

RPG REVIEW



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THE CHAOSIUM

Down Under After BRP Designer Notes

- *Ferals & Survivors: Post-collapse Urban Bushland NPCs for Down Under After*
- *RuneQuest Downtime Training Optimization ... AND MORE!*

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Administrivia

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RPG Review Policy on “Artificial Intelligence”

At RPG Review, we do not wish to shut down creative explorations of so-called AI. For example, we see scope for reviews of GPT game masters, or character art generators for your private games, or examples of *interesting* augmentation of human creative output with AI “collaboration”. Such reviews might, by their very nature, need to include some example AI output.

At the same time, we take a hard line against diluting or undermining valuable human contributions with slop. This is a stance that we consider to be both ethically and aesthetically more pleasing than any alternative, and we will vigorously defend it from slop trolling.

As such, all contributors who use AI in their work must provide a disclosure stating how and why AI was used. The editor reserves the right to decline or prune content in which the use of AI seems gratuitous. In cases where we do permit some use of AI, we will provide a clear warning for reader discretion.

If you have an idea for a contribution that you believe requires the use of AI, you are encouraged to contact the editor early, as a late rejection may offend.

Editorial and Cooperative News

Welcome to another issue of RPG Review, now into its 17th year. If you notice the latest issue was released a little slower than normal, please blame/forgive the new editor Tim Rice, who is still learning the ropes. That said, Tim brings twenty years of expertise in the L^AT_EX typesetting system and we hope you enjoy the new look!

For 2025, we want to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Chaosium Inc. Yes, it was in 1975 that the esteemed late Greg Stafford established what he referred to as The Chaosium, which soon gave rise to the *RuneQuest* roleplaying game in collaboration with Steve Perrin. With Lynn Willis, the *RuneQuest* rules were then distilled into the *Basic Role-Playing* system, whence a whole lineage of games including *Call of Cthulhu*, *Hawkmoon*, *Stormbringer*, *Nephilim*, and *ElfQuest*.

In keeping with the anniversary, the theme of this issue will be anything related to Chaosium Inc., *RuneQuest*, Glorantha, or the *Basic Role-Playing (BRP)* system (or any of its descendants). The prolific Karl Brown has submitted contributions related to *Down Under After*, including designer notes, and a suite of post-apocalyptic urban-bushland NPCs. Watch out for the **feral teacher**, the very concept of which cost the new editor some Sanity points! New contributor Devin Cutler has provided an overview of his Therra Roleplaying Game, which uses stakes to ratchet up the tension in BRP. Michael Cole has provided a playtested character design, background and character sheet for *RuneQuest: Roleplaying in Glorantha*. Tim Rice continues a past theme of analysing roleplaying games from a mathematical perspective with a look at the downtime training rules from *RuneQuest 3rd Edition*. Lev offers various contributions including a houserule which makes better use of the APP stat by reframing it as (ap)perception, as well as a fascinating history and review of *ElfQuest*. Finally, Lev and Tim review a couple of adventures for *Call of Cthulhu 7E*.

The cover art for this issue is *The King in Yellow* by Earl Geier. It was created in 1989 or 1990 for the *Call of Cthulhu* supplement *Fatal Experiments* by Chaosium.

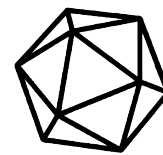
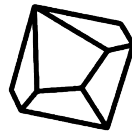
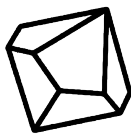
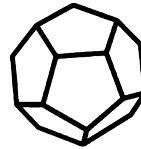
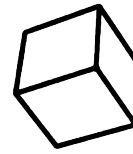
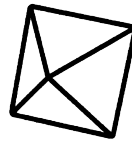
For the next issue in 2026, we're now seeking contributions for "the Wildcard Edition" in celebration of the 10th anniversaries of the *RPG Review* Cooperative. We'll revisit past editions, and are currently seeking nominations for best or most controversial historical article, as well as any new contributions that reuse any of the past themes.

Timothy Rice
editor@rpgreview.net



Lev Lafayette with Michael O'Brien, Vice President of Chaosium

RPG Review Cooperative



Other Cooperative News

Gamers for Isla Fundraiser

In October last year Isla Bell, a talented and prolific Melbourne artist, was tragically killed, shocking the community [1]. Isla was a local artist, gamer and environmental activist, known to many for her love of nature and through her support of local social justice projects with her art.

Following her death, street murals across Melbourne have been dedicated to her, and friends have left red and orange ribbons in public places to memorialise her. 30 of last year's RMIT art students turned their graduate showcase into a tribute to her, covering or removing their work in protest. This was a powerful show of support for women affected by violence and the 85 women in Australia killed in 2024.

In response to Isla's death, her family established The Isla Bell Charitable Fund in her honour to support young women artists [2]. Lev Lafayette, RPG Review Cooperative president, organised a fundraising campaign to support this. In the lead up to Conquest, Easter 2025, Lev worked tirelessly to promote this amongst his many networks for people to donate second hand RPG books to be sold off on our online store. This culminated over Easter weekend at Conquest with many of our members donating books for sale at the booth adding further to the fund. Kieran Dionysus, Isla's uncle and a fonder of the fund attended Conquest, paid tribute to Isla and gave thanks for the generosity the community had shown [3].

In total to date this campaign has raised \$15,689 for The Isla Bell Charitable Fund. Donations can still be given directly to the fund by following the Raisely link below.

Gendered violence is an epidemic in Australia but it is preventable. More information can be found at www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au.

- [1] Kristian Silva (2024) *A timeline of the Isla Bell murder investigation, as detailed in police court documents*, ABC News www.abc.net.au/news/2024-11-21/isla-bell-murder-investigation-police-court-documents/104628394
- [2] the-isla-bell-charitable-fund.raiselysite.com
- [3] www.facebook.com/reel/1249027360560160



Conquest Games Market 2025

On a wet August 30th a small crowd of soggy Melbournian gamers braved the weather to join us at Conquest's second Market Day. Numbers were down on the year before, most likely due to the weather. There was not much gaming this time, but we had plenty of good conversations over gaming history, swapping nostalgia-scented stories with other hobbyists, and educating the masses about the joys of RPG Review membership. As always our primary focus was helping shelf-space challenged members sell off their book collections.

Many thanks go to Karl, Liz, Lev and Rade for helping set up, pack down and generally operate the stall over the day.

Chaosium Con

About 250 people attended Chaosium Con Australia 2025 on 28–29 June, which was held at the Moonee Valley Racing Club. The RPG Review Cooperative was the only non-Chaosium sponsor of the convention. The evening before there was a screening of the cult film *The Call of Cthulhu* with a Q&A with the creators Andrew Leman and Sean Branney. The con proper offered stalls, panels, numerous Chaosium Games (RPGs and boardgames), and some RPGs by local creators. Among the stalls was the RPG Review second hand stall which sells books for members at no commission. One of the games on offer was *Down Under After*, a BRP-based game under development by member Karl David Brown. Another member, Liz, volunteered on the con's admin desk. The venue was comfortable with good acoustics so that GMs weren't shouting over each other to be heard. There was a separate room for panels. RPG sessions were 3 hours, long enough to teach rules and give players a complete adventure comfortably. However, there was a *Blood on the Clocktower* LARP event held in a permanent tented area which people complained was cold. The venue is to be demolished in the coming years so the 2026 con

will be held elsewhere. Other than this small grip affecting a minority of attendees, this was a small but well-run con. Definitely recommended if you are a fan of Chaosium's games

PAX AUS Tabletop

PAX AUS is a very large gaming convention covering games of all kinds video, card, board, and rpg. Here we discuss on the Australian RPG section. It was held October 10–12 at “Jeff’s Shed”, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. RPG Review did not have an official presence there. However, members Liz and Karl helped out with the Australian Roleplaying Community’s (ARC) PAX at the Table which offered RPG’s by Australian creators. Liz served on the admin table booking folks into games and Karl ran sessions of his *Down Under After* which was well received. ARC’s RPG sessions were a mere two hours long which is a challenge when you need to explain the rules and play a complete adventure. Pre-testing your offering for time is a must! The venue is a typical convention centre giant shed with concrete floors and poor acoustics. Tables were close together making GMs raise their voices and struggle to hear quieter players. However, the energy and enthusiasm of the players excited to be at PAX was great to GM with. For designers the ARC really is a community and it can be a great opportunity to talk show and glean some of the know-how needed to turn a manuscript into an actual book.

Missives from L-Space

The RPG Review library is a major membership services and now has 1087 items consisting of 878 games, 12 computer games, 189 magazines, and 8 fiction books. These have an estimated total value of \$20,806, and that’s probably a low-ball figure.

The list of library items is at the following URL:

docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NXHi1mKQJvfSysXiX3nFz3Oeousiwub9bOM_p7FkZ_c

Did you notice if that if you borrow just one or two items per annum you’ve made the value a life membership fee?

The library was first advertised as “coming soon” in the first issue of the newsletter *CruX Australi*, way back in 2016. At that stage, we acquired the old library from the Murdoch Alternative Reality Society (MARS), which was in operation from 1988 to roughly 2010. That accounted for some 280 items. This included many games from the 1970s and 1980s including early editions of Dungeons & Dragons, Rolemaster, Champions, and various BRP games.

The next big contribution was from Lachlan Smith, an active member of the Cooperative who unfortunately passed away in 2017. His collection of RPGs were donated to us, numbering some 216 items and, in doing so, the Lachlan Smith Memorial Wing of the library was established. Lachlan added a plentiful collection of Exalted, Rifts, and In Nomine.

Other significant donations have come from Lev Lafayette (146 items, including 95 magazines), Simon Stroud (79 items), Nicholas Moll (45 items, including a lot of D&D 4th edition), Andrew Pam (33 items), and Rade Vujcic (33 items), plus many others who have contributed to making the RPG Review Cooperative library one of the most extensive in the country.

The Library has recently moved from Pascoe Vale to a more conveniently located Southbank. Members can contact us if they require an item and come and pick up or we can post (at your expense).

Some new items that members may be interested include (take a deep breath):

Precognition, Overlight, Enter the Collection (Essence 20), *Knight, Make our own Heaven, Preparing for Paris, Prologue, Tahiti Clan Warfare, WRG Hordes of the Things, WRG De Bellis Multitudinis 300BC to 1500AD, WRG DBM Army Lists 500BC to 476AD, Beginners' Guide to Strategy Gaming* (new, unpunched), *Stranger Things Trump Quiz* (new), *Deck of Many Animated Spells Level 2 Vol2* (new), *Sidequest: 7th Sea* (new), *Garbage & Glory Trashrun, Level 1: Indie Anthology, Witch-Hunter: On Silver Wings, This is a Dark Ride, Plague, Unkindness, Zombies: A Hunter's Guide, Arzum Quickstart Guide, Avatar Legends: Rebels and Refugees, Shadow Scar Eyes in Darkness, Knight Hack: Medieval Warfare 1000 to 1400 AD, D20 Sword & Sorcery Relics & Rituals II* (hb, ll), *D20 Legacy of the Dragons* (Cook and Mearls), *D20 Liber Bestarius* (hb), *D20 Mindshadows, D20 Sanctuary* (no CD), *D20 En Route, D&D Midnight (Fury of Shadow: The Final Battle for Erethor (boxed) plus Minions of Shadow and Against the Shadow), Savage Worlds Deadlands Blood Drive* (hb), *Owl Hoot Trail* core rules, *Horror Recognition Guide (Hunter: The Vigil), Legions of Darkness (Kult), Everway Visionary Roleplaying and Spherewalker Sourcebook, RuneQuest II plus GMs screen* (2016 edition), *RuneQuest II Trollpak* (no box), *HeroQuest Roleplaying in Glorantha* (1st edition), *RuneQuest Clockwork and Cthulhu HeroQuest Glorantha* (hb), *RuneQuest III Elder Secrets* (boxed), *RuneQuest III Glorantha, RuneQuest III Gods of Glorantha* (boxed), *RuneQuest III The Haunted Ruins, Savage Worlds The Kerberos Club* core rules, *FATE The Kerberos Club* core rules, *Legacy The Engine of Life and Life Among the Ruins* (new, hb), *Broken Compass collection* (new, hb), *Broken Compass Adventure Journal, Broken Compass Season 1 Golden Age, Broken Compass Season 2 Jolly Roger, Broken Compass Season 3 Voyages Extraordinaires, Broken Compass Spinoff What If, Shadow, Sword, and Spell* basic rulebook, *Sol* core rules (Melbourne designers), *Aria: Canticle of the Monomyth* core rules, *Savage Worlds Science Fiction Companion, Torchbearer GMs Screen and 3 Player Decks* (new), *Conspiracy X Bodyguard of Lies Vol 2, Conspiracy X Bodyguard of Lies Vol 3, Transhuman Space Spacecraft of the Solar System, Exalted Storyteller's screen, 7th Sea GMs screen, The Key of Delhyread* (SLA Industries), *An Echo, Resounding (Labyrinth Lord), Red Tide (Labyrinth Lord), Servants of Gaius RPG* core rules, *Star*Drive: Klick Clack (Alternity), Gaslands: Post Apocalypse Vehicular Combat, Forbidden Kingdoms Master Codex* (hb), *Dungeonsque Player's Guide and Gamemaster's Guide, Strongholds and Followers* (hb, new), *The Walking Dead Dice Game: Don't Look Back.*

DOWN UNDER AFTER



Down Under After Designer's Notes

Karl David Brown of Coronoides Publishing

Welcome to the near-future urban bushland of Melbourne

Down Under After was my entry for Chaosium's BRP Challenge competition. While I didn't place in the competition, I'm continuing with the project. We have run sessions of the game at Chaosium Con Australia 2024 and 2025. We'll be running sessions at PAX AUS in Melbourne in October 2025.

The game is still in development and will be released in 2027. This is a preview of the project.

Elevator Pitch

Play humans, cockatoos, ravens, and rats hunting and scavenging among the eucalypts and skyscrapers of the urban bushland of Melbourne after civilisation's collapse.

Blurb

Melbourne Australia, 35 years from *today*, a sprawling urban bushland.

The tall colourful buildings are still intact except for broken shop-front windows. The parks and lawns are now forested. Where there were roads and paved areas now sway meadows of long grasses and wattle bushes.

Raise up your spear and stop-sign shield.

The civilisation that created our high technology has fallen. The age of the plough, spear, and shield has returned. Though sophisticated machines no longer function, simple durable objects once manufactured in vast quantities will provide for survivors for generations to come. Objects including cutlery, synthetic fibre clothes, hammers, crockery, shovels, and plasticware are constantly scrounged and traded.

Gather your raven, rat, and cockatoo friends.

The human population is about 1% of current levels. Older humans remember our civilisation at its peak and the skills to rebuild. The next generation grew up amidst chaos and knows how to survive. In small communities the remnant of humanity cooperates with ravens, cockatoos, and genetically modified rats to scavenge, hunt, and farm.

Your community needs you!

This is a game about hope, community, and ambition. Your multi-species band braves the urban bushland to find the resources to help your community thrive and survive.

5 things about this game.

1. **Civilisation has fallen.** Years long fracturing of international trust and environmental degradation destroyed critical infrastructure, caused civil unrest, and created an inability to deal with the Reaper Virus.
2. **No high technology.** In the Before nothing was built to last. Machines became dependent on the internet and then the cyberattacks brought them down. Disrupted international supply chains eroded manufacturing and maintenance. Decades later, there are no working cars, guns, computers, electric lights, phones, televisions, music players etc.
3. **Play humans, ravens, cockatoos, and genetically engineered rats.** Ravens and cockatoos are naturally intelligent birds, now they speak English. The rats are descendants of those who escaped or were released from labs.
4. **Animals** including cats, kangaroos, dog packs, possums, goats, parrots, mice, frogs, snakes, horses, even elephants dwell in the forest. In the bay seals and penguins thrive attracting great white sharks. Many animals are venomous including red back spiders, tiger snakes, and blue-ring octopuses.
5. **Colour.** The city is green with plants. Flocks of rainbow lorikeets are everywhere. The buildings have weather resistant paint, panels, massive street art, and signs. People wear brightly coloured scrounged synthetic fibres.

Tone

Down Under After is a game of survival, community, hope, and ambition after civilisation has fallen. Some of the characters have lived through the riots and disease of the Collapse. However, it need not be a grim game because there is hope and community. The setting has no supernatural powers or fantastic technology, but this does not mean this is an overly serious game, just one grounded in a plausible reality. Sure, you can play a cockatoo, but this is not a comedy game either. The non-humans are unusual but based on real science. Down Under After aims to walk the middle path and provide a plausible consistent setting to have entertaining adventures in.

About the rules

The game rules are built on the intuitive percentile-based Basic Roleplaying game that has been refined since 1978 and used in well-known games Runequest and Call of Cthulhu. Every BRP game tweaks the rules. This version removes mental arithmetic during play, is adjusted to portray the setting and handle tiny player characters.

Removing mental arithmetic during play

Like all BRP games the most common roll is a percentage you must roll under. You roll two D10, one for tens the other ones and try to roll under the skill. However, in Down Under After you also roll a D20 to determine the degree of success or failure. We call this the 'effect die'. The effect die can change a fail to a fumble or a success to a special success or critical success. This replaces the calculation of $1/5^{\text{th}}$ of skill for a special and $1/20^{\text{th}}$ for a critical etc.

Down Under After does not add or subtract modifiers when situations would make using a skill easier or harder. Instead, it uses difficulty grades. The most common are Average, Difficult, and Easy; the same as other BRP games. These are printed on the character sheet. Other rules cover the other grades. The grades are automatic, trivial, easy, average, difficult, demanding, challenging and impossible.

