

Optional Equipment

All you *need* to play the Marvel Superheroes Adventure Game: SAGA Rules is the Game Book (it contains the rules), the Roster Sheets for the Characters you wish to play, and the 96-card Fate Deck. However, there are some optional pieces of equipment that I find helpful. The vast majority of these items can be found around the house, especially if you are an avid gamer. Some of the more extravagant pieces can be quite expensive, but there is usually a cheaper alternative to these things. Obviously, the game is set up to work without these things, so many items are simply to use with house rules, but some others are still useful, even with the core rules only.

Dice: Most people will have at least a few standard six-sided dice (d6) in their homes. Gamers (especially D&D Gamers) will probably have a few fancier types of dice - such as d4, d8, d10, and d20 – and will be familiar with the shorthand abbreviations for these types of dice. The lowercase d stands for “dice,” the number after the “d” stands for how many sides the dice has. If there is a number before the “d” it stands for the number of that type of dice you will need. So, for example, 1d6 is one six-sided dice, while 2d4 stands for two four-sided dice.

This game was specifically designed to be “diceless,” but there are some things that dice are very good for, even within the “diceless” environment. A Narrator may wish to have Aura Duration effects last for a number of exchanges equal to a random dice roll instead of using card draws, for example. If you have a complete set of dice (2d4, 4d6, 1d8, 2d10, 1d12, and 1d20) from another game, I recommend using that, if not, you can make do with 4d6. Narrators should be aware of what number combinations various die rolls can net; for example 1d8 is slightly different from 2d4. While both have 8 total sides, 1d8 can be any number from 1-8, but 2d4 can be any number from 2-8 (because each of the two dice will be a number from 1 to 4).

Game Board: I have a playmat that I also use with Dungeons & Dragons games. It is, in essence, a large piece of graph paper with 1-inch squares in a grid pattern on it. I have laminated it for durability, but this also has the neat side effect of making it “writable.” Using wet erase markers (the type for overhead projectors) you can draw or write directly onto the playmat and then erase it with a wet tissue. As an added plus, if you spill your soda on it, you won’t ruin your playmat. If you do not have or cannot afford a playmat, you can create one by drawing squares onto a sufficiently large piece of “butcher’s paper” or by taping or gluing printed pieces of computer paper together to form the grid. Not as fancy, maybe, but just as functional, especially when laminated (most playmats can be laminated at your local office supplies store for under \$5). You can either create paper scenery or draw the scenery onto the grid with wet-erase markers.

Grids are very useful for remembering and calculating distances, such as striking distance and firing distance. It also helps to give you a better idea of what kind of cover and obstacles (trees, cars, civilians, buildings, etc.) are between an attacker and defender, making for a more realistic play environment. You will need some kind of tokens to represent the Characters (see Tokens for more details). Players move these tokens as if they were the Character’s body.

I calculate each 1-inch square as about 5 feet. This makes Striking Distance within one square, Firing Distance within 4 squares, and beyond that is Visual Distance. You may, at your discretion, reincorporate the distancing method of the original Marvel Superheroes game (often called “Classic” these days) but be forewarned that this will take a lot of work on the Narrator’s part.

Gaming Cards: By Gaming Cards I mean cards from Collectible Card Games (CCGs) or Trading Card Games (TCGs). CCGs/TCGs are such games as the Harry Potter TCG, the Pokemon CCG, and probably the oldest and most famous CCG of all, Magic: The Gathering. There are dozens (if not hundreds) of other CCGs out there. Constructing a deck of cards for a SAGA game is a bit different from constructing a deck for the game itself, but it’s not difficult. You’ll want to leave out whatever energy sources the game uses and include only the creature-type cards for Image Summoning.

To some people, a deck of gaming cards is a mild amusement; a great way to kill half an hour. In the hands of an Image Summoning hero, such decks are deadly; a great way to kill anyone who gets in your way. Plus, they make a great theme for a hero. The idea of a character carrying around a deck of such cards because he can bring to life the pictures (and/or text) is quite intriguing. It could turn a hero that looks wimpy into a character that looks incredible. Beating the villain with a weapon is one thing. Beating the villain with a *game* is quite another. For more details, see the document entitled “CCG Conversions” – available for download from my website.

