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This is a game about the American West. Some of the book is about how it was, and some is about how it is remembered. It is up to the players and Games Master to find their own version of the West, finding their own trail between truth and legend. If the players want a historically accurate game where miles are miles, events occur as they truly did, and death comes more often from disease than a bullet, then they will find the tools they need in this book. Alternatively, if the players want a game inspired by movies and dime novels, where the history is just a painted backdrop and heroes ride high in the saddle, then they too will find their desires catered for within.

The characters may be counted among those who build America, who drove the railroad across the continent and built the Western states. They may be soldiers who fight at the famous battles of the West, or adventurers who blaze the trails through the wilderness. They can be statesmen or scoundrels, outlaws or lawmen, the quick or the dead. They will either become part of the legend, or die in some godforsaken hot and dusty place and be forgotten.

A Timeline of the West

1803: President Thomas Jefferson completes the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the size of the country. The Lewis & Clark expedition is sent out to explore the new reaches of the United States.
1811: The first steamboat to travel the Mississippi, the New Orleans, takes to the river.
1813: The Creek wars pit settler against native in Alabama.
1819: The United States purchases the Spanish territories in Florida after General Jackson conquers them.
1822: First fur-trapping expeditions up the Missouri.
1825: The Creek nation cedes its remaining territory to the United States.
1827: The Winnebago nation is defeated.
1828: The Cherokee cedes its lands in Arkansas Territory, and migrate west of the Mississippi.
1832: All territory west of the Mississippi is declared by Congress as Indian Territory.
1836: The Republic of Texas secedes from Mexico. The following war includes the infamous battle of the Alamo.
1837: Following the imprisonment of their leaders, the Seminole nation is defeated.
1838: 18,000 Cherokee are driven from Georgia to the lands west of the Mississippi. One in four die along the ‘Trail of Tears’.
1842: The Oregon trail, a route west from Independence, Missouri to Fort Vancouver, Washington is begun.
1844: The telegraph is introduced to the United States.
1845: The concept of Manifest Destiny is invented – it is God’s will that the United States should rule North America.
1846-1848: The United States clashes with Mexico over Texas, which wishes to join the Union. Meanwhile, in California, the Bear Flag Revolt takes control of the region from Mexico and gives it to the Americans. Mexico’s surrender includes concessions of land in California and Texas.
1849: Soon after the United States gains control of California, gold is found in the South Fork of the American river. The news sparks a gold rush, and thousands move west to seek their fortune. They are referred to as ’49ers.
1852: Wells, Fargo & Company stagecoach and banking company formed.
1858: Silver strikes in Nevada; gold strikes in Colorado.
1860-1865: The Civil War. The Union battles the Confederates over state’s rights and abolition. Many troops are pulled from the western forts, leading to a general period of lawlessness and chaos on the frontier.
1865: President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated.
1866: The Sioux under Red Cloud ambush eighty soldiers commanded by Captain Fetterman. The battle is known as the Fetterman Massacre.
1867: Alaska is purchased for seven million dollars.
1868: Joseph McCoy runs the first great cattle drive. Instead of selling meat in the depressed southern markets, he drives his herds north to the town of Abilene, where they are loaded onto the railroads and shipped to the rich slaughterhouses of Chicago.
1868: Colonel Armstrong leads the Seventh Cavalry on an attack on the Cheyenne village of Washita.
1869: The railroads from west and east meet, forming a single railroad that crosses the continent.
1872: Dodge City founded.
1874: Gold is discovered in the sacred Black Hills in Montana, at the heart of Indian territory.
1875-1876: The Sioux fight a war to defend the Black Hills from encroaching miners. The Seventh Cavalry under Custer loses a battle to Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse at the Little Big Horn. Despite this victory, the Indians are outnumbered and outgunned. They are attacked at winter camps, starved out, and forced to surrender.

1877: Chief Joseph of the Nez Perces tribe surrenders after a thousand-mile fight against invaders, during which he outmanoeuvres a superior force several times.

1881: Sitting Bull emerges from hiding and surrenders.

1881: The gunfight at the OK Corral.

1881: Billy the Kid is shot by Pat Garrett.

1882: Jesse James is shot dead.

1886: Geronimo of the Apaches surrenders after a fifteen-year war with the Union.

1887: The Great Blizzard in Montana causes the Great Die-Up, wiping out vast number of cattle.

1889: The territory of what would become Oklahoma is given up to be claimed as farmland.