Setting

The rules reenforce the reality of the setting and its themes of community, survival, hope, and ambition

Community is central to the play. Players create their own community as part of character generation. This could be anything from a handful of human survivors scavenging in the ruins to a multi-species settlement of farmers and herders. The gamemaster's section then describes how to use the community the player's created to generate prompts for adventures. The player character's actions then feed back into this system to hopefully enable their community to thrive.

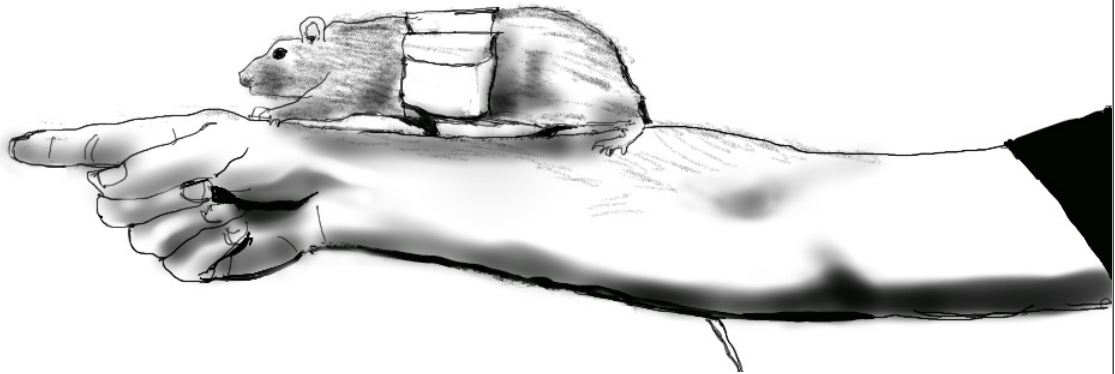
Within their community characters have a reputation, a contact from whom they learned two skills, and connections to the community or specific individuals. Many characters will have children.

In a game about survival, we acknowledge that few people want to fight to the death and fewer still are trained killers. I



wanted characters who are not trained warriors to be able to contribute meaningfully during disputes. The conflict resolution rules allow you to effectively mix social skills and combat skills. Characters can also use ‘aura attacks’ like raising your spear and screaming a war-cry, striding forward menacingly, or diving out of the sky with an ear-piercing screech to make others pause in combat. Conflicts can be ended by bargains, spears, intimidation, fear, persuasion, poison, fleeing, or exhaustion.

I wanted to simulate the reality of tiny species but still have these able to contribute. The mix of social factors and differing ways to end a conflict really help achieve this goal. Also, Tiny characters have faster reflexes so they act first and are harder for larger ones to hit. Rat warriors have better access to blade poison than humans.



Player Characters

Each playable species has abilities that complement the others. Humans are huge, more intelligent, long lived and have dexterous hands. Rats have acute senses, are fairly dexterous, and agile. Ravens and cockatoos have acute eyesight and can fly. Communities and adventuring teams with a mix of species are more likely to prosper. However, individuals of any species also vary. Want to be a fierce rat warrior or a stealthy human scout? The rules and setting are designed to make unusual choices feasible. A rat warrior for example might rely on ambush or a fearsome reputation and a poisoned spear.

There are two character generation systems. A faster system where players personalise an archetype and a longer but more flexible point based ‘from scratch’ system.

Down Under After uses characteristics to fold many of the differences between individuals and species into the core rules rather than numerous spot rules. Using characteristics to represent differences propagates those differences through the rest of the rules through derived characteristics and skill category modifiers.

Many games assume human size and have spot rules to cover the effects of larger or smaller than human creatures. BRP has SIZ (Size) and this which affects things like hit points and damage modifier. However, BRP’s SIZ characteristic lumps everything under 5 kg into SIZ 1. Small siz was added for use when differences in SIZ 1 creatures matters. STR (Strength) 1 is also divided into lesser str.

Another innovation in Down Under After was to split DEX into Agility and (manual) Dexterity and thus account for the differing capabilities of humans, who have good hands, and species that do not.

Willpower (WIL) replaces Power (POW) because there are no supernatural powers and because the will to survive is important.

Since in this setting characters have differing levels of education, often due to differing species lifespans, and so EDU is used.

Characters have a collection of skills reflecting their level of education and backstory. Some skills, such as insight and first aid, are specialized by species. Those trained in one species can try with another but the roll will be harder.

Fiction

Down Under After is a roleplaying game with a focus on fiction rather than fighting and tactics. The games' setting and rules reflect this. However, for fiction to succeed the players must be able to visualise this unique setting. Every chapter of the book will begin with a fictional vignette to immerse the reader in the world. Here are three.

Ming

Hidden in a wattle bush behind the old workshop Ming fidgeted with his spear and waited nervously for Susan Eek to return. The plan was simple. A rat to get in unseen and scout out the bushrangers' numbers and hideout. Ming's human endurance to carry her back to safety if things went south. Suddenly, the little grey body of Susan shot out of a window, fell two stories, and hit the ground sprinting for Ming's bush. There was yelling from within. When he felt Susan leap onto his back Ming was already running. Ming could run down a roo until it fell from exhaustion, but could he outrun the gang of bushrangers?

Quarr

A little above the canopy of blue gums Quarr glided on black wings following a small herd of wild goats. She panted in the summer sun. The goats too would be hot and thirsty. She bent her head down to look back and ensure the humans were still following her. Huge Luigi was right behind her, but the other humans had fanned out to flank their prey. Nimble Sarah was picking her way up the ridge overlooking the creek to get a clear shot with her bow when the goats stopped to drink. It would not be long now. Quarr salivated at the thought of the bounty of meat to come.

Ali

Ali watches the raven lookouts circle overhead. The birds glide lazily through the hot afternoon above the long wide line of grass. All traces of the broken asphalt Ali remembers from childhood are lost under the weeds and grasses. The tribe's goats bleat contentedly, and Ali's mind drifts off to last summer when the tribe's route took them by the bay. There they traded and flirted with athletic bronzed freedivers. . .

Ali's memory of cold blue waters and grilled flathead is jarred aside by a harsh series of caws. Bushrangers are coming!

Deliberately Parochial

The game's main setting is Melbourne, though guidance for playing in your own hometown is provided. Once the text is complete, I'll be hiring local artists, layout experts, printers, etc. to produce the book.

In the meantime, I've drawn some placeholder art myself.

Onward

I look forward to running this game at future cons, providing updates here, and on our Facebook Group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1210692354034023>.

Post-Collapse Urban Bushland NPCs

Karl David Brown

About Down Under After

Down Under After is a BRP-based RPG about survival, community, and ambition after civilisation falls apart. In the urban bushland of low-tech near-future Melbourne, diverse human and non-human characters quest to help their communities thrive and build a new civilisation.

Down Under After was selected to be played at Chaosium Con Australia 2024. It was my unsuccessful entry into the BRP Challenge using the Basic Roleplaying Universal Game Engine (Jason Durall and Steve Perrin, Chaosium 2023). The game is in development and is being playtested at conventions within Melbourne.

Human NPCs

This article contains a selection of human NPCs that would fit right in in post-apocalyptic, cyberpunk, blue-collar space, or contemporary settings. Non-human NPCs from Down Under After were not included because of space considerations and because they are too unusual to be useful beyond that setting. Furthermore, these non-human NPCs would require the use of new rules in play making them less useful for GMs of other BRP games. Human NPCs can be easily used with BRP rules as written. Some NPCs are ‘Notable’, these have better skill levels than most NPCs.

Ferals and Survivors

Ferals are humans born after The Collapse who are poorly educated but possess skills appropriate for survival. They are on average smaller than older Survivors of The Collapse but still young and fit.

Survivors : Are old enough to have benefited from good education, healthcare, and nutrition of Before. However, they are feeling the effects of aging and most carry scars of some kind from the years of chaos.

Using these NPCs in your BRP game.

Though based on BRP, Down Under After alters the rules to serve three purposes:

1. Fast beginner friendly play
2. To serve the physical reality of the setting (including non-humans PCs)
3. To serve the themes of the setting (survival, community, ambition)

A selection of key changes is discussed below to enable GMs of other BRP games to utilise these NPCs.

Willpower (WIL) replaces Power to clearly signal that this setting has no supernatural elements but also to because WIL is used with rules to model a character's mental resilience to go on in the face of hardship or danger.

DEX split into Agility (AGL) and manual Dexterity (DEX). This is because the other non-human player character options have poor hands compared to humanity but superhuman reflexes and agility.

Aura. The optional Aura Attacks rule is in use. If you don't use that rule just ignore this.

Major Wound. The Major Wounds combat option is used.

Major Stress. Down Under After uses new rules to model mental damage 'stress'. When using these NPCs in other BRP games this can be ignored.

Resilience. Is a new rule that works something like 'mental hit points'. When using these NPCs in other BRP games this can be ignored.

Advantage Rank and Action Rank. When using these NPCs in other BRP games Action Rank and Advantage Rank can be ignored. Standard BRP splits combat into a Powers Phase where characters act in order of INT and an Action Phase where characters act in order of DEX. Down Under After uses a modified version of this where the Advantage Phase characters act in the order of the average of INT and WIL. In the Advantage Phase Aura attacks, social skill use, and Advantage activations occur. Then in the Action Phase physical actions occur in order of the average of WIL and AGL.

Defence and Attack skills are given with Easy and Difficult chances calculated to speed play in the format easy/average/difficult.

Humans have a poor bite attack. Uses Brawl skill.

Skill category modifiers are used. The capabilities of some non-humans are vastly different to humanity. When using very high or low characteristics to define non-human characters, skill category modifiers ensure that non-human capabilities are reflected in their skills. However, the same logic can also apply within the human species.

Ratlish is the language of genetically engineered rats. Substitute in another language if desired.

New Weapon skill category modifier. The Combat skill modifier has been replaced with Weapons (based on DEX, STR, WIL) and Brawl and Grapple skills moved to Physical skills (based on AGL, CON, STR, SIZ).

Powers replaced with Advantages and Impairments to clearly signal that there are no supernatural elements in the setting. However, many humans have advantages that can be rationally explained and some non-human characters have abilities such as super-human senses or flight.

Feral Kid

A human child between 7 and 9 years old who was born into the urban bushland and has never known the wonders of the Old World nor the chaos of The Collapse. Children of human PCs could be represented by these characteristics.

Characteristics		Derived Characteristics				Combat				
STR	5	Aura	8	Advantage Rank	10					
CON	8	Major Wound	3	Action Rank	10					
SIZ	4	Major Stress	5							
INT	11	Move	10	Defences						
WIL	10	Hit Points	6	Dodge	80/40/20					
AGL	10	Resilience	14							
DEX	10	Damage Modifier	-1d6	AV	0					
CHA	9	Fatigue	13							
EDU	5									

Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	88/44/22	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	88/44/22	1d3-1d6	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	88/44/22	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	88/44/22	1d3-1d6	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	88/44/22	1d3-1d6	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	78/39/20	1d4-1d6	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +1, Manipulation -2, Mental -1, Perception +0, Physical +3, Weapons -2.

Skills: Brawl 44, Climb 60, Dodge 40, Grapple 45, Hide 29, Jump 45, Knowledge (Own Community) 26, Listen 41, Melee Weapon (knife) 14, Missile Weapon (Bow) 14, Native Language 61, Repair (scrap) 29, Science (Natural History) 16, Sense 26, Shield 15 Spot 41, Stealth 29, Swim 44, Throw 40, Track 26.

Advantages: None.

Impairments: None.

Equipment: Small knife

Feral Hunter

A typical feral hunter who has the skills to survive in the urban bushland. Many hunters have a dog companion.

Characteristics	Derived Characteristics		Combat		
STR	9	Aura	10	Advantage Rank	11
CON	9	Major Wound	5	Action Rank	11
SIZ	10	Major Stress	6		
INT	11	Move	10	Defences	
WIL	11	Hit Points	10	Dodge	96/48/24
AGL	11	Resilience	15	Parry (Spear)	66/33/17
DEX	13	Damage Modifier	+0	AV	3
CHA	8	Fatigue	18		
EDU	4				

Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	102/51/26	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	102/51/26	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	102/51/26	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	102/51/26	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	102/51/26	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	56/28/14	1d4+0	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2
Bow, Self	56/28/14	1d6+1+0	1	Impaling	80	2H	6	No	9/9	3
Long Spear (melee)	66/33/17	1d10+1+0	1	Impaling	Long	2H	15	Yes	11/9	2
Long Spear (missile)	46/23/12	1d10+1+0	1	Impaling	15	1H	15	No	12/10	2

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +0, Manipulation +3, Mental -2, Perception +1, Physical +1, Weapons +3.

Skills: Animal handling (dog) 20, Brawl 51, Climb 66, Dodge 48, First Aid (dog) 43, Gaming 35, Grapple 51, Hide 36, Jump 36, Listen 51, Melee Weapon (Spear) 18, Missile Weapon (Bow) 18, Native Language 70, Repair (scrap) 33, Science (Natural History) 9, Sense 31, Spot 51, Stealth 36, Swim 41, Throw 43, Track 36.

Advantages: Archer (Bow), Half Wild (skills already adjusted no further effect in play).

Impairments: None.

Equipment: Crafted leather armour, bicycle helmet, bow, quiver of 20 arrows, spear, small knife.

Feral Farmer

A typical feral farmer. Well-fed and strong from hard work on the land. Farmers tend crops and often have a few goats or chickens. They are the principal suppliers of food for many settled communities.

Characteristics	Derived Characteristics		Combat		
STR	11	Aura	11	Advantage Rank	12
CON	11	Major Wound	6	Action Rank	11
SIZ	12	Major Stress	6		
INT	13	Move	10	Defences	
WIL	11	Hit Points	12	Dodge	82/41/21
AGL	11	Resilience	15		
DEX	12	Damage Modifier	+0	AV	0
CHA	9	Fatigue	22		
EDU	7				

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +3, Manipulation +3, Mental +2, Perception +3, Physical -1, Weapons +2.

Skills: Animal handling (goat) 28, Bargain 48, Brawl 44, Climb 59, Craft (Carpentry) 28, Dodge 41, First Aid (human) 52, First Aid (goat) 52, Gaming 48, Grapple 34, Knowledge (Own Community) 47, Listen 48, Native Language 78, Persuade 38, Science (Natural History) 23, Science (Botany) 23, Spot 48, Status (Own Community) 28, Swim 41, Throw 44.

Advantages: None

Impairments: None

Equipment: Backpack, small knife.

Feral Teacher (Notable)

In some more prosperous communities, the best educated of the Feral generation teaches basic knowledge to children. In many small communities the teacher is the most learned person present.

Characteristics		Derived Characteristics				Combat			
STR	8	Aura			11	Advantage Rank		13	
CON	8	Major Wound			5	Action Rank		11	
SIZ	10	Major Stress			6				
INT	15	Move			10	Defences			
WIL	12	Hit Points			9	Dodge		46/23/12	
AGL	10	Resilience			16				
DEX	10	Damage Modifier			+0	AV		0	
CHA	9	Fatigue			16				
EDU	11								

Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	46/23/12	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	46/23/12	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	46/23/12	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	46/23/12	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	46/23/12	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	50/25/13	1d4+0	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +6, Manipulation +1, Mental +6, Perception +5, Physical -2, Weapons +0.

Skills: Art (Drawing) 58, Bargain 63, Command 63, Etiquette 63, First Aid (human) 88, Insight 62, Knowledge (Own Community) 110, Knowledge (Naarm Region) 62, Language (Ratlish) 80, Language (one other human language) 58, Language (English) 110, Literacy (English) 58, Literacy (one other human language) 58, Perform (Singing) 63, Persuade 73, Research 57, Science (Natural History) 59, Science (Mathematics) 59, Status (Own Community) 73, Teach 68.

Advantages: None

Impairments: None

Equipment: Small knife, notebook, ballpoint pen, set of whiteboard markers.

Feral Warrior (Notable)

Only the largest communities have sufficient prosperity to support any professional warriors. The exceptions are bands of nomadic raiders who obtain food by violence. Warriors excel at shield and spear fighting.



Characteristics		Derived Characteristics		Combat						
STR	12	Aura	12	Advantage Rank	11					
CON	12	Major Wound	7	Action Rank	13					
SIZ	13	Major Stress	6							
INT	10	Move	10	Defences						
WIL	12	Hit Points	13	Dodge	118/59/30					
AGL	14	Resilience	16	Parry	94/47/24					
DEX	12	Damage Modifier	+1d4	AV	3					
CHA	9	Fatigue	24							
EDU	4									
Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	114/57/29	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	114/57/29	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	114/57/29	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	114/57/29	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	114/57/29	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	114/57/29	1d4+1d4	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2
Long Spear (melee)	94/47/24	1d10+1+1d4	1	Impaling	Long	2H	15	Yes	11/9	2
Long Spear (missile)	74/37/19	1d10+1+1d2	1	Impaling	15	1H	15	No	12/10	2

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +1, Manipulation +3, Mental -2, Perception +2, Physical +3, Weapons +4.

Skills: Brawl 57, Climb 71, Dodge 59, First Aid (human) 56, Gaming 48, Grapple 57, Hide 41, Jump 57, Knowledge (Own Community) 46, Listen 55, Melee Weapon (Spear) 32, Melee Weapon (Knife) 32, Missile Weapon (Bow) 32, Language (Native) 50, Persuade 44, Sense 40, Spot 55, Status (Own Community) 44, Stealth 41, Throw 57, Track 40.

Advantages: Shield and Spear

Impairments: Nil

Equipment: Small knife, 3 long spears, road sign shield, biker jacket, bicycle helmet.

Survivor Elder (Notable)

In many communities the Survivors that established the camp remain the leaders. These people's bodies are diminished by age but their intelligence, experience, and leadership are not to be underestimated.