Music: Music can really set the mood for your gaming sessions. Various genres have their pros and cons, but ultimately you have to choose what’s right for you. Whatever you choose, it’s important to play it at an appropriate volume. If you play it too softly to hear, then you might as well not play it at all, but if you play it too loudly, you won’t be able to hear the gaming going on. Remember, gaming means that players are talking; describing their actions, their reactions, and maybe some out of character talking, too. I find it best to play it just loud enough to hear, so that it is in the background and not actively playing for the players’ attention. If you aren’t sure what I mean, aim for the low side of medium volume and adjust it according to your needs. If you can’t hear your players well over the music, you’ll need to lower the volume.

For my D&D sessions, I like to run earthy music; like maybe something tribal, Celtic & Irish music, Choral hymns, or those “Sounds of Nature” type ambient sounds CDs (there are some that sound like a rainstorm, a rainforest, an underwater lagoon, a running stream, etc). I try to avoid “unnatural” sounds like synthesizers, sirens, booming bass, etc.

For MSHAG sessions, there really isn’t too much of a limit on what works and what doesn’t. Soundtrack Albums from “superhero” movies (Spider-Man, Daredevil, Hulk, etc.) obviously work quite well. I also like fast, upbeat songs during the action scenes; trance and dance work well during that type of exchange. If there is going to be a lot of characterization and dialogue, then I tend to stray away from music with lyrics, as it can distract from the talking of the players. The instrumental tracks from soundtracks work well there. You don’t have to make music match the game at all, either; you can just play popular songs that you think the players would like. If you have the right equipment, you can make up your own mix CD for each gaming session or just one for all of them.

Playing Cards: A deck of playing cards can be used for various game purposes. The most common one is to assign a value to each card and have a player draw randomly from the deck to use their power. This works best with Image Summoning, Teleportation (Summoning), and Reality Warping but can be used for any purpose you can think of.

You could remove the face cards and have the player draw for “aura duration” – making the duration last for a number of exchanges equal to the numerical value of the card. This gives aura-duration-reliant heroes a bit more of an edge in using their powers. Rather than having powers just randomly shut off without warning during the exchange of a negative aura Narrator draw, the character knows how long he has. This may seem illogical, but think of it as the hero feeling the power “wearing off” and it won’t seem so bad.

You could take *only* the face cards (and maybe jokers) and have the player draw from the smaller deck to use Image Summoning. Using the Ace, King, Queen, and Jack as the creatures to be summoned would work well as a character theme; you could have each summoned character have different stats for variety. If you wanted the power to sometimes not work, you could mix in some or all of the numbered cards and have the power fail on non-face cards.

Tokens: I mentioned in the Game Board section that you would need Tokens to represent the characters. Tokens can be pretty much anything, but you should try to find unique items or else find a way to make objects identifiable from each other. Here are a few kinds of tokens you can use.

Die-Cast Figurines: Naturally, the way that works best is usually the most expensive. Die-Cast pewter or plastic figurines work best, and you’ll want them in sizes of roughly 15-30mm, with the larger figures representing the larger characters and the smaller sizes representing heroes that are small or can shrink. 15mm and 25mm are the most common sizes, followed by 10mm and 28mm. HeroClix figurines work especially well, since they are the right size and more often than not are the specific Marvel/DC heroes you want rather than a generic hero you can try to make look like a recognized character. They are also pre-painted, pre-assembled and are a game in and of themselves, making the purchase price more worth it. The downside to that is that HeroClix figurines are pretty expensive. They run around \$1 per figure - sold in packs of various sizes from 4 all the way up to 48 figures - and that’s one of the better bargains for pewter figures.

You can find “generic” figurines from various companies across the Internet (or if you’re lucky, the local hobby shop); figures from the fantasy, sci-fi, action, or hero genres usually work best. Anyway, it shouldn’t be too hard to find what you’re looking for, given that you have a large enough budget (even the “cheap” pewter figures are \$2-\$3 each, with most of them in the \$3+ range). These are usually not painted, allowing you to give your homemade heroes unique costumes and allowing you to really create and customize the hero you want. The bad side of these figures is that they are even more expensive than the HeroClix figures. Painting can also be a problem unless you are already a miniatures hobbyist.