1889-1890: The Ghost Dance religion, preached by the Paiute named Wovoka, claims that the land will soon be restored to the Indians. It causes widespread unrest in the reservations.

1890: Sitting Bull is killed while being arrested. Chief Big Foot of the Sioux attempts to move his followers to avoid military retribution. They are intercepted at Wounded Knee Creek by the Seventh Cavalry, and almost half the Sioux present are killed.

The classic period of the West made famous by movies, books and legends was from the 1850s to the 1870s. Before the California gold rush, the West was relatively thinly settled and unexplored. By the 1880s, railroads and barbed wire had tied down the frontier and ended the days of cattle drives and wild cattle towns.

The Wild West and OGL Games

The basic system used in OGL Wild West is fundamentally identical to that used in the other Core books from Mongoose Publishing. The skills and feats are similar, as is the combat and task resolution systems. If you are familiar with other games using the same system, the rest of this chapter can be safely skipped.

Characters and Dice

When a gang of bandits throw down on you, they may hit or they may miss wildly. In a movie, their success or failure would be part of the script. In a roleplaying game, this is determined by random chance based on the skill of the bandit in question. Since there is a variable involved, dice become a necessary part of the roleplaying medium.

When a person goes to a shooting range, the variance of his shots is mostly based on their skills but can also be influenced by luck, timing, and a thousand other factors. These are summed up by rolling a d20 (that is, a 20 sided die) with a high number representing most of the factors aligning in a favourable way and a low number meaning the opposite. Dice are used to determine success when using your character’s skills, when deciding how enduring or intelligent he might be, and when you absolutely, positively need to put a bullet in someone and keep it there.

On the Naming of Dice

Dice in roleplaying games go by a series of shorthand codes that are very easily to learn but look confusing at first glance. A four-sided die (the singular form of dice) is also called a d4. (The ‘d’ stands for dice.) In this book, dice will be referred to by this code preceded by the number of them needed for any given roll required by the rules.

For example, if a deranged miner Burke Talbot wants to throw a bundle of dynamite at an approaching band of lawmen, he would need to succeed at an attack roll and his soon to be piecemeal victims would need to roll Reflex saving throws on 1d20. (Do not despair; terminology like attack roll and Reflex saving throws will be explained soon.) If this d20 check is successful, the investigators would only take half damage when the dynamite detonated.
The exploding dynamite might deal 10d6 points of damage. The 10d6 means Talbot's player would roll one six-sided die, note the number, then roll it again nine more times and add the results to the first roll. Out of 10d6, a player can get a range of numbers from 10 (all ten dice roll a 1) to 60 (every die rolls a 6). When multiple dice are indicated by this shorthand code, the values of the rolls are always added together.

One last dice note concerned the idea of a d100, also called a d%. This is also called a percentile roll in roleplaying parlance. To do this, roll a d10 twice. The first roll is for the ‘tens’ digit; the second roll is for the ‘ones’ digit. If you were to roll a 4 and then a 2, that generates the number 42. When rolling a percentile, two 0s count as the number 100. Some dice sets have a special d10 with a two-digit number (10, 20, 30 and so on) stamped on each of its faces to make this easier, but such dice are certainly not necessary.

**MULTIPLIERS**

Certain modifications to dice rolls exist within the rules that, instead of adding a set number or an addition die or dice to a roll, multiply the result. These are listed as ‘x2’ or some other multiplication value. Multipliers apply to every numeric modifier and the basic dice involved in the roll but not to additional dice added as a modifier to the roll.

Multipliers can stack but regardless of their values, they stack in a specific way. When a check or value has two or more multipliers, the highest value multiplier is kept and every addition multiplier increases the first one’s value by 1.

**ACTIONS**

Once you have a character and some dice, you have all the tools you need to begin playing. Rounds of play usually consist of the Games Master (the person guiding the story and the action of a game) asking questions and describing scenes and players suggesting actions their characters wish to take in response to these descriptions.

Everything a character wishes to do, from waking up and putting on his socks to filling a band of miscreants full of hot lead, is an action. Actions come in different types and have different rules attached to them.

Simple actions are things that do not require rolls except in the most adverse of conditions. Under normal circumstances, a character is allowed to tie his shoes without needing to make a die roll for success. If that same character had just been run over by a stagecoach after staggering out of a saloon blind drunk, it might be a different story. Whenever a character needs to make a simple action, something they can normally do everyday with no special skill or talent required, the Games Master will generally simply declare success or, like in the example just given, require a roll (also called a ‘check’) or simply declare failure.

