VIKING DEATH SQUAD

Hacker's Core

Core Rules for Homebrewers

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Introduction

This document gives you the rules core that makes Viking Death Squad tick, but generalized to use in any setting. Master the core rules, then create your own Character Types, Skills, Gear, and Enemies to fit.

To get started, you'll need a mastery of the system, so let's jump right in to what makes this RPG what it is.

The Rolls

To play Viking Death Squad, you'll need a set of six-sided dice. Dice are indicated throughout this book with a capital D. 4D means four six-sided dice and so on.

Part of the game is describing scenes, saying things in character, or asking key questions. There are no rules to govern this part of role playing. Just keep moving around the table as the story unfolds.

When things get dangerous, or you're trying something with an uncertain outcome, or enemies come flying out of nowhere, it's time for the dice to get rollin'. Your character's stats and skills, modified by gear and other conditions, will determine how many D6's you'll roll. What you're up against will determine the number you're aiming to beat.

TEST: The GM will roll for how hard an obstacle or task is. Roll with the stat called for, meet or beat the GM to succeed!

ATTACK: When you attack a foe, roll with your POWER or AIM stat, plus any dice from gear or circumstances. Meet or beat the enemy's SPEED roll to succeed!

REACTION: When you are attacked, or the environment explodes with hazards, you'll roll the stat called for to avoid getting hit, poisoned, or blown to bits!

SKILL: Using SKILLS doesn't require a roll target. You simply roll the number of dice in a SKILL being used, and gain effects based on 4's, 5's, or 6's rolled, with some special cases to make things interesting

Example Tests

All through play, the GM will be rolling to determine your roll target. The GM chooses what to roll based on these simple categories.

Easy	**2D**
Average	**3D**
Difficult	**4D**
Heroic	**5D**
Amazing	**6D**

Let's say you spot a fissure ahead and want to leap across to escape enemies. The GM will think a moment, choose a difficulty, and roll. "This chasm isn't very wide, I'll call it 2D. Here's my roll: 9." Now, you'll be rolling your SPEED, hoping to meet or beat a 9.

This loop will happen many times during a session. After a few TESTS and ATTACKS, it will be second nature to player and GM alike.

Reactions

Reactions will occur when hazards or special events are trying to harm you and your allies. *"React with your SPEED!"* or *"Roll your GUTS to shake off the cold!"* Monster stats and a GM's sense of difficulty will determine what you need to meet/beat to succeed when reacting.

Explosions or evading fire	**SPEED**
Poison, cold, or smoke	**GUTS**
Mind control or fear	**WITS**
Being knocked or shoved	**POWER**

Skills

Characters can become specialized by choosing SKILLS that emphasize or reinforce the setting you're creating. Some skills may use 6's rolled, others may use 4's, 5's, or 6's. Still others may substitute for a TEST or REACTION roll.

All good homebrews have a tantalizing set of SKILLS for players to see possibility and potential strategy in their choices. Several examples are provided below to get you started, but first, let's cover more about the nuts and bolts of play.

Turns

A turn is that moment when the GM looks your way, and it's time to shine. Here are the three most common things done by heroes every single turn, in any order.

SAY SOME LINES: Role playing is all about saying cool stuff under fire, taunting enemies, proclaiming blood and justice, or letting your allies know how deep your bond really goes. Don't be shy, go big.

MAKE A ROLL: Whether you're using your training as a codetalker to decipher cryptic runes, smashing the metal skull of a Borg, or piloting a hover truck across the wasteland, you'll be rolling dice.

MOVE: In every situation, where you are is critical to survival. You might be standing too close to a magma vent, out of reach of a grapple chain, or too far from a coal demon to attack. In any given turn, you can move AND make a roll.

All of VDS play takes place in turns. Your GM will guide things along, calling out each player and making their own rolls. Be ready when your turn comes around!

Movement and Distance

VDS doesn't measure distance in grids or feet. There is simply arm's length, ranged, and out of reach.