Ah-ha! Before you get to thinking that miniatures are all insanely expensive, I have a bargain to share with you. I find that the little plastic bags of “army men” that you can find at \$1 type stores (like Deals, \$1 Shop, Dollar Tree, Dollar General, etc.) work well

for henchmen, law enforcement agents (FBI, CIA, S.H.I.E.L.D.), and (duh) actual soldiers. These figures are the right size and it's easy to clip or file off unwanted parts with clippers or a fingernail file. Then just paint them to get the look you want. Plus, you can get anywhere from 25-100 figures for \$1. You can also find buckets of varying sizes of this type of "army men" for various prices in the toy section of some discount chains (like Wal-Mart). Heck, even most grocery stores in my area carry them, but they are more expensive there than at the other types of stores. Look around for different brands to get different looks and poses.

Paper Figures: The second best method (or the best for those on a budget) is to use "paper figures." Paper figures are cheap, easy, and effective. Paper figures use a prefabricated template to create a sheet of paper figures. You cut them out, fold them into a triangle (so that they are self-standing) and then fasten the bottom flaps in place. These not only look good, but also are essentially free, since you probably already have paper, tape, and scissors at home. The easiest way to get the pictures onto the paper is to use a computer graphics program to fill in the template and print it out, but you could also draw directly onto the paper if you don't have a printer. These give you the best of both worlds; a large, easily visible surface, plus a small base that fits within the game board's graph. And of course, you can always scale them up or down to make them suit your wants or needs. At 1 inch tall by ½ inch wide (roughly the same scale as the pewter figures), you can fit 36 of them on one letter-size page. Even at 3 inches tall by 1 inch wide (making them easier to see, but still fitting within a single square of the grid), you can fit 12 figures per page. You can print out as many as you want, so accidentally destroying one doesn't really matter. Minions can be made just as cheaply and easily as major heroes, so building the villain's army won't break the bank.

All you need to make a paper figure is a suitable picture, a template, a computer with paint software, and a printer (after printing you will need scissors and tape or paper clips). If you do not have or cannot make a suitable template, then you can find one online at various sites. Check the Files section of my online group, the Downloads section of my website, or just e-mail me and I'll send you a copy of the one(s) I have. If you aren't that great at drawing (I count myself among this group) then there is a piece of software that you should not be without. It's called the Hero Machine and it will become your best friend. It allows you to quickly create heroes that look better than the ones you draw on your own. If you're really, really desperate you can skip the pictures and simply print the character's name in place of the picture.

You can use cardstock (110#) instead of plain paper if you wish. This makes the figures sturdier, but also more expensive. If you have problems getting your figures to stand up without falling over or getting moved when it isn't supposed to, try taping a penny or nickel to the inside of the base; that should weight it down enough that it only moves when you intend to. If you want to make paper figures without tape, you can cut opposing slits into the base so that the paper holds itself together. If you have any handy, using one or two paper clips will both hold it together and weight it down. The tapeless method allows you to unfold your figures and store them flat; that way they all fit into an envelope for easy storage. Any way you slice it, paper figures are cheap and effective. Using plain paper and tape, paper figures cost less than a penny each, and even using card stock and paper clips, you can create paper figures for less than a dime each.

Note: For a more detailed description on paper figures and how to make them, please see the document entitled “Paper Figures” – also available for download on my site.

Drawer Junk: Some common household junk can be used as substitutes as well. I call it “drawer junk” because it’s the kind of stuff you can probably find sitting in the bottom of an old drawer (or as we call it, “the junk drawer”). Old batteries, odd buttons, pennies, dice, etc. can be used to represent characters. So long as the stuff isn’t much larger than a quarter, it should work fine. You could even use index cards or scrap paper cut into 1-inch squares with the character’s name written on it. If you are using pennies, batteries, or buttons that are identical, you can make them easily identifiable by adding different colors to them; a drop of paint or nail polish works well for this purpose. Just be sure to use colors that are very different, such as red, green, and blue; using three shades of blue will get confusing unless they are three very different shades.

