

# TUMBLEWEED

by Mike Berkey ([michael.berkey@gmail.com](mailto:michael.berkey@gmail.com)), Copyright 2009. For more Microlite20 awesomeness, head over to the Microlite20 website at <http://www.microlite20.net>.

## CORE RULES

### STATS

Tumbleweed uses three stats: **Strength, Dexterity,** and **Mind**.

Roll 4d6, dropping the lowest die. Total the remaining 3 dice and allocate to one of the stats. Repeat for the remaining stats.

Your stat bonuses are **(STAT-10)/2, rounded down**.

### CLASSES

There are six classes: **Desperado, Grifter, Gunslinger, Law Man, Maverick,** and **Preacher**. Characters begin at level 1.

**Desperadoes** are wild men who live on the fringes of society. Outlaws, hired thugs, strong men, thieves and murderers all count themselves among their number. They gain a +1 to all attack and damage rolls. This increases by +1 at 5th level and every 5 levels afterwards.

**Grifters** are con men and swindlers. Always on the road, one step ahead of their victims and the law. Grifters get a +1 to Communications rolls at 1st level. This increases by +1 at 5th level and every 5 levels afterwards.

In addition, once per adventure per level, they can make a target believe one "fact", no matter how implausible, as long as the Grifter succeeds in a MIND +Comm roll vs the opponent's skill roll (usually MIND+Sub or Know).

**Gunslingers.** Renowned for their lightning fast reflexes, Gunslingers gain a +2 initiative bonus when using firearms. They are also better at certain firearms maneuvers than other classes: see the maneuvers section for more information.

A Gunslinger, however, will always have a preference for either pistols or rifles, never both—they can only use their special abilities (including their initiative bonus) with that type of weapon.

**Law Men.** Usually out-gunned and under-equipped, Lawmen are what passes for justice on the frontier.

Law Men can use a Tin Star to face down criminals (see the equipment section). They also gain a +1 to hit and damage with either six shooters or rifles, their choice. This bonus increases by +1 at 5th level and every 5 levels thereafter.

**Mavericks** are fast on their feet, masters of all trades, always with an eye on the brass ring. They can choose two favored skills at first level instead of just one.

**Preachers.** Holy men, spreading the word of the Lord as far as possible. Preachers get a +1 to Communications rolls at 1st level. This increases by +1 at 5th level and every 5 levels afterwards. Preachers can also use Bibles (see the equipment section).

**Other classes.** Just write down your profession, give yourself a bonus roughly equal to the ones above and get on with it. If you want to be a 3rd level Showgirl, we're not going to stop you.

Alternatively, feel free to rename classes to fit other concepts. For example, an Indian Brave could be a Maverick with favored skills in Physical and Survival. A Mountain Man could be a Desperado with a favored skill in Survival.

### NATIONALITY

Pick a nationality or ethnicity and then choose either a +2 to one stat or a +2 to any type of skill rolls that are a point of national pride.

For example, you could declare yourself to be a Mexican and say that your national pride is your skill with riflework. From then on, you'd get a +2 to attack rolls with rifles.

Another person might say that they're an Indian and their tribe has always been good with horses—they'd gain a +2 with rolls involving horsemanship, possibly including to-hit rolls while on horseback.

It's perfectly fine for two people from the same background to have different bonuses since it's all a matter of opinion.

If you have absolutely no opinion on your nationality, call yourself an American, praise the melting pot, and give yourself the +2 bonus anyway.

## SKILLS

There are five skills: **Communication, Knowledge, Physical, Subterfuge and Survival.**

Each character must choose 1 skill they are best at (also called your "favored skill"). Your rank in that skill will be at your level+3. All other skills will be at your level.

**Skill roll = d20 + skill rank + whatever stat bonus is most applicable to the use + situation modifiers**

Roll higher than the given Difficulty Class to succeed. For example, Climbing would use Phys + STR bonus. Dodging a falling rock is Phys + DEX bonus. Finding a trap is Subt + MIND bonus. Disabling a trap is either Subt + DEX bonus or Know + MIND, depending on the nature of the trap.

Note that there are no "saving throws" as such in this game; use Phys + STR or DEX for Fortitude and Reflex saves. Will saves are usually MIND bonus + your level.

