

Dirge

Hear the dead out there? They're moaning out a dirge for the human race. I say we shut them up.

Basic Rules

Dirge uses the D20 system with several major modifications.

The most major change is that there are no classes or levels. Instead, PCs gain ability scores, hit points, feats, and skills at a set rate: characters are customized by their choices in these areas. All player characters are restricted to fairly "realistic" limits for traits, but can become pretty competent within this scope.

Each character can select between one of four stances (described later). This stance can be changed with a standard action, but governs access to certain feats, special abilities, and other effects to provide a tactical element to fights.

The PCs form a band of survivors that shares a Morale rating (again, described later). Other groups of survivors have their own rating, and, should they prove a worse threat than the living dead, it may be worthwhile to break their morale before fighting physically.

Advancement

Player characters gain advances according to the schedule below. At the end of each week, consider the activities of the group.

- If the characters basically holed up and bunkered down with no real danger, no advances are earned.
- If they had a few moments of genuine risk, one advance is awarded.
- If they were in a serious life or death situation and survived through skill and cunning, they get two.

Beyond these awards, further victories are reflected in Morale.

Traits are gained according to the following schedule:

1. Skill rank
2. Skill rank
3. Feat
4. Skill rank
5. Two HP
6. Skill rank
7. Skill rank
8. Feat
9. Skill rank
10. Ability point (per Point Buy)

Whenever a player reaches 10, start over at step 1.

Traits

Starting Stats

Each player starts with 15 point buy for ability scores.

HP is equal to Con (no further HP bonus comes from Con, but HP do increase if Con is later raised).

Starting skill ranks are equal to Int (no further skills are gained from Int unless it is later raised).

Each player starts with two feats that can only be spent on weapon/armor proficiencies or skill focuses and two feats with no limitations other than prerequisites (four feats total).

Abilities

Abilities are purchased (at character creation and afterwards) using point-buy via the standard costs. No ability score can ever exceed 20 for player characters.

In addition to adding to skills, the ability scores have the following effects:

- **Strength** is used normally (melee attack/damage, and encumbrance). It additionally is used for attack and damage with heavy ranged weapons. It determines the character's encumbrance limit.
- **Dexterity** is also basically normal (used for ranged attack/damage and AC). It does not contribute to Initiative rolls (this is now handled by Wisdom).
- **Constitution** determines a character's base HP. Undead creatures often have zero Con, but still have a pool of additional HP to represent physical cohesion.
- **Intelligence** determines a character's starting skill ranks.
- **Wisdom** bonus is used for Initiative (rather than Dex, as paying attention to surroundings is more important than agility in the post-apocalyptic world). It also helps resist mental attacks (see below)
- **Charisma** score (plus Wis bonus) is the DC for social and mental attacks against the character.

Skills

All skills have a maximum of four ranks. In addition to these ranks, the skill gains a bonus from the relevant ability score and a bonus from a single relevant skill focus. This means that, without circumstance bonuses, the maximum skill bonus is +12 (4 ranks, +5 from 20 ability, +3 skill focus).

The difficulties of skill rolls are: 10 (easy), 15 (challenging), 20 (difficult), 25 (risky), 30 (nearly-impossible). Characters may take 10 and 20 per the normal rules. Time required for a skill check varies from skill to skill, and taking 20 might be extremely time-consuming and resource-prohibitive.

Each skill has a relevant Skill Focus. The stances these focuses are available in are abbreviated next to the skill's ability, below (see Feats and Stances for more information). Essentially, when in certain stances a character might not have access to a skill focus (and, consequently, is limited to ranks + ability bonus).

All skills may be used untrained representing a minimal modern education in the subject.

- **Academics (Int; V):** Know all elements of a liberal arts education not governed by other skills*
- **Acrobatics (Dex; FV):** Balance, tumble, and dodge out of areas of effect (i.e., Reflex)
- **Athletics (Str; DFTV):** Climb, jump, and swim
- **Computers (Int; V):** Use (likely somewhat rare) computers and computerized devices
- **Crafts (Wis; V):** Make crafted items not governed by other skills
- **Criminal (Dex; FV):** Escape confinement, perform sleight of hand, and pick locks
- **Drive (Dex; V):** Drive an automobile
- **Electronics (Int; V):** Make or repair simple electronics and wiring
- **Handle Animal (Cha; DV):** Befriend, train, and command animals and ride horses
- **Heal (Wis; DV):** Practice first aid and other medical skills
- **Intimidate (Str; TV):** Scare living individuals
- **Leadership (Cha; DFTV):** Command NPC survivors and establish Morale (see Morale)
- **Mechanic (Wis; TV):** Make or repair mechanical devices (including automobiles)
- **Negotiate (Cha; DV):** Bargain with living individuals
- **Perception (Wis; DV):** Be aware of the environment to notice and avoid surprise
- **Profession (Cha; V):** Practice an art or other pre-apocalypse job not governed by other skills
- **Sciences (Int; V):** Know all elements of a scientific education not governed by other skills
- **Stamina (Con; DTV):** Stay awake and keep going, resist toxins and illness (i.e., Fortitude)
- **Stealth (Dex; FV):** Avoid being detected when moving carefully
- **Survivalist (Con; DTV):** Hunt, fish, camp, and otherwise know how to get by in the wild

* If desired, characters may speak one additional language for every two points of bonus in Academics.