Action Figures: Some people favor action figures, but I actually don’t care for them. The main problem that I have with them is their size: they’re too darned big. Action figures come in three main sizes: 3.75 inches, 5.5 inches, and 12 inches. Each size has its advantages and disadvantages. Another problem I have with them is the cost: most of them are even more expensive than pewter miniatures (around \$5 or more per figure – ouch!). And if that weren’t bad enough, you’ll probably have availability issues with all but the most popular characters. Don’t even think about finding figures for extremely new, short-lived, obscure, or supporting characters; you won’t find them.

One possible use for action figures (if you have them) is to have a larger-scale figure to show everyone what your character looks like, but to use something else to represent your hero on the board. So, as a player running Cyclops, you might have a Cyclops action figure in front of you (maybe next to your hero sheet) so that everyone can see in full 3-D what you look like. However, on the grid map, you would actually use a 1-inch paper figure or some other in-scale token. I recommend against purchasing figures for this purpose, since printing a full-size picture of the character would be much cheaper and just about as effective.

The 3.75-inch figures are about the size of the original G.I. Joe figures; you know, the ones with bendable limbs that have bodies held together with a tiny rubber band. You can find these G.I. Joe figures (or their generic equivalent) or even superhero action figures (like Toy Biz action figures) at most toy stores (Toys’R’Us, Kay Bee), discount stores (\$1 shops), or the toy department of large chains (Wal-Mart, Kmart). Expect to pay about \$1 for 1-3 generic figures or upwards of \$3-\$5 each for name brand Superheroes and G.I. Joe figures. These figures offer more detail and flexibility than the 28mm cast figures, but are much larger. That means that you may have to change the scaling of your graph to match it. You’ll want to use squares of roughly 4 inches instead of 1 inch. (This may sound like a small change, but it expands “firing distance” from 4 inches to 16 inches.)

The 5.5-inch figures are the ones that most kids these days are probably more familiar with. I believe G.I. Joes have switched to this larger size, and this is also the size of most major hero figures being made today (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, X-Men, Batman, Justice League, etc.). The larger size makes them more realistic, with better details and more durability, but it also makes them five times larger than the size of the figures we would ideally want (22mm figures are about 1 inch tall). You would need to make each

square on your grid 5 inches (instead of 1) and as you can tell, this eats up playing surface quickly. Even large tables would have trouble accommodating Firing Distance, so you might have to play on the floor (and that presents a whole new set of problems).

The 12-inch figures are absolutely gigantic. To keep in scale, you'd have to use a whole room at the very least, and probably even a space in the backyard to really have enough room. This makes using a grid and scenery even tougher (and frankly, the whole point of using figures is to make things easier). To top it all off, you probably won't find this size of figure for less than \$10 each – that makes it \$50+ just to buy a small line-up for your favorite team (the Avengers carry an active roster of 6, while the X-Men teams average 7 members). Besides, it totally looks like you're playing with dolls. Not cool. Not cool at all. ;-)

Scavenged Pieces: Sometimes you can raid the game cabinet to get pieces from other games. I try to avoid taking pieces from games that are all there, but as long as you put them back, you'll be fine. A lot of games have pieces or tokens that are ideal for this purpose (games like Monopoly and Sorry come to mind). You can also use poker chips as tokens. Any game that has plastic pieces that you move around the board will suffice.

If I decide that I don't want a game, I raid through the pieces to see if there is something I can salvage before throwing it out; tokens, dice, etc. can be used for other purposes, so I save them. (Heck, I have even saved the game boards to make my own homemade games, but that's another story.) If you start doing this, you can have a nice collection of odds and ends from different games to use in your tabletop gaming.

If you haven't started doing this yet, you can borrow pieces from your current games or go shopping. Garage sales are excellent places to look for insanely cheap board games. Even if pieces are missing, you can probably find some usable pieces in it (and if there are missing pieces, it's bound to be cheap). If your family is anything like mine, then you've probably mixed and matched pieces from two copies of a game to get one game that's all there. I call this making a "Frankenstein" copy but most people just call it being cheap. Whatever you call it, it works, but more importantly it probably leaves you with extra pieces. If there are spare parts left over after making the complete set, check to see if there is anything you can use elsewhere.