ARM'S LENGTH: The area directly around you. Also called 'melee.'

RANGED : The area just beyond where you are, up to a 'bowshot' away. The distance guns are useful.

OUT OF REACH: An area further than you can throw a rock. Approaching enemies come from this area as they rush in.

On your turn, you can move from one of these areas to another before or after making a roll.

For example, if Olaf needs to dash to the grapple chain to escape, but it is out of reach, he uses his first turn to move toward it. Now the chain is his new 'ranged' distance, so he uses his next turn to get to arm's length.

Alternatively, heroes can forego making a roll on their turn to move TWO range areas in a dash.

Battle Order

Every encounter in VDS follows the same basic sequence until one side is destroyed, retreats, or surrenders. It all starts with who gets the jump on who.

1: ROLL SPEED

All heroes and enemies roll SPEED. This roll serves as their to-hit value for the encounter AND determines turn order. Surprise factors may offer advantages on this roll.

2: TAKE TURNS IN ORDER

Take turns in the order of highest to lowest SPEED. The GM may combine some enemies into a single SPEED. Continue this way until the battle is resolved.

Boosting SPEED Rolls

Gaining surprise on the enemy is crucial, as going first can lead to a decisive early victory. A few factors go into how many dice are granted for surprise.

AMBUSH: If an ambush is a possibility, the group being ambushed rolls its best WITS roll against the ambusher's best SPEED roll. If the WITS roll fails, ambushers gain +2D SPEED.

CONDITIONS: Nothing is more important to opening a battle than positioning and situational tactics. Use the table below.

Attacking from Concealment	+3D
High Ground	+2D
Fight from Cover	+1D
In Pursuit	-1D
Being Pursued	-2D

As you begin playtesting the VDS rules core, you may want to experiment with new ideas to create variation in turn order, SPEED, or surprise factors. You could rule that heroes and enemies must alternate turns, create special skills to suppress enemy ambushes, or even (more radically) decouple turn order and to-hit components of the SPEED roll that kicks of an encounter.

The key is seeing *through* the mechanics to the game you're dreaming up, and get your own sense of perfection to things as you create. Roll solo to test things out, and never be afraid to hack!

Armor is Life

Most tabletop games use hit points. Not here.

If you are hit by any harmful force with no armor to protect you, you are dead.

Combat in VDS is all about destroying armor. A heal in VDS isn't possible, but armor can be repaired, replaced, or even built on the spot with salvaged materials. Stockpile it, look for it, and pray you can keep it intact.

It's a Hit!

VDS battles hinge on hits. Simply use POWER or AIM to overcome a target's SPEED roll with weaponry, and you've scored a hit. The victim marks 1 hit on 1 piece of armor. The best piece of armor worn is hit first.

If your target has no armor, your hit is a kill! Fire away!

Rule of Three

All armor in VDS has 3 hits. It will be smashed to bits after 3 hits.

You'll want to stockpile armor, but your total inventory is limited to 10 total items and you can only wear 4 armor pieces at a time. Don't get hit!

Going Critical

Any time your roll is 12 or more beyond the roll target, you've scored a critical success.

A few cool things occur on every critical success.

Your roll achieves its maximum narrative effect.

If attacking, destroy 1 armor completely!

Take another turn instantly.

If using a skill, mark 2 bubbles to improve, instead of 1.

Pushing Gear

All gear in VDS has three hits. Once the third hit is crossed off, the gear is destroyed. This doesn't mean a gun is only fired three times! *Normal use does not expend hits.*

Mark off 1 hit when gear is damaged OR *PUSHED* beyond its normal limits

Pushing your gear is a wide open way to negotiate with the GM for more dice. It begins with a question, a call by the GM, and some amplification of your upcoming roll. Here are a few common examples.