Characteristics	Derived Characteristics		Combat	
STR	7	Aura	14	Advantage Rank 13
CON	9	Major Wound	6	Action Rank 10
SIZ	12	Major Stress	7	
INT	14	Move	10	Defences
WIL	12	Hit Points	11	Dodge 16/8/4
AGL	7	Resilience	16	AV 0
DEX	8	Damage Modifier	+0	
CHA	14	Fatigue	16	
EDU	16			

Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	38/19/10	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	38/19/10	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	38/19/10	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	38/19/10	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	38/19/10	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	46/23/12	1d4+0	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +7, Manipulation -1, Mental +8, Perception +5, Physical -6, Weapons -2.

Skills: Bargain 73, Command 73, Etiquette 73, Fast Talk 73, First Aid (human) 98, Insight 70, Knowledge (Own Community) 110, Knowledge (History) 73, Knowledge (Naarm Region) 63, Language (one other human language) 67, Language (English) 110, Language (Ratlish) 89, Literacy (English) 148, Literacy (one other human language) 68, Perform (Oratory) 72, Persuade 82, Research 100, Status (Own Community) 82, Teach 77.

Advantages: Schooling (skill bonuses already added)

Impairments: None

Equipment: Small knife.

Survivor Engineer (Notable)

Engineers once applied science to design the incredible structures and machines of Before. Today engineers are rare, but their knowledge will be critical if humanity is to rebuild their civilisation. However, within current low-resource survival-focused low-technology communities their skills are of limited use. Fortunately, they tend to be more handy than scientists and can often make themselves useful.

Characteristics		Derived Characteristics				Combat				
STR	12	Aura	12	Advantage Rank	14					
CON	12	Major Wound	7	Action Rank	11					
SIZ	14	Major Stress	6							
INT	16	Move	10	Defences						
WIL	12	Hit Points	13	Dodge	36/18/9					
AGL	10	Resilience	16	AV	3					
DEX	12	Damage Modifier	+1d4							
CHA	8	Fatigue	24							
EDU	16									
Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	46/23/22	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	46/23/22	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	46/23/22	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	46/23/22	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	46/23/22	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	136/68/34	1d4+1d4	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +6, Manipulation +6, Mental +10, Perception +8, Physical -2, Weapons +4.

Skills: Bargain 75, Craft (pick one) 71, Demolition 71, Drive (Car) 63, Heavy Machine (pick one) 71, Language (Native) 110, Literacy (Native) 154, Melee Weapon (Knife) 68, Navigate 82, Persuade 85, Pilot (pick one) 63, Repair 85, Research 106, Science (Mathematics) 75, Science (Engineering) 75, Spot 97, Swim 87, Teach 80, Technical (pick one) 81, Throw 93.

Advantages: Schooling (skill bonuses already added)

Impairments: None

Equipment: Small knife, slide rule, one or more tool kits, heavy clothing, hardhat.

Survivor GP

Before the most common type of medical doctor was the general practitioner. Due to these numbers of the few clinicians that survived The Collapse most were GPs. During the years of chaos clinicians were drafted first into emergency rooms and then to Reaper wards. They have been hardened by the violence and suffering of those times. A GP's skills make them a very valued member of their community.

Characteristics	Derived Characteristics		Combat		
STR	8	Aura	12	Advantage Rank	12
CON	10	Major Wound	6	Action Rank	9
SIZ	12	Major Stress	6		
INT	14	Move	10	Defences	
WIL	11	Hit Points	11	Dodge	84/42/21
AGL	8	Resilience	15	AV	0
DEX	9	Damage Modifier	+0		
CHA	13	Fatigue	18		
EDU	17				

Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	102/51/26	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	102/51/26	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	102/51/26	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	102/51/26	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	102/51/26	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	46/23/12	1d4+0	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +5, Manipulation +0, Mental +7, Perception +4, Physical -5, Weapons -2.

Skills: Brawl 51, Climb 66, Dodge 42, First Aid (human) 68, First Aid (Rat) 68, Gaming 63, Grapple 51, Insight 39, Knowledge (Own Community) 110, Language (English) 110, Listen 60, Literacy (English) 123, Medicine (Human) 43, Medicine (Rat) 43, Persuade 51, Research 83, Science (Biology) 39, Spot 60, Status (Own Community) 51, Swim 51.

Advantages: Schooling (skill bonuses already added)

Impairments: Reduced Sight

Equipment: Small knife, a backpack doctor's bag.

Survivor Scavenger

Before most humans lived ordinary lives that did not prepare them for survival after The Collapse. Whether they were merchant bankers, corporate CEOs, technicians, shop assistants, or cleaners they became scavengers After.

Characteristics	Derived Characteristics		Combat		
STR	9	Aura	11	Advantage Rank	12
CON	10	Major Wound	6	Action Rank	10
SIZ	12	Major Stress	6		
INT	12	Move	10	Defences	
WIL	12	Hit Points	11	Dodge	72/36/18
AGL	9	Resilience	16	AV	0
DEX	10	Damage Modifier	+0		
CHA	8	Fatigue	19		
EDU	9				

Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	86/43/22	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	86/43/22	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	11/22/44	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	86/43/22	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	86/43/22	1d3+0	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	46/23/12	1d4+0	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +2, Manipulation +1, Mental +3, Perception +3, Physical -3, Weapons +1.

Skills: Brawl 43, Climb 58, Dodge 36, Fast Talk 28, First Aid (Human) 54, First Aid (Rat) 54, Gaming 48, Hide 28, Insight 29, Knowledge (Own Community) 83, Language (Native) 83, Listen 49, Literacy (Native) 69, Persuade 38, Research 42, Sleight of Hand 27, Spot 49, Stealth 28, Swim 43, Throw 47.

Advantages: Schooling (skill bonuses already added)

Impairments: None

Equipment: Small knife, old backpack.

Survivor Soldier (Notable)

During The Collapse troops were deployed to numerous conflicts and the streets to quell civil unrest. As The Collapse grew worse those who started fighting with drones and assault rifles fought on with knives. Communications broke down then the Reaper killed off the chain of command. The soldiers that survived are the deadliest people in the urban bushland.

Characteristics	Derived Characteristics	Combat
STR	16 Aura	13 Advantage Rank 13
CON	16 Major Wound	8 Action Rank 12
SIZ	15 Major Stress	8
INT	11 Move	10 Defences
WIL	15 Hit Points	16 Dodge 116/58/29
AGL	9 Resilience	19 AV 10/14 (bullets)
DEX	17 Damage Modifier	+1d4
CHA	9 Fatigue	32
EDU	9	

Attack	Easy/Avg/Diff	Dmg	Attk	Special	Range	Hands	HP	Parry	STR/DEX	SIZ/Enc.
Bite	130/65/33 (Martial Arts 80/40/20)	1d3-1	1	Bleeding	Short			No		
Fist	130/65/33 (Martial Arts 80/40/20)	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short	1H		No		
Grapple	130/65/33	Special	1	Entangle	Short	2H		No		
Headbutt	130/65/33 (Martial Arts 80/40/20)	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Kick	130/65/33 (Martial Arts 80/40/20)	1d3+1d4	1	Crushing	Short			No		
Small Knife	154/77/39	1d4+1d4	1	Impaling	Short	1H	7	No	2/5	0.2
Large Knife	154/77/39	1d6+1d4	1	Impaling	Short	1H	12	No	5/7	0.3

Skill Category Modifiers: Communication +3, Manipulation +10, Mental +3, Perception +6, Physical +0, Weapons +12.

Skills: Brawl 65, Climb 80, Dodge 58, First Aid (Human) 73, Gaming 66, Grapple 65, Knowledge (Own Community) 88, Language (Native) 98, Listen 71, Literacy (Native) 88, Martial Arts (Brawl) 40, Melee Weapon (Knife) 52, Missile Weapon (Rifle) 52, Navigate 56, Repair (Firearms) 65, Research 64, Spot 71, Stealth 50, Swim 65, Throw 77.

Advantages: Schooling (skill bonuses already added)

Impairments: Phobia Loud Bangs (Major), Reduced Hearing

Equipment: Large Knife, small knife, bullet-proof vest, military helmet (Perception skills one grade harder), backpack, mountain bike.

Impairments

Some of the NPCs above have impairments. These are described below.

Phobia Loud Bangs (Major)

Activation: Triggered

Range: A large bang is detected, and the source is within within 100 metres.

Duration: While the noise persists and 15 minutes after.

Stress caused: Major 1d6, on exposure and every 15 minutes.

Skill?: No

This is an irrational fear of loud bangs. Survivor veterans of the Collapse Wars are often triggered by loud bangs even thunder.

Detecting this stimulus causes an unpleasant and extreme reaction (nausea, weakness, muscle freezing, possibly screaming or conversely trouble speaking). For a major phobia, suffer 1D6 hit points stress when detecting the stimulus and again every 15 minutes, and all skill rolls are 2 grades harder (-50 in other BRP games) while exposed and for 15 minutes after.

Reduced Hearing

Activation: Always on.

Range: Self

Duration: Always on

Stress Caused: 0

Skill?: No.

You have poor hearing. Lose Keen hearing if you have it. Any use of the Listen skill is one grade harder (-25 in other BRP games).

Advantages

Some of the NPCs above have advantages. These are described below.

Archer

Activation: One round.

Range: Self.

Duration: WIL combat rounds.

Stress caused: 3.

Skill?: No.

Before, firearms bows and crossbows were the chief ranged weapons of hunters and warriors. You have trained with the bow or crossbow since you were a child. If you take a moment to focus, steady your heart and remember your training, your shots have deadly accuracy. For the duration of the effect all attacks with the chosen weapon category are one grade easier (+25 in other BRP games).

You cannot have multiple instances of this Advantage active for the same weapon category, activating it again simply restarts the duration. Humans may take this Advantage twice once for bow and once for crossbow.

Shield and Spear

Activation: One Round

Range: Self.

Duration: WIL combat rounds.

Stress caused: 3.

Skill?: No.

Before firearms the shield and the spear were the weapons of the common warrior. This combination was cheap and provided a combination of protection, reach, and deadly piercing. With the death of the rifle, the spear and shield have again become the tools of the warrior. You have held a spear since you could walk and have spared with shield and spear since you were a child. You know where to strike to cause the most pain and where to hold your shield to provide passive protection. Familiarity makes you a deadly warrior if you take a moment steal yourself for battle and focus. For the duration your shield provides +2 AV as if it was worn armour in addition to its usual uses (this benefit does not apply to bucklers or mulga). You also gain +1 damage to any spear used, up to the maximum damage possible using that spear. The damage bonus is only applied to the weapon's natural range of damage, with the user's damage modifier (if applicable) applied separately, unmodified by Spear and Shield. If you roll maximum damage for the weapon (before adding your damage modifier) then you have scored a telling hit and roll +1d6 extra damage. You cannot have multiple instances of this Advantage active, activating it again simply restarts the duration.

Therra Roleplaying Game – Where the Stakes are Real

Devin Cutler

What is the Therra Roleplaying Game?

The Therra Roleplaying Game (“TRG”) is a tabletop fantasy role playing game in the same genre as Dungeons & Dragons (“D&D”), Runequest, and Pathfinder. Like those games, in TRG, one person takes the role of the gamemaster, designing and running the setting and the adventures set therein, while the other participants each take on the role of an inhabitant of the world, whether as a soldier, a wizard, a thief, a priest, or any number of other professions listed in the rules or designed by the gamemaster.

TRG is, rules wise, based on the Basic Roleplaying (“BRP”) gaming system by Chaosium, Inc. BRP is the core set of rule mechanics used by a variety of popular and time-honoured roleplaying games, including Runequest, Call of Cthulhu, Mythras, Stormbringer, and many others. Chaosium has generously allowed designers to make their own games based on the BRP ruleset and, under the ORC License, such designers can sell or otherwise exploit their game designs with no obligation to Chaosium.

While TRG uses the BRP system as its core, it has been modified quite extensively, both to add in rules not covered by BRP, to clarify and expand certain BRP rules, and to add in rules that are inherent to the world in which TRG is set. Additionally, as will be discussed later, TRG was designed to serve as a “landing platform” for D&D players who are looking to try out a different role playing system, and some of the rule changes and many other elements of TRG have been designed to be familiar to players of D&D (especially the 5th edition of that game).

What is Therra?

Therra is the name of the author’s homebrew fantasy campaign, which has been running continuously since 1993, with many of the original players still actively participating in the author’s semi-weekly game as of this writing. Therra started out using the 2nd Edition of D&D. The author ran a 10-year long (in real life) campaign wherein the player characters saved the world from the Big Bad Evil God (“BBEG”), a god known as The Deceiver.

Since then, Therra has been the setting for a couple of 5-year long 3rd Edition D&D campaigns, a 6-year long 5th Edition D&D campaign, and, most recently, a TRG campaign that just finished its first year of a planned 5-year run.

Therra was conceived as a “standard” fantasy world in which all of the races, classes, and creatures presented in D&D are housed. The central conceit of Therra is that when the gods fashioned the world, they became so enamoured of what they had created that they began to war amongst themselves for possession of it. This threatened to destroy the very thing they all coveted and fought over. So, when the God of Cleverness suggested that the beauty and wondrousness of the world they had created was too tempting, and therefore, they should remove themselves into a divine slumber so that they could only experience the world in their divine dreams, the other gods readily agreed. They constructed a great hall far to the north, called the Hall of Slumber, and then fashioned seven Gems of Power, which they presented to the seven leaders of the first races of demihumans (two each to the humans, elves, and dwarves and one to the gnomes). These gems were to be used only in the gravest of emergencies, for each could open the Hall of Slumber and awaken the gods.

With that done, the gods filed into the Hall of Slumber, with the God of Cleverness being given the honour of closing the door and starting the divine sleep. When the penultimate god entered the hall, he closed the door...but not behind him...rather, before him. Then, turning to the stunned assembly, he took the seven Gems of Power and made to his fortress of Mordasht, where he had been breeding foul creatures and armies and had gathered fell spirits to his cause.

So began the Wars of the Deceiver, for that is how this god was forever to be called.

The first campaign was set in a world that had been half conquered by the Deceiver, with no means in sight of stopping him. In millennia past, one hero had actually made it to the Deceiver’s throne room and almost grabbed one of the Gems of Power the Deceiver has mounted in his crown to mock the races of Free Folk (as they called themselves). With this close call, the Deceiver took no chances and, witnessed by the armies assembled to oppose him, crushed all seven Gems of Power into nothingness. The Deceiver, being a god, was basically thought to be unstoppable. However, he deigned to avoid emerging from his fortress and entering battle directly, as he feared that wielding his power so openly might...just might...reach the gods asleep in their hall and rouse them. Being immortal and with no way for the Free Folk to open the Hall of Slumber, there was no need for him to hurry. And so, over the course of several millennia, the Deceiver and his forces had taken over much of the lands bit by bit and life by life.

The player characters in the first campaign slowly came to learn that Flupnir, the Trickster God, had never trusted the God of Cleverness (well, he never trusted anyone, really!), and so he had fashioned a fake Gem of Power and had bent all of his will into it so that it would fool even another god, and even more so the God of Cleverness himself. The real Gem of Power was hidden away behind divine illusions and misdirection that only he, as the Trickster God, could work, with tests and guardians designed to make certain that only the most capable of the Free Folk would eventually lay their hands on the last Gem of Power and bring it into the heart of the Deceiver’s holdings to the Hall of Slumber.

The player characters managed to find and win the Gem of Power and then began an epic journey into the Heart of Deception, through blood and terror, to the Hall of Slumber, where they used the Gem to release the gods. The now roused deities took The Deceiver and cast him in chains and brought him into the Hall of Slumber with them this time, along with many of his powerful servants that had been imbued with

the Deceiver's divine essence. The player characters were named Heroes of the Gem and granted kingdoms surrounding the Hall of Slumber to rule as caretakers of the Hall.

Now, over 75 years have passed since the Deceiver was dragged into Slumber, and although he is no longer a direct threat, many of his minions and creatures still plague the world, and other dangers have begun to creep into the vacuum of power left by the removal of the Deceiver. There is still plenty of adventures, both high and low, to be found in Therra!

Why Slumber?

The central conceit in Therra is the Slumber of the Gods. Clerics in Therra, by means of rituals, worship, practice, and devotion are able to mystically tap into the dreams of their chosen Slumbering God and coax these dreams to perform great deeds of power, called miracles. Miracles rival the other forms of magic in Therra, whether that be wizardry (the art of tapping into the latent magic of the world and fashioning and focusing it to the caster's will), sorcery (the art of summoning otherworldly entities and entreating or forcing them to do the caster's bidding), or psionics (the art of learning to expand the mind and using the essence of the Astral Plane as a source of power to bring the desires of the expanded mind to reality). However, miracles tend to be somewhat more potent than the other forms of magic, and they can accomplish things that no other type of magic can, such as raising the dead.

The gods being in Slumber and clerics coaxing power from their dreams allows Therra to accommodate a variety of religious practices, customs, and myths amongst each of the gods' religions while still acknowledging that the gods themselves are distinct and immutable divine entities. Unlike some fantasy worlds where, effectively, the worshippers create their own gods through myth, deeds, and rituals, or others worlds where the gods are active participants and, therefore, worship of a given god is fairly uniform throughout the world, in Therra, one church in one land might worship the God of the Sun as a benign bringer of light and warmth, while another church in another land might worship the same god as a hurler of bolts of fire and a patron of stern, unyielding rulership. As long as both forms of worship are attuned to the dreams of the God of the Sun enough to invoke miracles from them, then both forms of worship are effectively part of the same religion, but vastly different in their approach.

Why BRP?