Contested actions make up the largest part of the rule mechanics for combat and skills in this book. Everything that a character does what might have a chance of failing because of the actions of someone else, skills, or abilities, the result is a contested roll. Contested checks are never guaranteed and even the most masterful of sharpshooters can miss his mark once in a while. Saving throws, which are a special type of check made to see if a character can escape the effects of something adverse, are another kind of contested roll.
A term used during contested rolls is DC, short for Difficulty Class. The DC of a contested check is the number a d20 check, plus or minus modifiers, that a character must roll or higher to succeed. A roll that is lower than the given DC for an action fails. The d20 is the most common type of die rolled during an average gaming session, making it crucial to the system and the single most important die for any player to own.

Astute players may have realised at this point that if contested checks have to beat a listed DC and they are all made using a single d20 then actions with a DC of 21 are impossible. On the surface, this is correct, that is where characters come in. Characters and the skills and abilities they gain come with modifiers that are added to or subtracted from certain kinds of checks. These modifiers can theoretically make any check possible, no matter how high the DC might be.

Though it is often a convention with games running the d20 rules to allow all rolls of 20 on a d20 to be an automatic success, this is not always the case. By the same token, a roll of 1 (called a ‘natural’ 1 because it is the actual result on the die roll, just as with a ‘natural’ 20) is not an automatic failure. Instances in the rules where a natural 1 or 20 indicate automatic success or failure will be clearly marked in the text of the rules themselves.
The Abilities

Each ability partially describes your character and affects some of his actions. Abilities are not the sum total of a character's personality or capabilities, but they do provide the framework around which skills and d20 checks are typically made, making them a very important part of the character's description.

Strength (STR)

Strength measures your character's muscle and physical power. Strength also limits the amount of equipment your character can carry.

You apply your character's Strength modifier to:

- Melee attack rolls.
- Damage rolls when using a melee weapon or a thrown weapon (including a sling). (Exceptions: Off-hand attacks receive only one-half the character's Strength bonus, while two-handed attacks receive one and a half times the Strength bonus. A Strength penalty, but not a bonus, applies to attacks made with a bow that is not a composite bow.)
- Climb, Jump, and Swim checks. These are the skills that have Strength as their key ability.
- Strength checks (for breaking down doors and the like).

Dexterity (DEX)

Dexterity measures hand-eye coordination, agility, reflexes, and balance.

You apply your character's Dexterity modifier to:

- Ranged attack rolls; including those for attacks made with bows, pistols and rifles, and other ranged weapons.
- Defence, provided that the character can react to the attack.
- Reflex saving throws, for avoiding explosions and other attacks that you can escape by moving quickly.
- Balance, Escape, Hide, Move Silently, Open Lock, Ride, Sleight of Hand, Tumble, and Use Rope checks. These are the skills that have Dexterity as their key ability.

Constitution (CON)

Constitution represents your character's health and stamina. A Constitution bonus increases a character's hit points, so the ability is important for all classes.

You apply your character's Constitution modifier to:

- Each roll of a Hit Die (though a penalty can never drop a result below 1 - that is, a character always gains at least 1 hit point each time he advances in level).
- Fortitude saving throws, for resisting poison and similar threats.
- Concentration checks. Concentration is a skill that has Constitution as its key ability.

If a character's Constitution score changes enough to alter his Constitution modifier, the character's hit points also increase or decrease accordingly.

Intelligence (INT)

Intelligence determines how well your character learns and reasons. It is important for any character who wants to have a wide assortment of skills.

You apply your character's Intelligence modifier to:

- The number of skill points gained each level. (But your character always gets at least 1 skill point per level.)
- Craft, Decipher Script, Disable Device, Forgery, Knowledge, Repair and Search checks. These are the skills that have Intelligence as their key ability.

An animal has an Intelligence score of 1 or 2. A creature of humanlike intelligence has a score of at least 3.

Wisdom (WIS)

Wisdom describes a character's willpower, common sense, perception, and intuition. While Intelligence represents one's ability to analyse information, Wisdom represents being in tune with and aware of one's surroundings. If you want your character to have acute senses, put a high score in Wisdom. Every creature has a Wisdom score.

You apply your character's Wisdom modifier to:

- Will saving throws (for negating the effect of mind-altering phenomena).