- Add a die to a roll
- Hit more than one foe with an attack
- Reduce the target number of a test
- Achieve unlikely narrative effect
- Attempt to destroy armor instantly without a critical

Skill or Stat?

How many dice will you roll? That depends on what skill or stat is linked to the task or effect you're trying to achieve. Your character will have different amounts of dice in different skills and stats. Here are the basics.

Melee attacks: Roll your POWER to use melee weapons.

Ranged attacks: Roll AIM to shoot ranged weapons.

Getting info: Roll WITS to scout, decipher, or investigate.

Acrobatic feats: SPEED is used for dashes or feats of agility.

Your special moves: Your SKILLS are what make you stand out. Roll skills to perform your specific specialties.

Recovering Resolve

There is only 1 stat that drains and refills over time: RESOLVE. This is a pool of dice players can use to boost their rolls, representing their willpower or bursts of strain.

Regain all spent RESOLVE dice when you rest in a safe place for an hour or more.

Create a Character

Get a clear character concept in mind or on paper. You may not know the details, but you know the spirit of the character, and your unique role in the team. It's time for the nuts and bolts steps to build it in game terms.

1: ASSIGN STATS

All heroes have six core stats. When you create a character, you have 4 dice to distribute into the 6 stats in any array you choose. All start with 1D free.

Minimum (1D): All stats have a 1D base for free. This is normal minimum ability. So if you place 2D into a stat you will have a 3D roll, and so on.

Skilled (2D): Famous athletes, rock stars or ground breaking mathematicians would operate at this level. Amazing for normal folk, but minimally impressive for a hero.

Expert (3D): This is where heroes leave others behind. You are faster, stronger, tougher than almost anyone around.

Master (4D): This level is the stuff of legend. A master of GUTS, for example, could drink an entire cantina dry before falling into his soup. Supreme ability.

POWER: Roll to hit a target with fists or melee weapons. Roll to lift, bend, smash or hold fast against physical objects.

AIM: Roll to use ranged weapons, throw things, or operate ship weaponry.

SPEED: Roll to gain surprise or evade explosions. Also serves as your to-hit roll and turn order value in combat.

WITS: Roll to discern information, scout the distance, find clues, locate secrets or out-think foes. No stat is as versatile as this.

GUTS: Roll to resist poison, the elements, shock, fear or stun effects.

RESOLVE: Resolve is a pool of dice you can use on any roll at any time as a boost. Then, when you rest in safety for an hour or more, the RESOLVE pool refills. You can also earn RESOLVE dice with skills or as GM award for cool play.

2: CHOOSE TYPE. Character types are one of the most effective ways to create a homebrew setting with a rules core. They give players a sense of place, of theme, and how they fit into that theme. Offer players 2-5 types as a general rule, following the classic character types from your unique experience. As the homebrew creator, here are the guidelines to create each type:

- **Grant 2 +1D stat bonuses**
- **Grant 1 special skill**
- **Grant 5D to split among any 1-3 skills chosen**
- **Grant 5 pieces of gear**
- **Inflict 1 limitation**
- **Offer 0-8 roles within type, with various bonuses**

3: WRITE DOWN BACKGROUND. No rules needed here, just a brief explanation of who or what the character is or came from. For bonus effectiveness, offer players potential areas of origin, themes, or roll tables to create small stories.

4: CHOOSE SKILLS. Choose a set of skills that makes the most of all your previous decisions. See 'Creating Skills' for more detail as the homebrewer here.

5: CHOOSE YOUR GEAR. Choose a set of starting equipment to accent your concept. See 'Creating Gear' for more detail as the creator, making gear exciting for players.

Ever Stronger

VDS does not use levels or experience points to progress its characters. Instead, you will steadily grow in RESOLVE and skill quality over time.

For each session completed, all characters gain +1D RESOLVE and RESOLVE is refilled. This is a permanent upgrade.

Skills are increased through practice. Each time you use a skill in play with a successful roll, mark a bubble of improvement on that skill.