BRP is known as a D100 system. Many popular fantasy role playing games, including D&D, are known as D20 systems, in that they use a twenty-sided die for most of their important resolution rolls. BRP uses what is known as percentile dice, wherein a ten-sided die is rolled to represent the tens column and a different ten-sided die (usually of a different colour) is rolled to represent the ones column. So, a roll of 6 and 8 means a 68, while a roll of 0 and 9 means a 9. A roll of 0 and 0 equals 100. By this means, a result of 1–100 is generated.

Most fantasy role playing games are known as "class-based", meaning that each player character chooses a class or adventuring profession to which he or she belongs. Each

class has its own abilities and progression and, in many cases, the features of one class are exclusive to that class. For example, Fighter is a common class in such games. So are Wizard, Cleric, and Rogue (or Thief). In general, a Fighter will be tougher and hit harder with weapons, while a Wizard will have a large variety of magic spells to do things like hurl lightning bolts at enemies or allow allies to fly through the air like a bird. Clerics usually have the power to heal (and even raise the dead when more accomplished), while Rogues excel at sneaking and picking both locks and pockets. Because of this, player characters in class-based systems tend to follow archetypes. Wizards wear little or no armour and tend to be somewhat frail. Clerics are wise and can wear armour but often have restrictions regarding the types of weapons they can use. Rogues can wear only light armour and wield smaller or lighter weapons effectively.

In class-based systems, each player character gains “levels” in his or her chosen class. A level represents a deeper understanding of the workings of the class as well as practice and in-the-field learning. Player characters start as level 1 in their class and eventually gain levels as high as the campaign and/or the system allows (usually 20th level). At each level, the character gains abilities and powers as well as hit points, which measure how much damage he or she can sustain until falling unconscious or dying. At each level, the character gains more hit points, with martial classes gaining more hit points per level than, say, rogues or magic-using classes.

BRP eschews all of this. Instead, it is what is known as a “skill-based” system. There are no classes in BRP. There are professions in BRP that define what a character did as an occupation prior to the start of the campaign, but, aside from any role playing effect, a character’s profession only determines the abilities and skills a character possesses at the beginning of the campaign. Once the campaign begins, the character is not locked into any sort of choice of profession or class. BRP relies entirely upon skills. Unlike class-based systems, where a character’s class pretty much defines him or her, in BRP, a character is defined by his or her skills. Each skill has a rating from 1 to 100, and that is, basically, the chance on a percentile roll that the skill works. So, if a character in BRP has a Sword skill of 65, that means that every time he or she swings a sword, there is a 65% chance that it will hit. BRP has many skills, and a character is basically the amalgamation of all of these skills.

If you want to play a thief in a class-based system, you choose to play the Thief class. If you want to play a thief in BRP, then you are free to choose those skills you consider to be “thiefly” and specialize in them. Focus on the Hide and Stealth skills. Focus on the Spot and Listen skills. Focus on the Fine Manipulation skill (to pick locks and disarm traps). Focus on the Sleight of Hand skill to pick pockets.

But BRP, because it doesn’t force characters into discrete classes, allows a character to be custom designed however the player wants. A thief character in BRP can learn to use any weapon, or wear even heavy armour (but good luck moving silently in it!), or even cast spells. But learning one skill means you are not learning something else. Everything is a trade-off, since you cannot be good at everything all at once.

What are Stakes?

Stakes in this context means that, when the player characters undertake an adventure or otherwise are placed into dangerous circumstances, there are consequences for failure and that failure is not only possible but ever-looming. BRP excels at this, and TRG adopts these stakes for its system. Stakes can take many forms, including any number of types of prices of failure. Maybe the characters have loved ones at risk. Maybe they have their honour at stake. Or maybe their own lives are on the line. Almost any fantasy role playing system can be conducive to stakes regarding things other than the player characters directly. But class-based systems tend to have a real problem when it comes to direct player character stakes. This problem is endemic to the very nature of class-based systems because of hit points.

In 5th Edition D&D (and assume, from this point on, that references to D&D mean 5th Edition), the most popular class-based system, a 10th level Fighter begins the game with 10 hit points at first level and, each level thereafter, rolls a ten-sided die for additional hit points. This means that the average 10th level Fighter in D&D will have $10 + 5.5 \times 9 = 59.5$ hit points. Given that such a character would almost certainly have at least a 14 Constitution score for another 2 hit points per level, that means that even a non-optimized 10th level Fighter would have 70 hit points on average. A battle axe in D&D does 1–10 damage on a hit, with an additional amount from +0 to +5 for the wielder's Strength score. That means the strongest possible foe swinging a battle axe at our 10th level Fighter can do, at most, 15 points of damage. Even if the attacker gets lucky and does a critical hit, and rolls maximum damage on the critical as well, that is still 25 damage at most. The most damage a non-magical battle axe can ever do in D&D, even if wielded by the strongest person alive, cannot take out our Fighter. In fact, subtracting 25 damage from the Fighter's 70 hit points leaves a full 45 hit points. Our Fighter could even take another maximum blow and still have 20 hit points left. For reference, the chance of doing this maximum critical strike is 1 in 2000. Doing that twice in a row is 1 in 4 million! And what is the effect on our intrepid hero from taking these two maximal blows? Nothing. He or she still fights at full effectiveness; there is absolutely no mechanical consequence for taking these two critical blows (other than decrementing the Fighter's hit point tally).

Now let's look at BRP. In BRP, there are no levels. Your hit points at the beginning of the game are, for most purposes, the hit points you have throughout the entire game. In D&D, a 1st level Fighter with a 14 Constitution score will start the game with 12 hit points. In BRP, the average human character with a 14 Constitution score will start the game with 14 hit points. And barring tiny possible increases from training over time, that's all that character will ever have. In BRP, a battle axe does 3–10 damage (1 eight-sided die plus 2). If a foe is somewhat strong, it can add 1 four-sided die to the roll to reflect its strength. A very strong human, comparable to the +5 damage bonus for D&D, would add a six-sided die for strength. That means, in BRP, a battle axe wielded by a very strong opponent can do up to 16 damage. And if it gets a critical success, it adds another 3–10 damage for a total possible of 26 damage.

As you can see, damage from weapons for both D&D and BRP are comparable, but hit points are not. If a BRP character takes 26 damage, he or she is down on the ground dying and possibly instantly dead. And that's from a single such blow. Remember, our D&D Fighter could withstand two such blows with no effect. And, in TRG, there is an

optional BRP rule known as “hit location”. The hit location rule divides a character’s body into 7 locations (2 legs, 2 arms, abdomen, chest, and head). Each location has its own hit points based on the total hit points of the character. For a character with 14 total hit points, the legs, abdomen, and head would each have 5 hit points, the arms would each have 4 hit points, and the chest would have 6 hit points. When a character is hit by a weapon using the hit location rules, the weapon strikes one of those locations and the damage is done directly to that location as well as to the character’s total hit points. When a location loses all of its hit points, that location is disabled. A disabled arm or leg cannot be used. A disabled abdomen means neither leg can be used. A disabled chest or head means unconsciousness. If a location takes twice as much damage as it has hit points, the location is maimed or crippled, and the character goes into shock or begins to die if a vital area were hit. If a location takes three times as much damage as it has hit points, the area is severed or destroyed. This is bad enough if the location is a limb. If it is anything but a limb, the character is instantly dead.

With hit locations in mind, think about that battle axe swing now. Even a regular hit from a mildly strong opponent in BRP does 4–14 damage (9 on average). Compare 9 damage to each of the hit location hit points for our 14 hit point BRP character. Not looking very good, is it? The average hit in the arm would maim that arm. The average hit in the leg or abdomen would cause the character to fall prone. And the average single hit to the chest or head would render the character unconscious. Never mind a critical hit. In that case, the average damage is 15.5, which would sever or destroy any location but the chest, and it would almost take out the chest as well.

In short, a single swing of a battle axe at an accomplished D&D character has almost no direct physical stakes to the character. The chance of even putting the 10th level Fighter into mild concern in two swings is 1 in 4 million. On the other hand, a BRP character, even an accomplished warrior, must always be wary of a large piece of sharpened steel being swung in anger at him or her. And that is, obviously, much closer to reality. In real life, weapons hurt when they hit. They do bad things to the body that they hit. And someone hit by a weapon is most likely going to be less abled in some fashion. This is true in BRP. It is not true in class-based systems like D&D because characters in those games have a large amount of hit points and there is no mechanism for causing a character to lose effectiveness prior to dropping unconscious when hit points reach zero. In D&D, a character with 1 hit point left fights just as well as he or she did when he or she had 100 hit points left. Until that last hit point is taken, combat is meaningless.

Now, keep in mind that in BRP, just like in real life, there are ways to mitigate this danger of maiming or death. A character can try to block the blow with a shield or a weapon. He or she can try to dodge out of the way. Or, as a last resort, any armour the character is wearing can reduce the damage taken, possibly entirely if the armour is heavy enough. So, every hit does not mean disability or death in BRP, but the possibility that a character might miss his or her shield roll and that a well-struck blow will punch through armour (or even bypass it on a critical hit) means that every swing comes with the highest of stakes.

Why do Stakes Matter?

Stakes matter for several reasons. First, it makes combat more exciting. When every blow might injure or kill your character, every swing becomes full of tension, and that makes for very exciting combats.

Second, when a system's combat system has direct personal stakes for the characters, they often try to seek out ways to complete their missions without resorting to combat. When a character has 100 hit points and an axe does 1–10 damage, the player really doesn't have to worry about going into combat all of the time. It will take many blows to even start to get the player concerned, and with healing readily available, it will take a lot more than that. And the process of whittling away those many hit points is so attritional in nature that, even if a combat goes against the characters, it will happen so gradually that there will be plenty of time to see it going bad and plan an escape.

Third, because stakes have a direct impact on the choices players and their characters make in the game world. Take the old trope of the farmer's daughter, for example.

Let's assume the player character is an accomplished warrior in both D&D and in BRP. He is 8th level in D&D, and in BRP he has very good armour and has a very good weapon skill (let's say 95%). The character is travelling along a road at night when it starts to rain heavily. Seeking shelter, he sees a farmhouse and goes up to it and knocks on the door. The farmer answers a bit warily but agrees to allow the character to sleep out back in the barn, but he warns the character not to touch his daughter, as she is the most precious person in the world to him and he will be angry beyond measure if her virtue is taken.

The character goes to the barn and begins to make ready to bed down for the night when the farmer's daughter walks in. She is quite beautiful and asks the character for a "roll in the hay". The character remembers what the farmer said... does he dally with the farmer's daughter or not?

Obviously, there are role playing circumstances to consider with either system. But on a purely actions-lead-to-consequences basis, the considerations are quite different between the systems. Let's say the character chooses to spend the night with the farmer's daughter. The next morning, he arrives at a nearby town and, having removed his heavy armour in town, strolls down the market square looking at things to purchase. The farmer, having found out what happened the night before, is beside himself with anger. He picks up his wood-chopping axe and marches off to town. There, he sees the character up ahead, shopping and completely oblivious to the farmer. The farmer marches up to the character, who doesn't hear him coming, and the farmer swings his axe at the character's unarmoured back.

What happens?

In D&D, even if the farmer hits, and even if the farmer has a decent Strength score (let's say a 16), that axe will do 4–13 damage. Our 8th level Fighter with a 14 Constitution has an average hit point total of 64.5. So, the farmer swings the axe, does, let's say, maximum damage of 13 points, and the Fighter, with 51.5 hit points left, turns around, laughs at the farmer, and either strolls away or beats the farmer senseless (or kills him). Every time. But wait, let's say the farmer gets ultra lucky or the gamemaster, wanting to try to enforce some realism within the context of the rules, says that, because the character was completely unaware, the farmer automatically scores a critical hit and

automatically does maximum damage! That'll introduce consequences...right? Well, the maximum critical damage would be 23 hit points. So, the Fighter now has 41.5 hit points left. He laughs, turns around, and either walks away, or beats the farmer senseless (or kills him). There is simply no possible way for the farmer to enact any sort of direct physical stakes against the character. Therefore, there is really no practical reason, other than role playing, for the character to need to worry about the farmer's ire in the first place.

In BRP, it is a whole different matter. If that farmer gets a shot with an axe at the character unaware and in no armour, it is more likely than not, with no help from the gamemaster by bending rules, that the character will be knocked out, killed outright, or at least in shock with a limb maimed. **MORE LIKELY THAN NOT.** In BRP, even the most callous character must pause and reflect on the possible consequences of sleeping with the farmer's daughter. It could mean the character's life!

Why TRG?

While TRG keeps the skill-based 1–100 system of BRP as well as its hit points and hit locations, there are some aspects of the system that have been changed to make things feel familiar to players of D&D. This is because Therra was originally a D&D-based campaign world, and, therefore, to maintain continuity, many things from D&D had to be ported over to TRG, when possible. Furthermore, the author designed TRG specifically for players of D&D who were seeking a new system...one with more stakes, more realism, and a power level more in tune with classical swords and sorcery tales and less with the type of superhero masquerading as fantasy to which D&D lends itself.

To this end, players of D&D will find many things familiar in TRG. The author has, as allowed by the Open Gaming License, converted every creature from the D&D System Reference Documents (both 3rd and 5th Editions) into BRP format. That means everything from behirs to bodaks, doppelgangers to gricks, balors to ice devils, and everything else D&D players are used to facing.

Furthermore, every magic item from the D&D System Reference Documents (both 3rd and 5th Editions) have been converted to work with TRG (and BRP). This includes holy avengers, daggers of venom, armour of etherealness, etc.

Finally, some of the spells from D&D (again, found in the System Reference Documents) have been converted into TRG format. These are both common spells like Entangle that fit right into the normal TRG/BRP spell system, as well as certain higher-level spells that, in TRG, require immense talent to be able to cast, but these spells perform important functions that are not duplicated by standard BRP magic. For example, Therra uses a cosmology that includes some of the standard D&D multiverse. However, BRP doesn't have any sort of magic in it that allows travel to other planes of existence. So, TRG introduces a version of the Plane Travel spell from D&D that is not commonly available but can be utilized by masters of the arcane arts to allow themselves or the characters to travel and have adventures throughout the multiverse.

TRG also introduces some rules changes that bring BRP more in line with D&D. TRG uses an initiative system rather than the static Dexterity order of BRP or the optional Strike Rank method to determine action order. D&D players are used to rolling for

initiative and having some variance in the order of action during a combat round. TRG leans into this by rolling a ten-sided die and adding it to Dexterity to determine action order. This initiative is rolled each and every combat round, which helps turn combat into the chaotic scrum that it should be rather than the ordered, predictable affair it often becomes. Characters can ready or delay their actions, too, just as in D&D.

TRG divides a character's combat turn into three distinct pieces: Movement Action, Combat Action, and DEX Rank Action. These are somewhat analogous to the Movement, Action, and Bonus Action parts of the D&D combat turn.

TRG also simplifies what are known as resistance rolls in BRP. A resistance roll is the chance that an active party can successfully affect a passive party in some manner. This is usually done when trying to affect a target with a spell, but can also be used to push heavy objects, grapple with someone, etc. In BRP, the chance of succeeding on a resistance roll is 50% if the two sides are even in whatever characteristic is used for that roll. For example, if one person wants to shove another person aside, the active character might use Strength and the passive person might use Size (which is a characteristic in BRP). If the shoving person's Strength is equal to the other person's Size, then there is a 50% chance that the person is successfully shoved. For each point of difference in either direction, the chance increases or decreases by 5%. So, if a Strength 13 wants to shove a Size 15, he or she has a 40% chance to successfully shove. This is simple enough, but it does require a bit of math on the fly.

Quick, without thinking much about it, what's the chance of a 17 Strength shoving an 8 Size?

You have to subtract, in your head, $17 - 8 = 9$ and then multiply that by $5\% = 45\%$ and then add it to 50% for a total of 95%. Three steps. If you are decent at math, then it's not too hard. Otherwise, it requires a calculator or looking up a chart in the rules.

In TRG, you simply roll a twenty-sided die, add it to the characteristic and whomever rolls highest, wins. That's it. Ties go to the defender/passive party. It's now a one-step process, and a process that all D&D players are familiar with, since that game involves primarily rolling a twenty-sided die and adding something to that. Furthermore, the BRP resistance roll is a single die roll, even though two parties are involved. Most players I know like to be able to roll a die when something is affecting them. The TRG system allows both parties to roll a die.

TRG also adopts the Imperial measurement system and uses 5-foot increments. This is the system D&D uses and makes play on a combat grid much easier. In that light, TRG also includes specific rules for using a grid. Theatre of the Mind play without a grid can be done with TRG, but if a grid is used, there are specific rules to address this that are similar in scope and detail to what one would find in D&D.

Finally, TRG seeks to put a more deterministic and legalistic spin on the rules as compared to BRP. While experienced gamemasters might appreciate a system where less is more, because they feel comfortable making up rulings as they go, D&D players and gamemasters are often much less experienced and are used to having rules spelled out in detail for them. TRG takes the D&D approach in this case and tries, wherever possible, to spell out precisely how things work. For example, in BRP there is a skill called Bargain, which represents how well a character negotiates things (usually for buying or selling things).

Here is the text from the BRP rules providing guidance to the gamemaster about the

skill roll for this skill:

A fumble might mean turn a merchant into an enemy, success means you get a deal, and better results yield higher discounts or more favorable conditions for your side.

Now, there is guidance here, but not much in concrete terms that a newer gamemaster can latch onto. How much does success with this skill change the price? How much more does critical success change the price? There is nothing in the rule that provides any guidance; it is entirely at the whim of the gamemaster, and the newer gamemaster may not know if it should be 10%, 25%, 50%, or maybe even more. Furthermore, once he or she makes a ruling, the table then has to remember that forever more. “Wait, last time I made my Bargain roll I got a 30% discount, why am I only getting a 20% discount this time?”