## CONTESTS

Occasionally, two or more characters will directly compete with another outside of a combat situation. Perhaps it's a high speed chase on horseback, maybe it's a high stakes game of poker. It all boils down to the following:

- One character is the Hunter, one is the Prey.
- There are 10 points of Lead. If the Lead increases to 10 or higher, the Prey wins. If the Lead reaches 0, the Hunter wins. The Lead usually starts out at 5, but the GM can decide to use a different number as starting Lead if one side has an advantage.
- Both sides make skill checks each round. Usually these skill checks will be versus static DC's, representing maneuvers.

**Note:** a "round" in this case does not necessarily have to be a combat round—it could be any length of time that would be dramatically appropriate.

**The highest successful skill check total wins 1 pt of Lead,** either towards the Hunter's or the Prey's advantage.

Depending on what these maneuvers are, additional benefits or penalties may accrue in the following round.

**If neither skill check passes, the Lead remains unchanged** and additional unpleasant effects may ensue as expected for a failed skill roll of that type (crashing, falling, losing money, whatever).

**If only one side fails their check, one or more extra points of Lead may accrue to the other side depending on how badly the roll failed by.**

**Risky Maneuvers:** For a DC penalty, you can attempt to change the Lead in one attempt by 2 or more points. Describe what you're doing, then take a +5 DC penalty for every extra point of Lead you want. Failure will usually have pretty serious consequences. Some examples would be cheating in a hand of black jack, or having your horse jump a gulch to put distance between you and a pursuer.

## COMBAT

**Hit Points = STR Stat + 1d6/Level.** If HP reaches 0, you are unconscious and near death. Further damage directly reduces STR. If that reaches 0, you are dead.

**Roll d20 + DEX bonus for initiative order.** Everyone can do one thing each turn; move, attack, dodge, pull a lever, etc. Only roll once, on the first round of combat--the order stays the same for subsequent rounds.

**Melee attack bonus = STR bonus + Level**  
**Ranged attack bonus = DEX bonus + Level**  
**Armor Class (AC) = 10 + one-half your level, rounded down + DEX bonus.**

Add attack bonus to d20 roll. If higher than your opponent's Armour Class (AC), it's a hit. Natural 20 is automatically a critical, doing maximum damage.

Characters can use DEX bonus + Level as their Melee attack bonus instead if wielding a light weapon.

If the total bonus is +6 or more a second attack can be made with a -5 penalty. If the total bonus is +11 or more a third attack can be made at -10, and a fourth at -15 if the total bonus is +16 or more. For example, if the total bonus is +12, three attacks can be made at +12/+7/+2. No more than four attacks can be made in a round, regardless of bonus (five if two weapons are used).

Add STR bonus to Melee damage, x2 for 2-handed weapons.

**Ranged Combat.** Shooting a gun into a crowded melee is not a good idea—if you don't take a -4 to hit, there's a 50% chance you'll hit a friendly instead of an opponent.

**Ranged Penalties.** If your target is relatively close, there is no penalty to hit for range. If it's mid-range for the weapon you're using (judgment call), take a -2. If it's farther out than that, the GM will assign a -4 to -10 penalty to hit, depending on his judgment of how far away the target is. Note that ranges are relative to the weapon used: “far away with a -10 penalty” for a pistol may only be a -4 range penalty for a rifle.

## MANEUVERS

Maneuvers are things you can do in combat in lieu of a normal attack.

**Aim.** Taking a full round to aim with a ranged weapon will add +2 to hit, but while doing so your AC will be at 10 because you can't move around. Gunslingers get an extra +2 to hit while aiming with their preferred type of firearm. You can not dual wield or Fan The Hammer while Aiming. You **can** Aim while taking a Trick Shot.

**Dodge.** You can forgo your next attack at any time and dodge out of the way. Roll  $d20 + \text{DEX} + \text{Phys}$ . The total is your effective AC until your next attack comes up. If it's lower than your real AC, well, you zigged when you should've zagged.

The GM may modify your check by +2 or -2 (or more) to reflect the amount of cover in the area and how the local terrain affects your mobility.

**Fan the hammer.** This requires two hands and a single revolver. In exchange for expending 2 more rounds than usual and a -4 penalty on all attack rolls that round, you gain one extra attack at your highest attack bonus. Gunslingers take only a -2 penalty.

**Grab.** Make a hit roll on your target. If successful, the target and attacker make opposed  $\text{STR} + \text{Phys}$  rolls. If the attacker wins, the target is grappled and loses his Dex bonus to AC. If the target wins, the grapple fails. Every time the target's action comes up he can make another opposed roll to either throw off the grapple or reverse the grapple.