Feats

Characters may purchase any feats for which they meet the prerequisites. However, each feat also includes one or more stances in which it is valid. If a character with that feat is not in one of the appropriate stances, he or she cannot use the feat. The feat continues to work as a prerequisite for other feats (which may not have the stance requirement), but is otherwise not present. For example, a character with Weapon Proficiency and Focus in Heavy Weapons would have a net +1 bonus in Tough stance, but a net -1 in any other stance (a -2 nonproficiency penalty but a +1 from the Focus).

Feats are the only way to gain an attack bonus in this system other than bonuses from abilities and stances (i.e., there is no such thing as a base attack bonus). Thus, no feats have a Base Attack prerequisite. For feats like Power Attack that scale based on Base Attack, instead scale them based on every 10 upgrades (e.g., Power Attack improves at 40 upgrades).

Feats may also award capabilities that are class special abilities in other D20 implementations.

All feats work the same as their normal D20 implementation unless otherwise noted. Available feats, stances, and prerequisites include:

- **Armor Proficiency:** Each proficiency below is purchased separately
 - **Light (DFTV):** No prerequisite
 - **Medium (DTV):** Requires Light Armor
 - **Heavy (T):** Requires Medium Armor
 - **Shields (TV):** No prerequisite
- **Blind-Fight (DF):** No prerequisite
- **Cleave (DT):** Requires Power Attack
- **Combat Expertise (DFV):** Requires Int 13
- **Combat Reflexes (F):** No prerequisite
- **Damage Reduction (T):** Requires Heavy Armor Proficiency; when wearing Heavy Armor, the character gains DR 1/-
- **Diehard (T):** Requires Endurance
- **Dodge (FV):** Requires Dex 13
- **Endurance (DTV):** No prerequisite
- **Far Shot (DF):** Requires Point Blank Shot
- **Great Cleave (T):** Requires Cleave
- **Improved Bull Rush (T):** Requires Power Attack
- **Improved Disarm (DF):** Requires Combat Expertise
- **Improved Grapple (DT):** Requires Improved Unarmed Strike
- **Improved Initiative (FV):** No prerequisite
- **Improved Trip (FV):** Requires Combat Expertise
- **Improved Unarmed Strike (DFT):** No prerequisite
- **Mobility (F):** Requires Dodge
- **Point Blank Shot (DFV):** No prerequisite
- **Power Attack (DT):** Requires Str 13
- **Precise Shot (DF):** Requires Point Blank Shot
- **Quick Draw (FV):** Requires Dex 13
- **Rapid Reload (DF):** No prerequisite; works only with proficient weapon groups
- **Rapid Shot (F):** Requires Point Blank Shot, Dex 13
- **Run (F):** No prerequisite
- **Shot on the Run (F):** Requires Mobility, Point Blank Shot
- **Skill Focus* (Var):** No prerequisite; buy multiple times for different skills
- **Sneak Attack (FV):** Requires Dex 15; grants +1d6 Sneak Attack as per the Rogue ability

- **Spring Attack (F)**: Requires Mobility
- **Toughness (DTFV)**: No prerequisite; adds +1 HP every time the 2 HP upgrade is gained (3 total)
- **Two-Weapon Fighting (F)**: Requires Dex 15
- **Uncanny Dodge (DF)**: Requires Dex 13, Wis 13; Works as per the Rogue ability
- **Weapon Finesse (F)**: No prerequisite
- **Weapon Focus (DFTV)***: Requires Weapon Proficiency in selected weapon group; may be selected multiple times for different weapon groups
- **Weapon Proficiency**: Each proficiency below is purchased separately and (other than Basic) require Basic as a prerequisite
 - **Basic (DFTV)**
 - **Melee (DFTV)**
 - **Medieval (DF)**
 - **Guns (DFTV)**
 - **Archery (DF)**
 - **Heavy (T)**
 - **Exotic (TF)**
- **Weapon Specialization (DFT)***: Requires Weapon Focus in selected weapon group; may be selected multiple times for different weapon groups
- **Whirlwind Attack (F)**: Requires Combat Expertise, Spring Attack

Stances

Each character must always be in one of four stances. Changing stances requires a Standard action.