Here is the same text from TRG:

Success: The character bargains the other party down or up by $1 D 3 \times 5\%$ from his or her last offer or gets him or her to agree to terms slightly in the character’s favour.

Failure: The character does not get what he or she asked for. The other party stands firm on his or her latest offer or the terms he or she previously requested.

Special Success: The character bargains the other party down or up by $1 D 3 \times 10\%$ from his or her last offer or gets him or her to agree to terms materially in the character’s favour.

Critical Success: The character bargains the other party down or up by $2 D 3 \times 10\%$ from his or her last offer or gets him or her to agree to terms significantly in the character’s favour.

Fumble: The character angers or insults the other party, whether by words, tone, or counteroffers. The other party breaks off negotiations and refuses to continue the deal (or possibly requires a $3 D 3 \times 10\%$ increase/discount or very significant terms in his or her favour in order to accept the deal).

As you can see, there is no guesswork here. The gamemaster and the players know what to expect from the use of this skill. Of course, the gamemaster can always deviate from this, but it is easier to have the specific rule and deviate from it than to not have it and have to make it up whole cloth.

That’s Why!

All of the above highlights why TRG was created and how it has been designed to meet its goals. TRG represents what the author feels is the ideal balance of familiarity with other systems and the stakes and eloquence of BRP. Together, they allow players and gamemasters to explore the longstanding World of Therra or to adapt the rules to their own worlds or even popular published settings. A game of TRG will feel both familiar and refreshingly new to D&D players and will still hit all of the touchstones that make BRP and BRP-based games so wonderful and exciting for experienced BRP players.

Nerika of House Delaeus

Sworn Axe-Sister of Babeester Gor

Michael Cole

I am Nerika of House Delaeos, sworn axe-sister of Babeester Gor.
Return from whence you came, lest your blood feed the Earth this day.

For a recent Runequest Glorantha campaign, I came up with a character of Nerika, a Babeester Gor Axe-Sister. I wanted to create a Babeester Gor axe-sister who wasn't a berserk caricature, but a disciplined, heavy-armoured temple guard—a professional soldier rather than a zealot. This is also more fitting of the RQG interpretation.

Partially for game-play, but partially for just personal interest, I decided to go slightly overboard in building her. This will be the notes on the character, as well as a description of how she was constructed.

The Character Sheet

The character sheet, shown below, was generated from the **Adventures** chapter of the *RuneQuest: Roleplaying in Glorantha* manual (2018). Note that the character sheet is after some play, not as how it was when the character was created, so don't panic if it looks too powerful for a starting character.

Homeland was obviously Esrolia, but given that the campaign was to be in Dragon Pass, I decided to give my father a Tarshite heritage. I then conducted all of the various rolls to randomly generate the family tree. On my mother's side, it worked out fine, but for my father's side, I went slightly overboard, given that my paternal grandfather died early at Grizzly Peak. I had my Paternal grandmother remarry, and thus my father ended up with three older step-siblings, and four younger half-siblings. Names were all randomly selected or generated from a website somewhere. All of this is what ended up on the character sheet.

As part of this, I also started constructing a character background, which is listed below. Some of this came from events rolled as per the manual, but the rest flowed rather easily. This was more of a stream of consciousness thing—I started off trying to write prose, but then gave up and just used bullet points. I had in mind what sort of character I wanted, and just wrote the background points as they would lead to that. I also split it into sections to make it easier to read and write. This would be it.

Character Background Outline

Chapter One: Beginnings

My father, Kalan, was born in Tarsh in 1574, in what he believes was the East Bush Range. He was never totally sure, as his family moved around a lot when he was young. According to him, his father, my grandfather, was a hunter, but took umbrage at the Lunar occupation and effectively became a bandit, although Dad always called him a “Freedom Fighter”. I don’t think it was a particularly good early childhood for him—Dad doesn’t talk about those early days much, but does say that they always had to have everything ready to leave on a minute’s notice, and that their huts were always rough quick-built affairs.

This all ended in 1582, when his father fought the Lunars at Grizzly Peak, and was slain there. My father, who was only eight at the time, was taken by his mother to Lismelder in Sartar. His mother was a weaver by trade, but times would have tough for a widowed woman with a small child to support, particularly a foreigner from Tarsh. There, she met and married a Sartarite Warrior, who himself already had three children from a previous marriage.

Again, my father doesn’t talk much about this—I don’t think that it was an easy situation. Whilst he doesn’t speak about it, his younger half-sister, my Aunt Bel, has spoken to me about her father.

- Her father, my dad’s stepfather—not an easy man to get along with
- Was very harsh on Dad
- Already had three children—all older
- They were not that welcoming of him, being an outsider and not blood
- Mother and stepfather had four more children—father got on well with his half-sisters and brothers, but they were all much younger, by 16 years or more.

Chapter 2: Coming to Esrolia

It was in 1597 that everything changed for my father. The Lunars invaded.

Dad travelled to Esrolia to join a mercenary regiment there, I think more just to get away from his stepfather than anything else. He did very well, however was wounded—that was how he met my mother.

- Mother is Soraya of [House Delaeos](#)
- Yes, I am of House Delaeos—you don’t need to remind me, everyone else does.
- My grandmother is an elder of the clan, an Ermaldan Priestess, and was at one point, second in charge of the Temple in Nochet
- Her daughter, my mother, was a slight disappointment to her, in that she became a healer rather than a Ernaldan priestess. I think that this was partly in an attempt to get away from her—grandmother can be rather forthright and opinionated and controlling.

- Grandfather is a philosopher, really nice, but very mild
- Her only other child, my Aunt Terena, who is one year older than my mother, became a scribe. Never married—no children.
- My mother met my father at a recuperation hospital, and nursed him back to health. The injuries were rather severe, he was severely burnt.
- He was granted land in Pennell and settlement rights as compensation, and mother went with him there, perhaps to separate from her family.
- He did well, and was later able to buy property, and so able to get his mother and all four of his half-siblings down and to emigrate into Pennell after his stepfather died.

Chapter 3: Return to Nochet

- Parents had 4 children, Jalala, Larana, myself and then Polana. All of us born in Pennell.
- Life was good there, I enjoyed the rural life
- Dad started an apple orchard did well.
- I enjoyed being with my Aunts and Uncles—two married, and I had younger cousins to be with
- Was a good extended family, and I got on well with them
- After a while, Grandmother's requests became too much, and we all returned to the mansion in Nochet.
- Jalala and Larana really liked being in Nochet. They both joined the Ernalda Temple, and Grandmother was extremely pleased.
- My younger sister Pol managed to avoid that by getting an apprenticeship to Aunt Terena—Terena never married.
- I was sort of the odd one out.
- Big and solid but rather clumsy
- I just wasn't interested in the Ernaldan stuff—particularly the politics. Much preferred life in Pennell, but Grandmother wanted me to now fulfil my status.
- Managed to bargain all that away with my grandmother by joining Babeester Gor, and becoming a Temple Guard at the Ernaldan Grace Temple in Nochet.
- Wasn't that into Babeester Gor—I know this sounds sacrilegious, but I thought that this would keep everyone happy.

- Wasn't mad on the whole revenge/beating up on people/cutting off genitals thing—there were those in the guards that were, but I always found them a bit off-putting. The entire blaming men for everything—they obviously didn't get out much.
- Did like the whole beer brewing and drinking thing—that was definitely cool
- But more importantly, the Ernaldan priestesses were hot, and I was away from the mansion and disapproval.
- Pennell was simpler—it was mostly boys there—a couple of girls, but there was always a way to find some shelter away from others for a while.
- In Nochet, not so easy. Most of the Esrolian boys were very timid, given my family, and I wasn't interested in a marriage. Either that or they just became annoying.
- Only way for boys was to sneak down to the docks to find some foreign sailors, and there weren't than many that were young, attractive and clean—I do have some standards
- That left only girls, and there weren't many opportunities around the Clan House—we were rather insula
- The Temple thus seemed like a really good idea.

Chapter 4: The Temple

- I enjoyed those first few years—was good at learning military craft —it seemed to come naturally, not only the fighting skills, but also learning about battle tactics
- They also had a good library, and whilst not a gifted student, I enjoyed the studies of battle
- The cult stuff, not so much. Just wasn't really my thing. Never became as fanatical as some others of the Sisters.
- I did get on well with the sisters, there was a good comradery there, and it was definitely good living away from home.
- Also met a young priestess initiate, Pallegina. She became very sweet on me and I on her. We spent a lot of time together.
- Probably the best time of my life.

Chapter 5: The War

- So then, in 1622, when I was only 18, war came to Esrolia
- I was at the temple when Queen Samastina took refuge there
- Didn't initially think much of it—she was only a year older and of my house, so was familiar

- Found that I became a leader of the battle almost by accident
- Others charged wildly and were slaughter, or were scared and hid.
- I just seemed to not panic
- Ended up being placed in charge of holding the left flank, more through it descending to me.
- Although I didn't realise at the time, I did well, and impressed a lot of people, including the Queen
- After we destroyed the assassins and broke out, Samastina took me as one of her personal guards on the march to the Capital.
- The following year,
- Fought in the Siege of Nochet
- I was appointed a regiment commander and was blessed by Samastina
- Was rather surprised at this, being still so young, but Samastina had seemed to feel that I was capable, and worthy of patronage.
- I also took a liking to her—she took control in a difficult situation, whilst still very young
- Also received a valuable necklace from her at a public gifting
- I sort of became part of her “outer” inner circle.
- I was present at her wedding as part of the official guards
- Travelled with her and her new husband to Pennel Ford and fought there —saw Harrek the Beserk close up and survived

Chapter 6: After the War

- After that, I returned to Nochet with my Queen
- Found that things had changed
- My grandmother became very proud of me and started trying to show me off
- Started talking about me knuckling down and becoming a Barbeester Gor priestess or Rune Lord, or shifting to become an Ernaldan Priestess
- Even started talking about arranging a marriage
- Seemed kind of stifling to me.
- Pallegina sort of withdrew.

- I don't think she liked how I had become much more martial and business-like.
- Also, the family became more aware of it, and I didn't have as much spare time or space
- It became slightly awkward
- We are still friends, but there is a gap between us
- I do still miss what we had.
- I became more recognized—as if stuff was now expected of me, yet I was still only 21. I thought I was still young and could just do my own stuff without being watched.
- Fumbled around for a couple of years, still at the palace and temple, unsure of what to do.
- Then came the Dragonrise
- Found myself at a loss as to what to do
- Then came the request from Dragon Pass for Babeester Gor warriors to assist in Temple Defence—many had died during the conflict there
- Decided to travel, got permission to go. Not sure how long I will be gone, or what I will do whilst I am there, but it should give me some time to clear my head and decide what I want for my future.

Character Background in Prose

I then decided to cheat, and used an LLM to come up with a prose version of the background outline. I put in the above outline, along with a few more notes about various items in terms of character motivations as I read them, and it came back with the following as the various chapters.

Chapter One: Beginnings (Revised)

My father, **Kalan**, was born in Tarsh in 1574, in what he believes was the East Bush Range. He was never totally sure, as his family moved around a lot when he was young. According to him, his father, my grandfather **Daranth**, was a hunter who took umbrage at the Lunar occupation and effectively became a bandit, although Dad always called him a “freedom fighter.” I don't think it was a particularly good early childhood for him—Dad doesn't talk about those early days much, but he does say that they always had to be ready to leave at a minute's notice, and that their huts were always rough, quick-built affairs.

This all ended in 1582, when Daranth fought the Lunars at Grizzly Peak and was slain there. My father, who was only eight at the time, was taken by his mother, **Enastara the Weaver**, to Lismelder lands in Sartar. Times would have been tough for a widowed

woman with a small child to support, particularly a foreigner from Tarsh. There, she met and married a Sartarite warrior who already had three children from a previous marriage.

Again, my father doesn't talk much about this—I don't think it was an easy situation. His stepfather was not an easy man to get along with, very harsh on Dad, and his step-siblings were not welcoming of him, being outsiders to his blood. His mother and stepfather had four more children together, though, and Father got on well with them despite the age gap of more than sixteen years. These were my aunts and uncles — **Belana, Laran, Andrin, and Hendira.**

Of all my extended family, it was these Tarshite-Sartarite half-siblings that I myself came to feel closest to later in life. I got on with them better than anyone else. They were straightforward, practical, and at home in the rural lands, and I found their company comfortable. I always felt far more at ease around their nature than the polished politicking of Nochet. Looking back, I think this is why I enjoyed Pennell so much — its simplicity, its orchards, its sense of family.

Chapter Two: Coming to Esrolia (Revised)

It was in 1597 that everything changed for my father. The Lunars invaded. Dad travelled south into Esrolia to join a mercenary regiment there—I think more just to get away from his stepfather than anything else. He did very well, but was badly wounded, and that was how he met my mother.

My mother is **Soraya of House Delaeos.** Yes, I am of House Delaeos—you don't need to remind me; everyone else already does. My grandmother, **Enestra,** is an elder of the clan, a high Ernaldan priestess who was, at one point, second in command of the temple in Nochet. She is forthright, opinionated, and very controlling, and she took over much of my mother's life. Her daughters were, to her mind, disappointments: Soraya became a healer instead of a priestess, and her eldest sister **Terena** remained childless and pursued the life of a scribe. To my grandmother, the birth of four granddaughters to my parents was a blessing from Ernalda herself—and she made sure everyone knew it. From the moment we were born, she spoke of us as temple daughters and bargaining pieces in marriage alliances.

I grew up surrounded by religious ritual. In Nochet, every festival, every household meal, even our bedtime prayers were bound up in the ceremonies of Ernalda. As a girl, I was paraded through it all, dressed in fine green robes and laden with flowers. I didn't object much—I understood it was expected, and it amused me more than anything—but I never took it as seriously as Grandmother wanted. She noticed, of course, and made her disapproval very clear.

My mother met my father at the temple hospital in Nochet while nursing the mercenaries back to health. His burns were severe, and she stayed with him through the long recovery. In return for his service, he was granted land and settlement rights in **Pennell,** and my mother went with him there, perhaps partly to separate from her own mother's controlling influence.

Pennell was good to them both. Father planted an apple orchard, and we four children—**Jalala, Larana,** myself, and **Polana**—were all born there. My cousins, uncles, and aunts gathered in Pennell as well, for my father later bought property and brought his Tarshite half-siblings south. It was a good extended family, a lively household of

cousins and playmates. We roamed the orchards, helped with the harvest, and learned to live with the land. I grew up knowing how to farm, ride, and fight with sticks in the fields long before I learned the polished manners of Nochet. Looking back, I think those years were the happiest of my childhood.

Chapter Three: Return to Nochet (Revised)

Life in Pennell suited me. I liked the orchards, the open fields, and the noisy, warm company of my cousins. But eventually, Grandmother's requests became too much to ignore. She wanted her granddaughters back in Nochet, to raise us into her vision of priestesses and brides, and my parents eventually gave in. We left Pennell behind and returned to the great mansion of House Delaeos.

My older sisters, **Jalala** and **Larana**, took to Nochet life eagerly. Both entered the Ernaldan temple, much to Grandmother's delight. My younger sister, **Polana**, wriggled out of those expectations by becoming Aunt Terena's apprentice as a scribe. Grandmother was proud of her, too, though perhaps not as much as of the temple daughters.

That left me. I was big, strong, and a little clumsy—not the graceful, diplomatic figure Grandmother wanted for temple or marriage politics. I wasn't drawn to the ceremonies or the endless intrigues, and truth be told, I preferred the quiet life of Pennell to the city's endless games. Grandmother, of course, expected more. She had four granddaughters, and she meant to use all of us: temple status, marriages, alliances, the whole game of Esrolian power. My two eldest sisters were already placed—Jalala was whispered to be in line for a temple marriage, while Larana was being courted by one of the noble houses allied to Samastina. That meant her eye turned to me.

I couldn't bear it. I wasn't ready for marriage, and I wasn't about to become the pliant pawn Grandmother wanted. Instead, I bargained with her. I would join the cult of **Babeester Gor** and serve as a temple guard at the Grace Temple. It kept me in a respected position, close to the Ernaldan hierarchy, but it freed me from the pressure to be a priestess or bride. Grandmother, though disappointed, accepted the compromise—and in her eyes, it was still better than nothing.

I never took the cult with the same fervour as some of my sisters-in-arms. Many of the guards were wild in their devotion — fierce, vengeful, even frightening. I was dutiful and steady, but I never embraced the fanaticism. I was the sort who would give directions to a nervous supplicant or share a laugh with a fellow guard over a mug of beer. I liked the beer—Babeester Gor's brewers are among the best — but the blood-oaths and mutilations never sat right with me.

For me, the temple was more about freedom. Away from the mansion, away from my grandmother's disapproval, I had my own quarters, my own duties, and my own circle of comrades. It was in the temple that I met **Pallegina**, a young priestess-initiate. We were both seventeen when we grew close, and she was my first real love. For a time, those years in the temple were the best of my life—a place where I belonged, at least for a while.

Chapter Four: The Temple (Revised)

My initiation into **Babeester Gor** was meant to be terrifying—bloody, brutal, designed to strip away weakness. I went in expecting the worst, but found myself surprisingly

calm. I wasn't spooked, even when the rituals grew darker, or when the other initiates flinched at the oaths. I didn't treat it lightly—not exactly—but I couldn't help seeing it as just one more test to pass. In the end, I impressed everyone, including myself. The Sisters who oversaw the rites had expected me to stumble, and when I didn't, their shock almost startled me more than the ritual itself. For the first time, I realised I had an inner strength I hadn't known was there.