After 5 successful uses of any one skill, gain 1D. This 1D can be added to the skill used, or placed into a brand new skill. Once the die is gained, clear the uses and start again.

Creating Skills

It can be a challenge as you homebrew or convert a setting to a new system. Stay loose, follow your nose, and think like a kid! Skills in VDS are built on 1 of 4 possible roll styles, all of which require no target from the GM. With each skill you offer players, aim to reinforce or emphasize elements of your world concept or intended tone.

FOR EACH 6

Players roll skill dice and hope for as many 6's as possible. 6's are rare, so this type of skill is lower power overall. Since more than one 6 can be rolled, these kinds of skills need multiple outputs. Examples below:

• Grant 1D per 6 to a future roll or ally roll
• Conjure or create armor or other items
• Conjure or create creatures or minions

FOR EACH 4, 5, OR 6

Like the skill type above, but far more powerful and likely to deliver its effect, this skill also results in multiple outputs. Examples here:

• Repair hits to armor
• Learn facts or truths from hidden sources
• Grant 1D to more than 1 ally
• Recover RESOLVE dice

ROLL AT LEAST ONE 6

A single-output skill that only needs one 6 to take effect. Examples of 'single-output' are listed here:

• Destroy a piece of armor instantly
• Destroy a foe
• Conjure or create an item or entity
• Bypass a test, attack, or reaction roll with success
• Reduce a GM target by 1D

SUBSTITUTE A STAT OR SPECIFIC ROLL

These special skills replace very specific kinds of tests, attacks, or reactions by using the skill dice instead of stat dice. Take care here, as this tinkers with the core of things. Examples listed here:

• Attack with instant armor destruction
• Earn a bonus roll with a success
• Earn bonus effect on success such as repair or RESOLVE
• Confuse or stun foes
• Force a re-roll of SPEED

Creating Gear

All the basic gear in your setting should be pretty easy to list. Each item has 3 hits to destroy, and no specific or extra features besides being designated as a ranged weapon, melee weapon, armor, or other item type. Be intuitive. Visualize your world and list the objects you see to get moving. Then, to create specialized gear, consider the 4 extra features VDS uses.

FEATURE ONLY 1 HIT

To make more disposable or 'low level' gear like leather or worn-out items, just limit them to a single hit. This is a perfect way to make a VDS 'goblin' type foe. Examples of 1 hit themes in gear:

• Minion or 'mook' level baddies have 1-hit armor, if any
• Explosives or ablative armor is disposable
• Rotten or aged items

TRIGGER A SPECIAL EFFECT

List a condition and an effect to create more powerful, valuable, enchanted, or high tech items. A few ideas:

• Grant an additional attack or use of the item
• Refill RESOLVE on critical or kill
• Bypass or destroy armor
• Harvest or steal items from foes
• Activate additional movement or evasion

FEATURE AN IMMUNITY

Armor gets cool when it ignores certain kinds of effects. This can feel weird on gear besides armor, but works with jewelry and talisman-type items. Examples:

• Ignore very specific types of attacks entirely
• Only take a hit on a critical
• Protect from falling or collateral damage

### INCLUDE A SPECIAL PUSH FEATURE

Pushing gear means inflicting a hit on it to achieve beyond-ordinary effects like extra hits, more dice on the attack roll, or hitting multiple foes. Bend this rule by making a very special effect when high value gear is pushed. Even list 'destroy this item' as a supreme push mechanic. Examples of this open-ended system here:

• Hit all visible foes
• Refill all ally RESOLVE
• Repair all armor or allied armor

Gear Roll Table

Simple roll-to-select tables can be really handy for equipment... from basic weapons and armor to top end items. This sheet can be helpful to keep such a table organized and usable at the table.
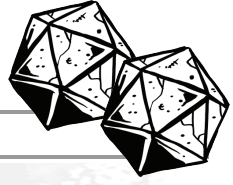
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