Every time the attacker's action comes up, he can do something, such as inflict unarmed damage, strip an item from them, or move or throw the target somewhere (potentially also doing unarmed damage). It's the GM's judgment call if an action is reasonable or not.

**Sneak attack.** If you successfully sneak up on someone, or otherwise catch them unawares, the first hit adds your ranks in Subterfuge as bonus damage.

**Take Cover.** If you duck behind an object, you can gain +2 to +10 to your AC depending on the extent of the cover (light cover = +2 all the way to nearly complete = +10). Half this AC bonus may also apply to saves if the GM allows it.

**Throw an explosive.** These weapons require the attacker to make a missile attack targeting a particular 5 foot by 5 foot area, which is a DC 10 roll. Anyone caught within the blast radius can make a Dexterity Check (the DC is listed with the explosive) and only take half damage.

**Trick Shots.** Declare what your shot is going to do—it could be anything from shooting a weapon from your opponent's hand to blowing his hat off to extinguishing a lantern. Make a to-hit roll at -8 (-4 for a Gunslinger using their preferred type of firearm).

If it's against a live opponent, then he makes a save (usually  $\text{DEX}$  or  $\text{STR} + \text{Phys}$ ) against a DC equal to your attack roll (with the to hit penalty) and either drops the weapon or is intimidated, which could have effects ranging from a -2 to hit on his next action to flat-out surrender, depending on how much he failed by and what, exactly, you did.

If he **makes** the save (i.e. his save roll is **higher** than your to hit roll), then the attack applies against his AC (again with the -8 penalty)—he still might be shot by accident.

Against an inanimate object, use a flat DC, higher for smaller objects or more difficult shots. Aim, range and cover all apply to Trick Shots.

**Two weapons.** You can wield two light weapons and attack one extra time with the off hand at your highest attack bonus, if you take a -2 penalty on all attack rolls that round. Gunslingers only take a -1 penalty when dual-wielding their preferred type of firearm.

## SECOND WIND

Twice per day, a character can catch their Second Wind, restoring half their lost hit points. This takes up a single action.

If you are at 0 hp and losing strength, a Second Wind will put you back at 1 hp.

## OTHER HAZARDS

**Falling:** 1d6 damage per 10', half damage on Phys+DEX save. DC=depth fallen in feet, maximum DC 30, maximum damage 20d6.

**Extreme Heat & Cold:** If not wearing suitable protection, Phys+STR save once every 10 minutes (DC 15, +1 per previous check), taking 1d6 damage on each failed save.

**Poison:** Phys+STR save to avoid or for half, depending on poison. Effect varies with poison type, but a good generic deadly poison will do 5d6 damage over the course of a few minutes.

## LEVEL ADVANCEMENT

**Encounter Level** = Hit Dice of defeated monsters, or the given EL for the trap, situation, etc. Add +1 for each doubling of the number of foes. e.g.: 1 Goon = EL1. 2 Goons = EL2. 4 Goons = EL3, etc.

## EQUIPMENT

**Axe.** 1d10 damage, two handed.

**Bow and Arrow.** 1d6 damage. The character's strength bonus applies to damage rolls if the bow was made for that character.

**Bowie Knife.** 1d6 damage.

**Brawling.** Technically not equipment since everyone comes equipped with fists, elbows, feet, knees, teeth, foreheads, etc, but listed here for clarity. 1d4 damage.

**Derringer.** 1d6 damage. A tiny revolver with abysmal range and damage and with only a 2 round capacity. Highly concealable.

**Dynamite.** 3d6 for one stick, thrown. Every additional stick adds +1d6. DC 15 to save for half damage.

**Hatchet.** 1d8 damage.

**The Holy Bible.** The written words of the Lord, a Preacher's best friend short of the Almighty himself. Works like a Tin Star (see below) in that a character can use it to get an opponent to repent of his sins, possibly resulting in hesitation, surrender or retreat. Only a Preacher may wield the Holy Bible.

The opponent gets a +5 bonus to their save (if not

**Loot.** \$200 gives you one EL. Every doubling of that gives you another EL. e.g.: \$200 = EL1. \$400 = EL2. \$800 = EL3. \$1600 = EL4. This only applies to Loot gained per adventure, total, per character.