The next few years were good ones. I learned the arts of war, and the temple taught me quickly. Axe-work came naturally, and I found that I had a knack not just for fighting, but for keeping my head when others panicked. I was no scholar, but the temple library taught me more about battle than I'd ever imagined, and I found myself fascinated by tactics and histories.

Not everything suited me. Some of the Sisters were fanatics, ready to cut down any man who crossed them, glorying in blood and vengeance. I never warmed to that side of the cult. I was dutiful, but I wasn't cruel. Off duty, I was friendly, even sociable, more likely to point a visitor toward the right shrine than to frighten them into silence. The others sometimes raised their eyebrows at that, but I didn't care. It was simply who I was.

It was in the temple that I met **Pallegina**, an initiate priestess. She was clever, earnest, and sweet on me from the start. At first I laughed it off, but soon I found myself just as taken with her. We were both seventeen, both discovering who we were, and we spent nearly every spare moment together. She was my first real love, and for a time I thought it might last forever.

Looking back, those were probably the happiest years of my life — training, studying, drinking with my Sisters, and stealing away to be with Pallegina. I didn't think much about politics, or about my grandmother's plans for me. For the first time since leaving Pennell, I felt like I belonged.

Chapter Five: The War (Revised)

In 1622, when I was only eighteen, war came to Esrolia. I was still serving as a temple guard when Queen **Samastina** took refuge with us at the Grace Temple. At first, I didn't think much of it. She was only a year older than me, and from my own House, so she felt more like a cousin than a Queen. But when the fighting started, everything changed.

The assassins struck hard, and many of our leaders fell in the first clash. Panic spread through the defenders—some charged wildly to their deaths, others froze in fear. Somehow, I stayed calm. I didn't plan to take command, but with no one else giving orders, people started looking to me. I gave directions, organised the defence, and held the left flank together. It wasn't strategy so much as common sense—but it worked. Later, I realised I'd been leading women far more senior than me, and even Samastina herself had taken note.

When the assassins were crushed and the Queen marched on the capital, she took me with her as one of her guards. I didn't expect it, but she seemed to recognise something in me—steadiness, perhaps, or just the nerve to act when others faltered. The bond of House Delaeos may have helped too, but I know she chose me because I'd proven myself.

The next year was worse. I fought in the **Siege of Nochet**, and later at **Pennell**

Ford, where I saw **Harrek the Berserk** fight with my own eyes and somehow survived. I was still so young, yet Samastina appointed me as a regiment commander and blessed me before all. She even gave me a necklace in public gifting, marking me as one of her circle. It was an honour I never expected.

But the cost was high. I lost Sisters and friends, both in the temple and on the battlefield. Returning to Nochet, I walked past empty bunks and silent training yards where once there had been laughter. I still see their faces when I close my eyes. And standing so close to Harrek when his rage took hold—that memory will never leave me.

After the war, my family changed toward me. My grandmother, for the first time, was proud of me, eager to parade me as an asset to House Delaeos. My younger sister Pol was openly delighted, though my elder sisters were more reserved, absorbed in their own temple duties. For Grandmother, I had finally proven myself useful—and she meant to make use of me.

Chapter Six: After the War (Revised)

After Pennell Ford, I returned to Nochet with my Queen. At first, I felt proud—I had fought, commanded, and survived. I had honours I never imagined, and Samastina herself treated me as a trusted guard. But when the cheering faded, I found that everything had changed.

My grandmother, once so critical, became proud of me at last. She showed me off at every chance, speaking of me as if I were the jewel of House Delaeos. Yet beneath her pride lay her old ambitions: she began to talk about me becoming a Babeester Gor priestess, or perhaps even shifting into the Ernaldan hierarchy. She spoke of marriage, of alliances, of what I could win for the House. For her, I was no longer a disappointment—I was an asset.

I didn't feel like one. The temple I returned to was quieter, emptier. Many of the Sisters I had trained and laughed with were gone, killed in the fighting. Walking the halls, I could almost hear their voices, but their beds remained empty. I carried their memory, but it weighed on me more than it comforted.

Pallegina, too, had changed. While I had grown harder, more martial, she recoiled from what I had become. She had loved me when we were carefree and close, but now my duties pulled me away from her, and my new status made everything between us awkward. My family had begun to notice us as well, and that made it worse. Slowly, she withdrew. We are still friends, but it is not what it was. She was my first and only love, and though I try not to show it, I miss her still.

Queen Samastina remained kind to me. She was only a year older, and though she wore a crown, we spoke as near equals, both of House Delaeos. She gave me her support whenever she could, but even her friendship could not ease my sense of being stifled. I liked her well enough, but palace life was not for me—too many eyes, too many rules, and no chance to slip away for a drink or a laugh.

So there I was, twenty-one years old, with a reputation far beyond my years, yet unsure of who I was or what I wanted. I knew only that I needed space—space to think, space to breathe, space to decide my future. When word came from Dragon Pass that Babeester Gor warriors were needed for temple defence after the Dragonrise, I seized the chance. I asked leave to go, and it was granted. I don't know how long I will be gone, or

what path I will walk there, but perhaps among strangers, away from my grandmother's ambitions and my Queen's expectations, I will find out who I really am.

Companions

Whilst Babeester Gor does not canonically use "squires", junior initiates or temple acolytes often serve as attendants to senior Sisters on pilgrimage or campaign. Also, Nerika is going on a long journey, and is still a member of House Delaeos, and thus in some way also represents the Queen. She would most likely travel with attendants, not for fighting, but for logistics, messaging and presentation. It would be very odd for someone of her stature to be wandering unaccompanied in a foreign nation.

Obviously, it would be up to the GM as to whether this would be allowed, but I would suggest that as long as they are non-combatant and do not overshadow the main character, they would certainly add colour and in some ways add complications—they need to be protected. As such, I have given her two attendants and travelling companions, neither of which is particularly powerful, but they do round out the party.

Junior Cult Sister/Apprentice

Name: Thandine ("Thandi")

Age: 15

Background: Daughter of an Esrolian brewer family, dedicated to Babeester Gor but too young and untested for full battle service. Assigned to Nerika partly as training, partly to assist.

Personality:

- Grimly serious, very literal, and tries too hard to be "fierce."
- Idolises Nerika, though Nerika's casual, dry manner confuses her.
- Overeager with ritual—the type to quote cult oaths at strangers in a scary monotone.
- Inexperienced in combat; strong enough to carry baggage, help with armour, and hold torches, but not a reliable fighter yet.

Utility:

- Takes care of armour and weapons and suits up Nerika (laces armour, tightens straps, oils bronze).
- Takes care of horses and gear.

Household Servant

Name: Dastara ("Dasi")

Age: 19

Background: A cousin through one of House Delaeos' cadet branches—not noble, but raised in the household. Literate, clever, assigned by Grandmother Enestra to “make sure Nerika doesn't embarrass the House.”

Personality:

- Wry, witty, and talkative.
- Cares nothing for cult fanaticism; thinks all the blood-oaths are absurd.
- Loyal to Nerika, but also sends regular reports back to House Delaeos.
- Socially savvy, good at smoothing things over with outsiders, innkeepers, merchants.

Utility:

- Handles supplies, money, and correspondence.
- Acts as Nerika's “voice” when diplomacy is required (especially in Esrolian politics).

Outfitting

So, the next step was to come up with an outfit, in particular, combat outfitting. Here, rather than the expected bare-tits, foaming mouth and large axe of the stereotypical Babeester Gor axe-sister, I wanted to outfit her as a Temple Guard of the Grace Temple, the largest Ernaldan Temple in the Largest City. Full proper layered armour, with proper accoutrements.

Firstly, some notes on Bronze. Historically, bronze was expensive, rare, and was poured into moulds and cast rather than being worked in a forge. There are various references to the manufacture of such, but in general, they do not hold a sharp edge as well as iron, nor are they as durable—they do however have excellent corrosion resistance. This also means that the blades cannot be large.

The other major drawback is that it cannot be worked. What this means is that for axes, unlike nowadays where you form a loop in the head and insert a haft through the loop, with bronze, the best you can do is form a socket or lathes, and insert the haft in to the socket and pin. For this, in order to get the most power, you required an angled handle and the heads were rather small and wedge-shaped. The other option is to mould two heads and bolt them together around a handle, to form a labrys.

With respect to armour, a full bronze breastplate is costly but practical; entire suits are rare. Scale and plate are common; mail (chain) requires very high-skill casting or riveting bronze rings and so would be extremely rare and costly.

For Runequest, with the idea of holy metals, we can perhaps ignore some of these, but I have tried to keep them in mind somewhat in the outfitting. I have envisaged this as a kind of Minoean-Etruscan fusion.

Combat Suiting Guide

So first, I will list the standard combat/guard duty outfit, layer by layer, with rough time estimates. This assumes she's either suiting herself up (for training, guard duty, or skirmish readiness) or being helped by a temple novice/household servant (for full ceremonial combat kit).

Base Layer

- **Loincloth**¹, tied/wrapped. ~1 minute (quick, like underwear).
- **Silk/cotton shift (sleeveless, mid-thigh)** pulled over head. ~1 minute.
- **Heavy linen/wool dress (3-ply quilted, mid-thigh, half-sleeves, laced front)** over shift, lace adjusted. 2–3 minutes.

Purpose: Hygiene, modesty, warmth, and a base for heavier armour.

Padding & Core Protection

- **Padded vest (horsehair, diamond-stitched linen, tight fit, laced at collar)** squashes chest, stiffens torso. 3–5 minutes (hardest to pull on solo, easier with help).
- **Thick belt with bronze/ leather tassets, culet, tassels, axe ring** buckled around waist. 2 minutes.

Purpose: Impact absorption, distributing weight, symbolic “girdle of the temple.”

Plate Foundation

- **Scale sleeves**² (elbow length, tied to vest at shoulder/armpit) slip arms in, secure thongs. 3–4 minutes (fiddly ties).
- **Bronze breastplate + backplate (hinged right, strapped left/shoulders)** step in, close hinge, buckle. 5 minutes solo, 2–3 minutes with help. The breastplate is boob-plate—even though the breasts are squashed down under the vest, and the sculpted areas could assist in aiming, it is Barbeester Gor, and so the contours would be required. It has a double-headed axe embossed into the surface—the two headed above and circling the top of the breasts with the handle extending straight down the front.
- **Pauldrons (tongue-and-groove slot in breastplate, strap round upper arm)** slot and strap both sides. 2 minutes. Note that these would be problematic for putting on without assistance, as they limit the raising of the arms. They are slid downward into the breastplate clamshell over the armholes, and will assist in keeping the breast and backplate fastened together.
- **Optional midriff protector (bronze disc/plates on belt, laced left side)** buckle and lace. 2 minutes. The central plate is circular, about 20 cm in diameter, and embossed with a design of the Grace Temple, with two rectangular plates on each side embossed with the six sisters of Nochet. It acts to not only cover the midriff gap, but also the central plate would extend down and offer some groin protection. Note that it makes it difficult to bend at the waist, so whilst required for ceremonial duties, is optional in combat.

Purpose: Heavy torso protection and cult symbolism (the embossed Babeester Gor axe and the city and temple emblems).

¹Yes, I know that there is this myth that women in the past did not wear underwear, but that myth is due simply to poor preservation. Particularly at that time of month, it would be essential, and at other times, it would be cold. See also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subligaculum>.

²Overlapping bronze scales sewn over a linen backing.

Lower Limbs

- **Leather boots with bronze caps.** 2 minutes.
- **Demi-greaves (bronze, leather backing, strapped over calves, with knee + instep plates)** buckled at rear. 2–3 minutes each leg.

Purpose: Mobility and protection for lower legs.

Head & Hands

- **Padded hood (felt/linen, open face, neck coverage)** pulled on. 1 minute.
- **Bronze helmet with nasal guard** settled over hood, straps/buckles. 2 minutes. This resembles a Corinthian-style helmet. This is a family heirloom, so it would be decorated with feathers as the crest, with embossed snakes on each side—the symbols of House Delaeos. It also contains an inset crystal with a 2-point Protection Spirit Matrix.
- **Leather gauntlets with bronze bars (open palms, extend halfway up forearm, fingertips in sockets)** slip on, secure. 1–2 minutes.
- **Optional. Bronze Mitten Plates** slip over gauntlets and fasten. 1–2 minutes. These are ridged plates curved around the back of the hand and the fingers, and keep the hand curled. They would mostly only be used with the great axe, as they are too restrictive otherwise.

Purpose: Protection vs. missiles and blows, open palms preserve grip on axe.

Weapons & Accessories

- **Utility belt loadout:**
 - Front right, a small curved knife for cutting, hanging down along the crease of the right leg
 - Left side, front—chalk bag, for drying palms before combat
 - Left side, rear—pouch containing bandages
 - Right side, front—pouch containing candle, flint and steel, writing charcoal, and a whistle
 - Right side, rear—Either a quiver (if taking a bow) or a water canteen
 - Rear—dagger, with sheath horizontal on belt.
- **Main axe (ring-hung on right)** slotted in. 30 seconds.
- **Great axe (looped onto hinged back-hook rivetted to backplate)** settled behind right shoulder. 1 minute (needs awareness to balance).
- **Shield (hung on left back-hook on backplate, with throwing axes inside)** secured last. 1–2 minutes. This would be wood, with a bronze facing, and with a central boss and handgrip. On the inside would be two sheathes for the two short-hafted throwing axes.

This would be a lot of kit, probably around 30 to 35 kgs all up, but Nerika is strength 18. It also would not be worn all the time—purely for ceremonial or in battle. It is a statement, not just armour. Total suit-up time would be around 30 minutes solo, but only around 15–20 minutes with assistance. Most of the heavy bronze goes on after the padding, and it is well distributed so given her build, this should be survivable.

Partially Armoured

This would be for travel in uncertain or frontier regions—some protection without being exhausting or out of place.

- Base layers (as above)
- Padded vest
- Belt with bronze/ leather tassets, culet, tassels, axe ring
- Torc—This would be the 400 Lunar gift from Queen Samastina. It is silver with emerald inlays at the tips with a leaf and vine motif, similar to the [Snettisham Great Torc](#), but simpler.
- Scale sleeves
- Knife and axe on belt
- Shield slung on rear of horse

Unarmoured

For travel in peaceful areas

- Base layers (as above)
- **Wool or linen travel dress** (knee to mid-calf length, belted, sleeved). Simpler than temple garb, dyed in deep colours (green, red, or brown).
- **Sturdy leather boots or sandals** (depending on weather/terrain).
- **Wool cloak** for warmth and rain, fastened with a bronze brooch or pin.
- Belt with knife and small hand axe of a more ceremonial design
- Torc

Other Clothing

- **Ceremonial garb:** For cult rituals or appearances with nobles: a formal **dyed linen gown** with bronze clasp or embroidered trim, showing her status as Babeester Gor warrior of House Delaeos.
- **Casual tunics & skirts:** For off-duty in inns, camps, and villages—more comfortable, less intimidating. Likely wool/linen, with sturdy sandals.

Travel Pack

So, for what she would need on her travels. Four horses, one for each of the three in the party and one pack animal.

Nerika's horse would carry her, her shield, and her personal gear in saddle bags. The great axe would be strapped to the right-hand side, with a leather scabbard over the head to protect the horse.

Dasi would carry spare clothing, a correspondence/writing kit, a small lock-box for valuables and coin and her own personal gear.

Thandi would carry general horse and gear maintenance equipment, required temple/cult votive items and her own personal gear.

The pack animal would carry the bronze armour (bundled up) and any weapons not in use, plus supplies—camp gear (small pot, iron tripod, ladle, wooden bowls/spoons) and food (dried fruit, flatbread, hard cheese, jerky—enough for 3–5 days before needing replenishment).

The Earth has had her drink. Leave now, or She'll thirst again.