Stances have three major effects:

- Most feats are governed by a particular stance and become inaccessible when not in that stance. For example, Heavy Armor Proficiency is a Tough stance feat: if a character switched to another stance while wearing heavy armor, he would immediately begin to suffer penalties for not being proficient, even if he had the feat normally.
- Stances also have an innate bonus.
- Finally, stances gain a circumstance bonus when attacking or defending against targets in a single other stance.

The stances are:

- **Determined:**
 - Characters in this stance gain a +2 bonus to all attacks.
 - Determined characters gain an additional +2 to attack, damage, and AC against Tough characters, as they tend to have slightly better maneuverability while retaining enough power to cause harm.
- **Tough:**
 - Characters in this stance gain a +2 bonus to melee and heavy weapon damage and subtract 1/2 Str rating from total Encumbrance.
 - Tough characters gain an additional +2 to attack, damage, and AC against Fast characters, as they laugh off high-speed but low-damage attacks, and are dangerous to the lightly armored up close.
- **Fast:**
 - Characters in this stance gain +10 ft. movement rate and +1 dodge AC.
 - Fast characters gain an additional +2 to attack, damage, and AC against Vulnerable characters, as they can quickly get away from traps and are used to being aloof in the first place.
- **Vulnerable:**
 - Characters in this stance appear nonthreatening and all characters take a -6 penalty to attack them unless they have injured the attacker or they are the only target(s) left.
 - Vulnerable characters gain an additional +2 to attack, damage, and AC against Determined characters due to the skill at riding the emotional or literal blind spots of these characters.

Morale

Each party (or group of enemies) has a Morale rating.

The party's Morale cannot exceed the party leader's Leadership skill bonus. If the party leader is incapacitated or another leader must otherwise be chosen, immediately lose all Morale in excess of the new Leadership bonus. For new parties and enemy encounters, start Morale at half the Leadership bonus.

When Morale reaches 0, each member of the party gains the Shaken effect (which stacks with other sources of Shaken to build to Frightened or Panicked). If Morale is 5 (and for every additional 5 points of Morale), all members of the party gain a +1 Morale bonus to attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks (i.e., reverse Shaken). Morale has a minimum of 0.

The party gains a point of Morale when:

- Any member defeats an enemy with a threat level equal to or greater than the current Morale
- All surviving party members are healed to full HP the first time after a fight that resulted in at least one lost Morale (i.e., you can only get this bonus to repair lost Morale, not raise it)
- An incapacitated party member is returned to positive HP
- The party accomplishes something the GM deems particularly heartening

The party loses a point of Morale when:

- Any member takes damage from a single source/attack equal or greater than the current Morale (cumulative if multiple members take damage from the same attack)
- Any party member is incapacitated (cumulative with taking damage greater than current Morale)
- Any party member is killed (cumulative with being incapacitated)
- An enemy uses a full round action and successfully makes a successful Intimidate check at a DC equal to 10 + current Morale

Morale persists between sessions.

Equipment

Weapons

Weapons are divided into several proficiency groups.

Weapon	Damage	Critical	Enc.*	Qualities
Basic (DFTV)				
Knife	1d4	x2	1	Close
Club	1d6	x2	2	Close
Spear	1d6	x2	4	Thrown, Two Handed
Crossbow	1d6	x2	3	Ranged, Two Handed+2 attack vs. armored targets
Shotgun	1d10	x2	3	Gun, Two Handed, +1 attack
Melee (DFTV)				
Machete	1d6	19-20/x2	2	Close
Wood Axe	1d8	x3	4	Two Handed
Staff	1d6	x2	3	Double weapon
Maul/Mattock	1d10	x4	6	Two Handed
Medieval (DF)				
Sword	1d8	19-20/x2	2	
Mace	1d10	x2	4	Close
Bow	1d8	x3	4	Ranged, Two Handed
Greatsword	2d6	19-20/x2	5	Two Handed
Scythe	2d4	x4	5	Two Handed

Weapon	Damage	Critical	Enc.*	Qualities
Guns (DFTV)				
Light Pistol	1d6	x2	1	Gun, Close
Medium Pistol	1d10	x2	2	Gun
Heavy Pistol	2d6	x2	3	Gun
SMG	1d8	x2	3	Gun, Area, Auto
Light Rifle	1d8	19-20/x2	4	Gun, Aim, Two Handed
Medium Rifle	1d12	19-20/x2	5	Gun, Aim, Two Handed
Archery (DF)				
Compound Bow	1d10	x3	4	Ranged, Aim, Two Handed, Adds Str bonus to damage
Heavy (T)				
Heavy Rifle	2d8	19-20/x2	6	Gun, Aim, Two Handed
Flamethrower	2d6	x4	8	Area, Fire, Two Handed
Exotic (TF)				
Molotov	1d6	x4	2	Area, Fire

* Treat Encumbrance for an item as +1 if it is not currently being wielded and is not properly stowed, sheathed, or holstered in a weight-distributing container.