Add up the Encounter Levels (EL's) of every encounter you take part in. When the total = 10 x your current level, you've advanced to the next level. Reset the total to 0 after advancing.

Each level adds:  
+1d6 to Hit Points  
+1 to all attack rolls  
+1 to your primary skill(s)  
+1/2 to all other skills  
+1/2 to AC

If the level divides by four (i.e. level 4, 8, 12, etc.) add 1 point to STR, DEX, or MIND.

more) if they are not religious or are from another, non-Christian, religion.

If a Preacher is trying to use the Bible on more than one target at a time, there is a -1 penalty to his targets' saves for every 2 people that could be classified as faithful to the Preacher's religion in that group.

**Machete.** 1d8 damage.

**Rifle.** 2d8 damage. 18 round capacity before reloading. Impressive range.

**Shotgun.** 2D10 damage, short range. 2 round capacity if double-barreled, otherwise only 1.

**Six-shooter.** 2d6 damage. 6 round capacity.

**Tin Star.** This is a sheriff's badge, and the only law a frontier town may ever see. Only a Law Man can use these.

As an action, the character can present the badge, and make a Comm + MIND roll vs the opponent's Know + MIND (Or STR, if higher). If successful, the criminal hesitates for one action. If successful by 5 points or more, the opponent surrenders. The GM can rule that some opponents will never surrender, only run away, hesitate or retreat.

If the Law Man tries to use his Tin Star on more than one opponent, give them a bonus to their save equal to +1 for every person in the group.

**Tomahawk.** 1d8 damage.

## ANIMALS

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Type	HD	HP	AC	Damage, Notes
Bear	6d8+24	(51 HP)	15	Claw +11 (1d8+8), Bite +6 (2d8+4)
Dog / Coyote	2d8+4	(13 HP)	13	Bite +3 (1d6+3)
Donkey	2d8+2	11	13	Bite +1 (1d2)
Herd Animal	3d8+9	(22 HP)	13	Butt +3 (1d8+6), Trample +3 (1d12)
Horse	3d8+6	(19 HP)	13	Hoof +2 (1d4+1)
Rat	1d2	(1 HP)	14	Bite +4 (1d3-4)
Rat, Texas	1d8	(3 HP)	13	Bite +3 (1d4)
Rattlesnake	1d8	(4 HP)	17	Bite +4 (1d2-2) + Poison (3d6 damage, DC 15 for half)
Wolf	2d8+4	(13 HP)	14	Bite +3 (1d6+1)

All creatures have a bonus to all skills equal to their number of Hit Dice, if appropriate. For skill areas a creature is well-known for being good at, give them +3 skill ranks for that task. Examples would be wolves tracking, horses jumping obstacles, etc..

## FOES

Whenever you need NPC's, simply choose their profession—that's their class. Either **choose** their level, if it's important, or roll 1d4. If the roll comes up 4, roll d8. If that roll comes up 8, then roll d20 for level.\*

\* Also known as the "Red" Gurdy Pickens Rule.

If you don't have a preference for statistics, give them a 14 in whatever stat they're good at (if any) and 10 in any other stats. Give them 4 hp (+ STR bonus) per level and favored skill in whatever skills they need to do what they do.

Minor NPC's don't typically get special abilities or Second Winds, which is why it doesn't really matter what you call their profession.

More important NPC's can be created using one of the classes given earlier in this document. These NPC's usually get class abilities and the ability to use Second Wind.

*Example: The players run across a band of miners in the wilderness. The miners have a few guards with them and they're being led by "Smiling" Sam Whitmore, the lyingest conman west of the*

*Mississippi.*

*The GM decides to roll 3d6 for the number of miners—there's 12 miners in total. Rolling a d4 for the average level of miners, he comes up 1. A typical miner will be Str 14, Dex 10, Mind 10, have 6 hp and +4 in Physical (level +3). All other skills will be at +1.*

*The guards, he decides, will be Desperadoes. The d4 comes up 4. He does **not** roll again since that's already plenty tough—the Desperadoes are now all 4th level. He creates them the same way normal player characters would be, assigning them separate nationalities and everything, since they're supposed to be a challenge. There will be exactly as many guards present as needed to make the encounter challenging.*

*Smiling Sam himself will be a higher level character, Grifter class, probably a level or two greater than the player characters. He'll have a nationality, the ability to use Second Wind and will probably sneak off before the players can capture him, if they're not careful.*