**AGILITY**Modifier **+10**

- Boat (05) _____
- Climb (40) _____ **44**
- Dodge (DEX x2) _____ **18**
- Drive (05) _____
- Jump (DEX x3) _____ **30**
- Ride (Horse) (05) _____ **15**
- Swim (15) _____

COMMUNICATIONModifier **+10/20**

- Act (05) _____
- Art (05) _____
- Bargain (05) _____ **25**
- Charm (15) _____
- Dance (10) _____ **20**
- Disguise (05) _____
- Fast Talk (05) _____
- Intimidate (15) _____ **43**
- Intrigue (05) _____ **10**
- Orate (10) _____
- Sing (10) _____ **30**
- Speak Other Language
 - (Tradetalk) (00) _____ **30**
 - (Earthtongue) (00) _____ **14**
- Speak Own Language
 - (Esrolian) (50) _____ **50**

KNOWLEDGEModifier **+10**

- Alchemy (00) _____
- Animal Lore (05) _____
- Battle (10) _____ **78**
- Bureaucracy (00) _____
- Celestial Lore (05) _____
- Cult Lore
 - (Babeester Gor) (05) _____ **20**
 - (Ernalda) (05) _____ **15**
- Customs (local) (25) _____ **25**
- Customs
 - (_____) (00) _____
- Elder Race Lore (05) _____
- Evaluate (10) _____
- Farm (10) _____ **35**
- First Aid (10) _____ **43**
- Game (15) _____
- Herd (05) _____
- Homeland Lore (own) (30) _____
- Homeland Lore
 - (Sartar) (00) _____ **10**
 - (_____) (00) _____
- Library Use (00) _____
- Manage Household (10) _____
- Mineral Lore (05) _____
- Peaceful Cut (10) _____
- Plant Lore (05) _____
- Read/Write
 - (Theyalan) (00) _____ **10**
- Shiphandling (00) _____
- Survival (15) _____
- Treat Disease (05) _____
- Treat Poison (05) _____

MAGICModifier **+10/20**

- Meditate (00) _____ **5**
- Prepare Corpse (10) _____
- Sense Assassin (00) _____
- Sense Chaos (00) _____
- Spirit Combat (20) _____ **35**
- Spirit Dance (00) _____
- Spirit Lore (00) _____
- Spirit Travel (10) _____
- Understand Herd Beast (00) _____
- Worship
 - (Babeester Gor) (05) _____ **28**
 - (_____) (05) _____

MANIPULATIONModifier **+15**

- Conceal (05) _____
- Craft (_____) (10) _____
- (_____) (10) _____
- Devise (05) _____
- Play Instrument (_____) (05) _____
- Sleight (05) _____

PERCEPTIONModifier **+10**

- Insight (own species) (20) _____
- Insight (_____) (00) _____
- (_____) (00) _____
- Listen (25) _____ **38**
- Scan (25) _____ **44**
- Search (25) _____
- Track (05) _____
- Hide (10) _____
- Move Quietly (10) _____

OTHER SKILLS

- _____
- _____
- _____

ADDITIONAL MAGIC

- _____
- _____
- _____

NOTES

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

GEAR, TREASURE, AND MAGIC ITEMS

- Bronze Plate Segmented w/ Quilted Undershirt (7 points Spiritual Armour) _____ Max ENC **17** ENC **16/11**
- Plate Greaves & Vambraces, and Closed Helmet w/ Leather Hood with 2pt Protection Spirit Matrix _____
- Sleeping roll, good clothing - Standard + Closed Bodice & Dress (LHS Saddle Bag) _____
- Climber's Pack - pitons, hammer, hook and rope) - RHS Saddle bag. _____
- 400L Necklace (Gift - Queen Samastina), Necklace, 2pt Glamour (Gift - Leki of Colymar) _____
- 6 +1 Throwing Axes, Bow w/ 8pt Crystal, 12 +1 Arrows, Kaga _____
- Wheels (W) _____ Lunars (L) **90** Clacks (C) _____ Bolgs (B) _____ Goods (L) **140**



FAMILY

GRANDPARENTS

Grandfather (F) Hunter (Tarsh), (M) Phil. (Nochet) Dead?
Grandmother (F) Weaver (Tarsh), (M) Priestess (Nochet) Dead?

AUNTS & UNCLES

FssB - (Sartarite, Lismelder) G M Dead?
FssS - (Sartarite, Lismelder) G F Dead?
FssB - (Sartarite, Lismelder) G M Dead?
--- G Dead?
FsS - Belana (1590 (35), Farmer, Pennell) G F Dead?
FsB - Laran (1592 (33), Farmer, Pennell) G M Dead?
FsB - Andrin (1596 (29), Farmer, Pennell) G M Dead?
FsS - Hendira (1598 (27), Farmer, Pennell) G F Dead?
--- G Dead?
MS - Terena (1577 (49), Scribe, Nochet) G F Dead?
G Dead?
G Dead?

PARENTS

Father Kalan (1574 (52), Farmer, Tarsh via Pennell) Dead?
Mother Soraya (1576 (48), Healer, Nochet) Dead?

SIBLINGS

Jalala (1598 (27), Ernalda Priestess) G F Dead?
Larana (1600 (25), Ernalda Priestess) G F Dead?
(Myself (1604 (21))) G F Dead?
Polana (1607 (18), Scribe (appr. to aunt)) G F Dead?
G Dead?
G Dead?
G Dead?
G Dead?
G Dead?
G Dead?
G Dead?
G Dead?

FAMOUS ANCESTORS

CLAN & TRIBAL LEADERS

FAMILY EVENTS

MARRIAGE

MARRIAGE TYPE

STATUS

CHILDREN

Spouse _____ G _____ Dead? _____ G _____ Dead?
Spouse _____ G _____ Dead? _____ G _____ Dead?
Events _____ _____ G _____ Dead? _____ G _____ Dead?

HOLDINGS

HARVEST

MODIFIER

HOUSEHOLD

Last Year's Omen _____
Raiding _____
Heroquest _____
Previous Year's Harvest _____
Next Year's Omen _____

Description _____

_____ Hides _____

ADVENTURER INCOME

Base Income _____ L Special Notes _____

Tenant(s) _____

MOUNT | ELEMENTAL | ALLY

NAME	TYPE	ATTACK	%	DAMAGE	RANGE	SR	PTS	LOCATION	D20	ARMOR/HP						
STR	CON	SIZ	DEX	INT						/						
POW	CHA	MOV	HP	MP						/						
DAMAGE BONUS	DEX SR	SIZ SR								/						
PASSIONS		SKILLS								/						
RUNES		PTS								/						
MAGIC										/						
		HIT POINTS	DEAD	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		/	
NOTE		RANSOM	(L)	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	/



ADVENTURER BACKGROUND WORKSHEET

HOMELAND

Homeland Esrolia

BASE PASSIONS

Love (family) _____
 Loyalty (clan) _____
 Loyalty (tribe) _____
 Hate _____
 Other _____

PARENTAGE

Favored Grandparent _____
 Occupation _____
 Favored Parent _____
 Occupation _____
 Other Grandparent _____
 Occupation _____
 Other Parent _____
 Occupation _____

FAMILY HISTORY

FAVORED GRANDPARENT'S HISTORY

If killed, stop and move to Favored Parent's History, or continue using your other grandparent.

YEAR	EVENT	RESULTS	FATE
1561	Your favored grandparent was born by this year.		
1582	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
	Your parents were born by this year.		
1597	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1602	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1603-4	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
	Your parents are married by now, if at all. Your adventurer was born sometime in 1604.		
1605	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>

If your favored grandparent survives this long, they retire from adventuring. Now your favored parent begins adventuring. Determine your mother's and father's siblings, if desired. See the Family section on the Family & Holdings sheet.

FAVORED PARENT'S HISTORY

If killed, stop and move to Your History, or continue using your other parent. Determine your siblings, if desired.

YEAR	EVENT	RESULTS	FATE
1608	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1610	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1613	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1615	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1616	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1618	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1619	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1620	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>
1621	_____		Killed? <input type="checkbox"/>

If your favored parent survives this long, they retire from adventuring. Congratulations! It's time for your own history.

YOUR HISTORY

You come of age and your adventures begin.

YEAR	EVENT	RESULTS
1622	Fought gloriously in Esrolian Civil War - Protected Queen Samastina from Red Earth Assassins - +4 Reputation	
1623	Fought in Siege of Nochet, and at Pennell Ford - Blessed by Queen Samastina - Saw Harrak Fight - +10 Battle, +3 Reputation	
1624	_____	
1625	Witnessed the Dragonrise	

Now it's time for new adventures!

TREASURE AND BOONS

2Rep Lunar Outlaws, 2Rep Battle, 3Rep Battle of Red Cow
+8 War Wagon, +12 Mirror, +2 Chariot

FAMOUS ANCESTORS AND REPUTATION

1625 - Fought in Tusker Raid on Apple Lane, +3 Reputation
1625 - Killed Redeye, +6 Reputation

An integer programming approach to RuneQuest 3e training calculations

Timothy Rice

Introduction

RuneQuest 3rd Edition [1] features a dynamic skill system that allows characters to improve skills if and only if they exert those skills. This can be through practical experience—for example, if you successfully use first aid during combat, you will unlock a chance to improve your character's first aid skill. Another way to exert a skill is to devote quiet periods in a character's life to researching and training in the skill. One convention is to allow fifty hours training for each week in which the character is not actively adventuring.

This document will focus on the mechanics of training, rather than of practical adventurous experience.

Each time you want to increase a skill through training, your character must invest a pre-determined number of hours based on the current skill rank. Each such increase is small by itself, but the process can be repeated an arbitrary number of times, so long as hours are available.

As the skill increases, each increment takes more training time to complete. This algorithm admits fast increases for low-ranked skills, but those unwilling to go on adventures will find ultimate mastery recedes beyond their reach.

Formally, the training procedure goes like so:

1. Decide in advance whether your skill change will be chosen by $1d6 - 2$, or a deterministic increase by exactly 2%. Since the expected value of $1d6 - 2 = 1.5$, most people will choose the flat 2% increase; we will therefore assume i is a fixed constant through most of what follows.

Let the outcome of this decision be called i , so usually $i = 2$.

2. Let the current skill be denoted s (which is always an integer).
 - If $s \leq 0$ then one hour is required to raise the skill by an amount equal to i .
 - Otherwise if $s \geq 1$ the amount of training required to increase the skill from $s\%$ to $(s + i)\%$ is s hours.

For example, it takes an hour to raise a skill from -5 to -3 , and it takes three hours to raise a skill from 3 to 5.

At this point, those wishing to chart the course of their character's future progression will take interest in questions such as:

- If I want to increase a particular skill to a desired level, how many hours do I need to invest?
- If I have h hours to invest in a skill, what progression will I see?

Past efforts to answer these questions have involved manual iteration or computational simulation of the training process. Although such methods have their place in problems that resist analytical solutions, it turns out that we can derive exact closed-form expressions that obviate past guestimations.

Notation

We will want to make use of various notations which render mathematical concepts more succinct. Let:

- $x \vee y$ denote the *maximum* of x and y and let $x \wedge y$ denote the *minimum*. Example: $-2 \vee 1 = 1$; $-2 \wedge 1 = -2$.

(This notation is commonly used in probability theory. It will be useful for imposing a minimum of one hour training even if the current skill is negative.)

- $|x|$ denote the *absolute value*: $|-2| = 2$. That is, turn any negative numbers into positive numbers.
- $\lfloor x \rfloor$ denote the *floor* function, which means *rounding down*. Examples: $\lfloor 2.718282 \rfloor = 2$; $\lfloor 3.1415927 \rfloor = 3$; $\lfloor -3.1415927 \rfloor = -4$.
- $\lceil x \rceil$ denote the *ceiling* function, which means *rounding up*. Examples: $\lceil 2.718282 \rceil = 3$; $\lceil 3.1415927 \rceil = 4$; $\lceil -3.1415927 \rceil = -3$.
- $[m]$ denote $\{1, 2, \dots, m\}$.
- $I(x)$ denote the *indicator* of expression x , which equals one if x is true and 0 otherwise. Example: $I(3 \leq 0) = 0$ because $3 \leq 0$ is false; but $I(3 > 0) = 1$ because it is true that $3 > 0$.

s_n : The skill value after training n times

For a given skill that we want to increase repetitively, let s_n denote the skill rank after the n^{th} increase; it is consistent with this definition to have s_0 represent the pre-training skill percentage. The following fact is worth noting for the case where skill increases are fixed at a given value of i (such as 2%):

$$s_n = s_0 + in. \tag{7.1}$$

If we were not using fixed skill increases, we would need to write $s_n = s_0 + \sum_{j \in [n]} i_j$ where i_j is the size of the j^{th} skill increase; and in general i_j could be a random number, so we would need to employ a stochastic analysis in that case.

t_n : **The cumulative training time for n increases**

Analogously to s_n , let t_n denote the cumulative time to achieve the n^{th} increase. For example, if we start from $s_0 = 0$ it will take an hour to increase the skill to two. Then $s_1 = 2$ and $t_1 = 1$. For convenience, we set $t_0 = 0$ without loss of generality.

Hours required for multiple increases

In this section we explore the first question: how long does it take to raise a skill currently at $s\%$ to a new value of $S\%$? The results we obtain will prove useful for answering the second question.

We first consider the simplest case when the starting skill is greater than zero. This will then lead to a general formula that encompasses any starting skill, as well as tolerating deviations from the RuneQuest 3e canonical rules.

Since we are dealing with integers, for a given target skill of $S\%$ there is no guarantee there will be a given n such that $s_0 + in$ yields S *exactly*. More likely, the querant wants to know how long to reach that skill *or higher*. So this is really a stopping-time problem: when does training *first* yield an $s_n \geq S$?

Adhering to the case of constant skill increases i , we can find out the target n after a bit of arithmetic:

$$n = \left\lceil \frac{S - s_0}{i} \right\rceil. \quad (7.2)$$

For example if your current skill is 2 and you want to raise it to 3, $\left\lceil \frac{3-s_0}{i} \right\rceil = \left\lceil \frac{3-2}{2} \right\rceil = 1$; which matches the obvious, that training exactly once will do.

The case when $s_0 > 0$

Let's begin with an example where $s_0 = 1$. Clearly, $t_1 = s_0 = 1$; then $s_1 = s_0 + i$ which will bring the skill up to three (using $i = 2$). The training required to achieve the next improvement is thus also three, or $t_2 = t_1 + s_1 = 1 + 3 = 4$ hours.

In other words, starting with a skill of 1%, we have invested four hours to achieve two improvements, bringing the skill up to 5%. Not bad for one morning's work!

Putting it together we can see a pattern emerge:

$$\begin{aligned}
t_1 &= s_0 \\
t_2 &= t_1 + s_1 \\
&= s_0 + s_0 + i \\
&= 2s_0 + i \\
t_3 &= t_2 + s_2 \\
&= 2s_0 + i + s_0 + 2i \\
&= 3s_0 + 3i \\
t_4 &= t_3 + s_3 \\
&= 3s_0 + 3i + s_0 + 3i \\
&= 4s_0 + 6i \\
t_5 &= t_4 + s_4 \\
&= 4s_0 + 6i + s_0 + 4i \\
&= 5s_0 + 10i.
\end{aligned}$$

Notice how the coefficient of s_0 is incrementing by one at each step, but the coefficient of i is forming a pattern that looks suspiciously like triangular numbers:

$$\begin{aligned}
1 &= 1 \\
1 + 2 &= 3 \\
1 + 2 + 3 &= 6 \\
1 + 2 + 3 + 4 &= 10.
\end{aligned}$$

The triangular numbers are also called binomial coefficients, and there exists a concise notation to express them:

$$\binom{n}{2} = \frac{n(n-1)}{2}.$$

By substituting into this formula, we can see that $\binom{1}{2} = 0$, $\binom{2}{2} = 1$, $\binom{3}{2} = 3$, $\binom{4}{2} = 6$, and $\binom{5}{2} = 10$. These all match the coefficients of i calculated above.

Such observations lead us to postulate a general formula for t_n :

$$t_n = ns_0 + \binom{n}{2}i. \tag{7.3}$$

We can use induction to prove it holds not just for these few n but for all integer $n > 0$, so long as $s_0 > 0$.

Lemma 7.0.1. *When starting with a positive skill s_0 , the cumulative time to train the skill n times is given by:*

$$t_n = ns_0 + \binom{n}{2}i.$$

Proof. Assume we have an example n for which we know that $t_n = ns_0 + \binom{n}{2}i$. (We already showed above that such examples exist.)

Now consider t_{n+1} , which we know can be calculated as $t_{n+1} = t_n + s_n$. (I.e. if we've already worked at this skill for t_n hours, it is going to require another s_n hours to achieve the next skill increase.)

Then,

$$\begin{aligned}
 t_{n+1} &= t_n + s_n \\
 &= ns_0 + \binom{n}{2}i + s_0 + ni \\
 &= (n+1)s_0 + \frac{n(n-1)}{2}i + \frac{2n}{2}i \\
 &= (n+1)s_0 + \frac{n(n-1) + 2n}{2}i \\
 &= (n+1)s_0 + \frac{n(n-1+2)}{2}i \\
 &= (n+1)s_0 + \frac{(n+1)n}{2}i \\
 &= (n+1)s_0 + \binom{n+1}{2}i
 \end{aligned}$$

This follows the same pattern as noticed for t_n but all n have increased by one; thus by induction it is proved to be a general formula for all $n > 0$. \square

Examples

Suppose we currently have a skill at 5% and we want to increase it 2% at a time until we obtain 15%. Then $S = 15$ and $s_0 = 5$, so by our earlier formula and with $i = 2$ we must have $n = \lceil \frac{15-5}{2} \rceil = 5$. Thus we seek t_5 as:

$$\begin{aligned}
 t_5 &= \left(ns_0 + \binom{n}{2}i \right) \Big|_{n=5} \\
 &= 5 \times 5 + \frac{5 \times (5-1)}{2} \times 2 \\
 &= 25 + 20 \\
 &= 45.
 \end{aligned}$$

Thus our character would need to spend most of a week to achieve this improvement.

Using the same formula, a character with a current skill of 50% would have to spend an entire week of training to go up to 52%.

The case $s_0 \leq 0$

Consider the case when $s_0 = 0$:

$$\begin{aligned}
t_1 &= 1 \\
s_1 &= i \\
t_2 &= t_1 + s_1 \\
&= 1 + i \\
s_2 &= 2i \\
t_3 &= t_2 + s_2 \\
&= 1 + i + 2i \\
&= 1 + 3i \\
s_3 &= 3i \\
t_4 &= t_3 + s_3 \\
&= 1 + 3i + 3i \\
&= 1 + 6i
\end{aligned}$$

We see the same pattern of binomial coefficients; the proof that $t_n = 1 + \binom{n}{2}i$ for all $n > 0$ is left as an exercise for the reader.

More generally, if $s_0 \leq 0$, we need to increase it an hour at a time until it is positive, and then we can expect to see the usual progression of binomial coefficients begin.

