name:

Stat	Rating -	Skill Damage	=Effective Skill	Skills
Might				
Agility				
Wit				
Personality				

Kill Damage	◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯
Combat Counter	◯ ◯ ◯

Name:

Stat	Rating -	Skill Damage	=Effective Skill	Skills
Might				
Agility				
Wit				
Personality				

Kill Damage	◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯
Combat Counter	◯ ◯ ◯

Name:

Stat	Rating -	Skill Damage	=Effective Skill	Skills
Might				
Agility				
Wit				
Personality				

Kill Damage	◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯
Combat Counter	◯ ◯ ◯