Weapon Qualities:

- **Aim:** A character proficient in this weapon may use its sights or scope to aim by expending a Move action. This reduces range penalties by 2. A good scope might reduce these penalties further.
- **Area:** This weapon can attack a cone rather than against a single target. If used in this way, all targets in the cone must succeed at an Acrobatics check (DC 10 + attack bonus) or take damage.
- **Auto:** This weapon lets the user expend additional ammunition and take a -2 attack for +4 damage.
- **Close:** This weapon can be used while grappled.
- **Double Weapon:** This weapon may be used with Two Weapon fighting as two weapons or as one two-handed weapon.
- **Fire:** This weapon can set the target on fire. It continues to automatically do its base damage each round at the end of the target's turn. This expires if the target takes a full round action to put the fire out. Any damage die that rolls a 1 is no longer rolled on subsequent rounds.
- **Gun:** This weapon attacks and deals damage based on Dex bonus. A living target hit by a gun attack must make a Stamina check (DC 5 + damage taken) or immediately drop to -1 HP and dying.
- **Ranged:** This weapon attacks with Dex and deals no bonus damage unless otherwise noted.
- **Thrown:** This weapon can be thrown (attacking with Dex) and deals listed damage plus Str bonus.
- **Two Handed:** This weapon requires both hands to use effectively. If it is a melee weapon, it adds an additional .5 x Str bonus to damage.

Range:

For simplicity, range is standardized into several increments. These may decrease in poor lighting or areas with heavy visual obstruction (snow, smoke, brush, etc.) but are otherwise standard. All ranged weapons used against moving targets in a combat situation take identical range penalties: distance weapons that don't have the Aim quality may have superior range under ideal conditions but are treated similarly for ease of use in this system. The ranges are:

- **Point Blank:** 30 feet or less
- **Close:** 60 feet or less
- **Medium:** 100 feet or less (-2 penalty)
- **Long:** 150 feet or less (-4 penalty)
- **Extreme:** Greater than 150 feet (-8 penalty if it's not functionally impossible for the weapon used)

Headshots:

An attempted headshot attack takes a -4 penalty. If double the attack's damage *would not* reduce the target to 0 or fewer HP, the damage is applied normally. If double damage *would* reduce the target to 0 or fewer HP, the target is dead (or unconscious for living targets and nonlethal damage).

Armor

Example	Prof.	AC	Max Dex	ACP*	Speed	Enc.
Leather coat	Light	+1	+5	0	-0	1
Kevlar Vest	Light	+2	+4	1	-0	2
Flak Jacket	Medium	+4	+3	2	-5	4
Riot/SWAT Gear	Heavy	+6	+2	3	-10	6
Riot Shield	Shield	+2	N/A	1	-0	3

* The total Armor Check Penalty is always subtracted from all Str- and Dex-based skill bonuses. If the wearer is not proficient, it is also subtracted from attack rolls and added to total Encumbrance.

Armor with a significant Kevlar component allows the wearer to add the AC bonus to the Stamina check to resist instant incapacitation from gunfire.

Encumbrance

Characters are likely to want to carry a lot of supplies and gear in the zombie-haunted apocalypse, and must manage their encumbrance to avoid overloading.

A unit of encumbrance is approximately five pounds if tightly packed and balanced, but may be far less for bulky or unwieldy items. Weapons and armor each list an encumbrance rating, and other gear will be rated based on this rule. The GM might assess a +1 encumbrance penalty to weapons that are not properly stowed.

Each character can comfortably carry up to [Strength + Strength bonus] units of encumbrance without penalty. For each additional [Str Bonus, minimum 1] of units, the character suffers -1 to all d20 rolls. For every -2 (i.e., every 2 x Str bonus), the character also suffers -5 feet speed. A character cannot carry more than twice the base encumbrance limit, but might briefly lift more weight with a Strength check.

For example, a character with Strength 16 has a normal encumbrance limit of 19 (16 + 3), a maximum load of 38, and accrues penalties at 20-22, 23-25, 26-28, 29-31, 32-34, and 35-37. If he were wearing a flak jacket and carrying a medium rifle, light pistol, and machete, his encumbrance would be 12, so he could carry 7 more units before beginning to suffer penalties. If he was carrying 24 units, he would be at -2 to all rolls and -5 feet to speed.