Using the earlier notation, we can explore the progression of t_n like so:

$$\begin{aligned}
t_1 &= 1 \vee s_0 \\
t_2 &= t_1 + 1 \vee s_1 \\
&= 1 \vee s_0 + 1 \vee (s_0 + i) \\
t_3 &= 1 \vee s_0 + 1 \vee (s_0 + i) + 1 \vee s_2 \\
&= 1 \vee s_0 + 1 \vee (s_0 + i) + 1 \vee (s_0 + 2i) \\
&\vdots \quad \vdots \quad \vdots \quad \vdots \quad \vdots \quad \vdots \quad \vdots \\
t_n &= 1 \vee s_0 + 1 \vee (s_0 + i) + \cdots + 1 \vee (s_0 + (n-1)i) \\
&= \sum_{j=0}^{n-1} 1 \vee (s_0 + ji). \tag{7.4}
\end{aligned}$$

Now let λ be such that $s_{\lambda-1} \leq 0$ but $s_\lambda > 0$; after a little thought we realise this can be calculated as:

$$\lambda = I(s_0 \leq 0) \left(\left\lfloor \frac{|s_0|}{i} \right\rfloor + 1 \right).$$

(The indicator at the front sets $\lambda = 0$ whenever $s_0 > 0$.)

For example, if you start with a skill at -3% , you need to raise it to -1% , then raise it again to 1% before it will become positive, thus we expect $\lambda = 2$; and indeed:

$$\begin{aligned}
\lambda &= \left\lfloor \frac{|-3|}{2} \right\rfloor + 1 \\
&= \left\lfloor \frac{3}{2} \right\rfloor + 1 \\
&= [1.5] + 1 \\
&= 1 + 1 \\
&= 2.
\end{aligned}$$

With this notation defined, we can decompose the sum in formula (7.4) as:

$$\begin{aligned}
t_n &= I(\lambda > 0) \sum_{j=0}^{(\lambda \wedge n)-1} 1 + I(n > \lambda) \sum_{j=\lambda}^{n-1} (s_0 + ji) \\
&= I(\lambda > 0)(\lambda \wedge n) + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)s_0 + i \sum_{j=\lambda}^{n-1} j \right) \\
&= I(\lambda > 0)(\lambda \wedge n) + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)s_0 + i \sum_{k=0}^{n-\lambda-1} (k + \lambda) \right) \\
&= I(\lambda > 0)(\lambda \wedge n) + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)s_0 + i \binom{n - \lambda}{2} + (n - \lambda)i\lambda \right) \\
&= I(\lambda > 0)(\lambda \wedge n) + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)(s_0 + i\lambda) + i \binom{n - \lambda}{2} \right).
\end{aligned}$$

However, we can note that $I(\lambda > 0)(\lambda \wedge n) = \lambda \wedge n$ regardless of whether $\lambda > 0$. Additionally, we can re-express $\lambda \wedge n$ in a form that will facilitate collecting terms, admitting further simplification:

$$\begin{aligned}
\lambda \wedge n &= I(n > \lambda)\lambda + I(n \leq \lambda)n \\
&= I(n > \lambda)\lambda + (1 - I(n > \lambda))n \\
&= I(n > \lambda)(\lambda - n) + n \\
&= n - I(n > \lambda)(n - \lambda).
\end{aligned} \tag{7.5}$$

Using equation (7.5) we can now rewrite t_n in the form:

$$\begin{aligned}
t_n &= I(\lambda > 0)(\lambda \wedge n) + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)(s_0 + i\lambda) + i \binom{n - \lambda}{2} \right) \\
&= n - I(n > \lambda)(n - \lambda) + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)(s_0 + i\lambda) + i \binom{n - \lambda}{2} \right) \\
&= n + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)(s_0 + i\lambda) - (n - \lambda) + i \binom{n - \lambda}{2} \right) \\
&= n + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)(s_0 + i\lambda - 1) + i \binom{n - \lambda}{2} \right).
\end{aligned} \tag{7.6}$$

In the case $i = 2$, this simplifies further:

$$\begin{aligned}
 t_n &= n + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)(s_0 + i\lambda - 1) + i \binom{n - \lambda}{2} \right) \\
 &= n + I(n > \lambda) \left((n - \lambda)(s_0 + 2\lambda - 1) + 2 \binom{n - \lambda}{2} \right) \\
 &= n + I(n > \lambda) ((n - \lambda)(s_0 + 2\lambda - 1) + (n - \lambda)(n - \lambda - 1)) \\
 &= n + I(n > \lambda)(n - \lambda)(n + s_0 + \lambda - 2).
 \end{aligned} \tag{7.7}$$

Finally, when $s_0 > 0$ (which is most of the time) it reduces to:

$$\begin{aligned}
 t_n &= n + n(n + s_0 - 2) \\
 &= n(n + s_0 - 1).
 \end{aligned} \tag{7.8}$$

It's easy to check that this is another way of writing equation (7.3) and it yields the same result of 45 for the earlier example.

Increases attained after set hours

Suppose we wish to set in advance the number of hours allocated to increasing a skill, and then ask what will this raise the skill to. Note that this is the inverse of the problem considered in the previous section.

Again we assume that i is a fixed positive integer (usually 2, but we leave it general), n is a non-negative integer, and the s_n are integers. We also let h denote the fixed number of hours allocated for training the skill in question.

The problem amounts to finding the n satisfying the following two constraints:

$$\begin{aligned}
 t_n &\leq h \\
 t_{n+1} &> h
 \end{aligned}$$

That is, what is the n such that if we train that many times, we will not run out of hours, but if we try to do any more training (i.e. $n + 1$ times) we will exhaust the available hours and not be able to complete the final round?

This is equivalent to maximising n subject to the constraint that $t_n \leq h$. Amongst mathematicians this is referred to as an *integer programming* problem.

In general, integer programming problems are notorious for resisting easy solutions. Intuitive ideas about how to find high and low points on a terrain rely on the terrain being *continuous*; approximating integers with neighbouring decimals can lead a search algorithm down the wrong track.

For the present problem however, we don't run into this issue. The fact that t_n and s_n are monotonic increasing justify a seemingly naïve *integer relaxation* approach, in which we actually can use continuous approximations and then use rounding to find the optimal integer.

Note that it shall be useful to partition the available hours into two parts: those used bringing the skill up to above zero (if possible), and those which apply to skills already above zero.

This intuition motivates some new notation: let h^- be hours spent on the skill while it is non-positive, and let h^+ be any remaining hours spent on the skill after it becomes greater than zero. Clearly, $h = h^- + h^+$; and, if $s_0 > 0$, $h^- = 0$ and $h = h^+$.

We also note that if $h < \lambda$, then automatically we should set $n = h$.

When $s_0 > 0$

Regardless of whether in fact $s_0 > 0$, solving this case allows us to also solve for h^+ in the more general case.

We start with the inequality constraint $t_n \leq h$ and unpack it using the general formula (7.6); then use $\lambda = 0$ to obviate the indicator; then notice the quadratics; which motivates completing the square; before taking the square root of both sides:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & t_n \leq h \\
 \Rightarrow & n + n(s_0 - 1) + i \binom{n}{2} \leq h \\
 \Rightarrow & ns_0 + i \frac{n(n-1)}{2} \leq h \\
 \Rightarrow & \frac{i}{2}n^2 + \left(s_0 - \frac{i}{2}\right)n \leq h \\
 \Rightarrow & n^2 + 2\frac{2s_0 - i}{2i}n \leq \frac{2h}{i} \\
 \Rightarrow & n^2 + 2\frac{2s_0 - i}{2i}n + \left(\frac{2s_0 - i}{2i}\right)^2 \leq \frac{2h}{i} + \left(\frac{2s_0 - i}{2i}\right)^2 \\
 \Rightarrow & \left(n + \frac{2s_0 - i}{2i}\right)^2 \leq \frac{2h}{i} + \left(\frac{2s_0 - i}{2i}\right)^2.
 \end{aligned}$$

We have two cases to consider here:

- If $2s_0 - i = 0$, the inequality immediately simplifies to $n^2 \leq \frac{2h}{i}$.
- On the other hand, if $2s_0 - i \neq 0$, that will allow us to bring together the $\frac{2s_0 - i}{2i}$ terms from both sides.

If $2s_0 - i = 0$

In this case $2s_0 = i$, so the inequality devolves to:

$$\begin{aligned}
n &\leq \pm \sqrt{\frac{2h}{i}} \\
\Rightarrow n &\leq \pm \sqrt{\frac{2h}{2s_0}} \\
\Rightarrow n &\leq \pm \sqrt{\frac{h}{s_0}}.
\end{aligned}$$

Rejecting the solution where $n < 0$, this becomes,

$$n \leq \sqrt{\frac{h}{s_0}}.$$

Then maximising n while satisfying this inequality leads us to the solution:

$$n = \left\lfloor \sqrt{\frac{h}{s_0}} \right\rfloor.$$

For example, take $s_0 = 1$, $i = 2$, so that $2s_0 = i$ is satisfied. Now suppose $h = 50$. Then $n = \lfloor \sqrt{50} \rfloor$, where $\sqrt{50} \approx 7.07$, leading to the result $n = \lfloor 7.07 \rfloor = 7$.

This accords with a manual calculation which shows that in a week of training, a character starting with a skill at 1% could raise that skill seven times, achieving 15% by the end of the week.

If $2s_0 - i \neq 0$

In this case the earlier full inequality (7.6) can be manipulated like so:

$$\begin{aligned}
n + \frac{2s_0 - i}{2i} &\leq \pm \sqrt{\frac{2h}{i} + \frac{(2s_0 - i)^2}{4i^2}} \\
\Rightarrow n + \frac{2s_0 - i}{2i} &\leq \pm \frac{2s_0 - i}{2i} \sqrt{\frac{8hi}{(2s_0 - i)^2} + 1} \\
\Rightarrow n &\leq -\frac{2s_0 - i}{2i} \pm \frac{2s_0 - i}{2i} \sqrt{\frac{8hi}{(2s_0 - i)^2} + 1} \\
\Rightarrow n &\leq \frac{2s_0 - i}{2i} \left(-1 \pm \sqrt{\frac{8hi}{(2s_0 - i)^2} + 1} \right). \tag{7.9}
\end{aligned}$$

The square root is always strictly greater than one, so we always end up with a single positive and single negative solution. Again we need to deal with it as two separate cases: $2s_0 - i > 0$ and $2s_0 - i < 0$.

Case One: $2s_0 - i < 0$: In this case the positive solution is obtained by choosing:

$$n \leq \frac{2s_0 - i}{2i} \left(-1 - \sqrt{\frac{8hi}{(2s_0 - i)^2} + 1} \right)$$

$$\Rightarrow n \leq \frac{i - 2s_0}{2i} \left(1 + \sqrt{\frac{8hi}{(2s_0 - i)^2} + 1} \right).$$

When $i = 2$ the only time this case arises is when $s_0 = 0$. Since we need to treat any $s_0 \leq 0$ as a special case regardless of i , we will defer further discussion of this scenario until later.

Case Two: $2s_0 - i > 0$: In this case the positive solution is chosen by writing the inequality (7.9) as:

$$n \leq \frac{2s_0 - i}{2i} \left(-1 + \sqrt{\frac{8hi}{(2s_0 - i)^2} + 1} \right).$$

Again electing for $i = 2$:

$$n \leq \frac{s_0 - 1}{2} \left(-1 + \sqrt{\frac{4h}{(s_0 - 1)^2} + 1} \right).$$

An example with an initial skill of 5% and a week of training:

$$n \leq \frac{4}{2} \left(-1 + \sqrt{\frac{200}{16} + 1} \right)$$

$$\Rightarrow n \leq 2 \left(-1 + \underbrace{\sqrt{\frac{27}{2}}}_{\approx 3.67} \right)$$

$$\Rightarrow n = [5.35]$$

$$\Rightarrow n = 5.$$

Thus after a week, a character starting with a skill of 5% could raise it five times, to a total of 15%.

For general values of s_0

We've already established that h can be decomposed as $h = h^- + h^+$. It turns out they should furthermore have values $h^- = h \wedge \lambda$ and $h^+ = 0 \vee (h - \lambda)$. This is based on an intuitive realisation:

- If you have a negative skill, you can pump hours into it until it becomes positive, if the hours are available.

- If you do this, it removes hours from your total training time.

Just as we decompose h into h^- and h^+ , we now do the same for n : let n^- be number of improvements obtained for the skill by spending hours from h^- , and let n^+ be the number of improvements obtained by spending hours from h^+ .

Since hours from h^- are spent one at a time, we must have that $n^- = h^-$.

It is also useful to let s_0^+ denote the skill percentage after spending h^- hours on improving it. That is, it is the value of the skill immediately after it switches from non-positive to positive.

We can use the formula $s_0^+ = s_0 + n^-i$ since we gained $i\%$ for every hour spent on the skill while it was non-positive.

For n^+ , we reuse the formulas derived for $s_0 > 0$:

$$n^+ = \begin{cases} \left\lfloor \frac{i-2s_0^+}{2i} \left(1 + \sqrt{\frac{8h^+i}{(2s_0^+-i)^2} + 1} \right) \right\rfloor & \text{if } s_0^+ < \frac{i}{2}. \\ \left\lfloor \sqrt{\frac{h^+}{s_0^+}} \right\rfloor & \text{if } s_0^+ = \frac{i}{2}. \\ \left\lfloor \frac{2s_0^+-i}{2i} \left(-1 + \sqrt{\frac{8h^+i}{(2s_0^+-i)^2} + 1} \right) \right\rfloor & \text{if } s_0^+ > \frac{i}{2}. \end{cases} \quad (7.10)$$

Or when $i = 2$ (eliding the case $s_0^+ < 1$ since that is subsumed by n^-):

$$n^+ = \begin{cases} \left\lfloor \sqrt{\frac{h^+}{s_0^+}} \right\rfloor & \text{if } s_0^+ = 1. \\ \left\lfloor \frac{s_0^+-1}{2} \left(-1 + \sqrt{\frac{4h^+}{(s_0^+-1)^2} + 1} \right) \right\rfloor & \text{if } s_0^+ > 1. \end{cases} \quad (7.11)$$

A summarised procedure

We'll now summarise what needs to be done when using the standard $i = 2$.

If $s_0 < 1$

1. Calculate $\lambda = \left\lfloor \frac{|s_0|}{2} \right\rfloor + 1$.
2. Calculate $h^- = h \wedge \lambda$ and $h^+ = 0 \vee (h - \lambda)$.
3. Calculate $n^- = h^-$.
4. Calculate $s_0^+ = s_0 + 2n^-$.
5. Calculate $n^+ = \left\lfloor \sqrt{\frac{h^+}{s_0^+}} \right\rfloor$ if $s_0^+ = 1$ or $n^+ = \left\lfloor \frac{1-s_0^+}{2} \left(1 + \sqrt{\frac{4h^+}{(1-s_0^+)^2} + 1} \right) \right\rfloor$ otherwise.

If $s_0 = 1$

$$n = \left\lfloor \sqrt{\frac{h}{s_0}} \right\rfloor.$$

If $s_0 > 1$

$$n = \left\lfloor \frac{s_0 - 1}{2} \left(-1 + \sqrt{\frac{4h}{(s_0 - 1)^2} + 1} \right) \right\rfloor.$$

This procedure lends itself to programmatic automation; a reference implementation can be found at [2]. A table of results generated from that program is in Appendix 7; likewise, a plot of cumulative time required per skill percentage attained is in Appendix 7.

Conclusion

We derived novel closed-form expressions for certain quantities of interest to RuneQuest players. There are a couple of directions future work of this nature could explore:

- Analysis of the stochastic case where one chooses to roll $1d6 - 2$ rather than deterministically take 2%. This could include deriving the distributions of the stochastic analogues of s_n and t_n , as well as the distribution of the first-hitting time to reach a desired skill level.

Working with the distributions of sums of large numbers of dice can be laborious, but the Central Limit Theorem would permit one to draw on existing results about Brownian motion.

- Profile-guided optimisation of decisions about which skills to train for how long. Since most skills can be increased through practical adventuring, one will often wish to save training hours for skills not amenable to the former. These include skills at either low percentages, as well as some academic skills that cannot benefit from adventuring.

Some back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest training should not be done on practical skills above about 30%. Using statistics collected from real gameplay would assist with the development of an optimal regime for strategic character development.

Tabulated results

Skill	Number of times to increase skill									
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
-5	7	52	147	292	487	732	1027	1372	1767	2212
0	21	91	211	381	601	871	1191	1561	1981	2451
5	45	140	285	480	725	1020	1365	1760	2205	2700
10	70	190	360	580	850	1170	1540	1960	2430	2950
15	95	240	435	680	975	1320	1715	2160	2655	3200
20	120	290	510	780	1100	1470	1890	2360	2880	3450
25	145	340	585	880	1225	1620	2065	2560	3105	3700
30	170	390	660	980	1350	1770	2240	2760	3330	3950
35	195	440	735	1080	1475	1920	2415	2960	3555	4200
40	220	490	810	1180	1600	2070	2590	3160	3780	4450
45	245	540	885	1280	1725	2220	2765	3360	4005	4700
50	270	590	960	1380	1850	2370	2940	3560	4230	4950
55	295	640	1035	1480	1975	2520	3115	3760	4455	5200
60	320	690	1110	1580	2100	2670	3290	3960	4680	5450
65	345	740	1185	1680	2225	2820	3465	4160	4905	5700
70	370	790	1260	1780	2350	2970	3640	4360	5130	5950
75	395	840	1335	1880	2475	3120	3815	4560	5355	6200
80	420	890	1410	1980	2600	3270	3990	4760	5580	6450
85	445	940	1485	2080	2725	3420	4165	4960	5805	6700
90	470	990	1560	2180	2850	3570	4340	5160	6030	6950
95	495	1040	1635	2280	2975	3720	4515	5360	6255	7200
100	520	1090	1710	2380	3100	3870	4690	5560	6480	7450

Table 7.1: Number of hours to increase skills chosen number of times

Skill	Hours invested									
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
-5	4	5	6	7	7	8	8	9	9	9
0	2	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	7
5	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	5
10	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3
15	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
20	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
25	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
30	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
35	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 7.2: Number of skill increases possible for hours invested

Plots

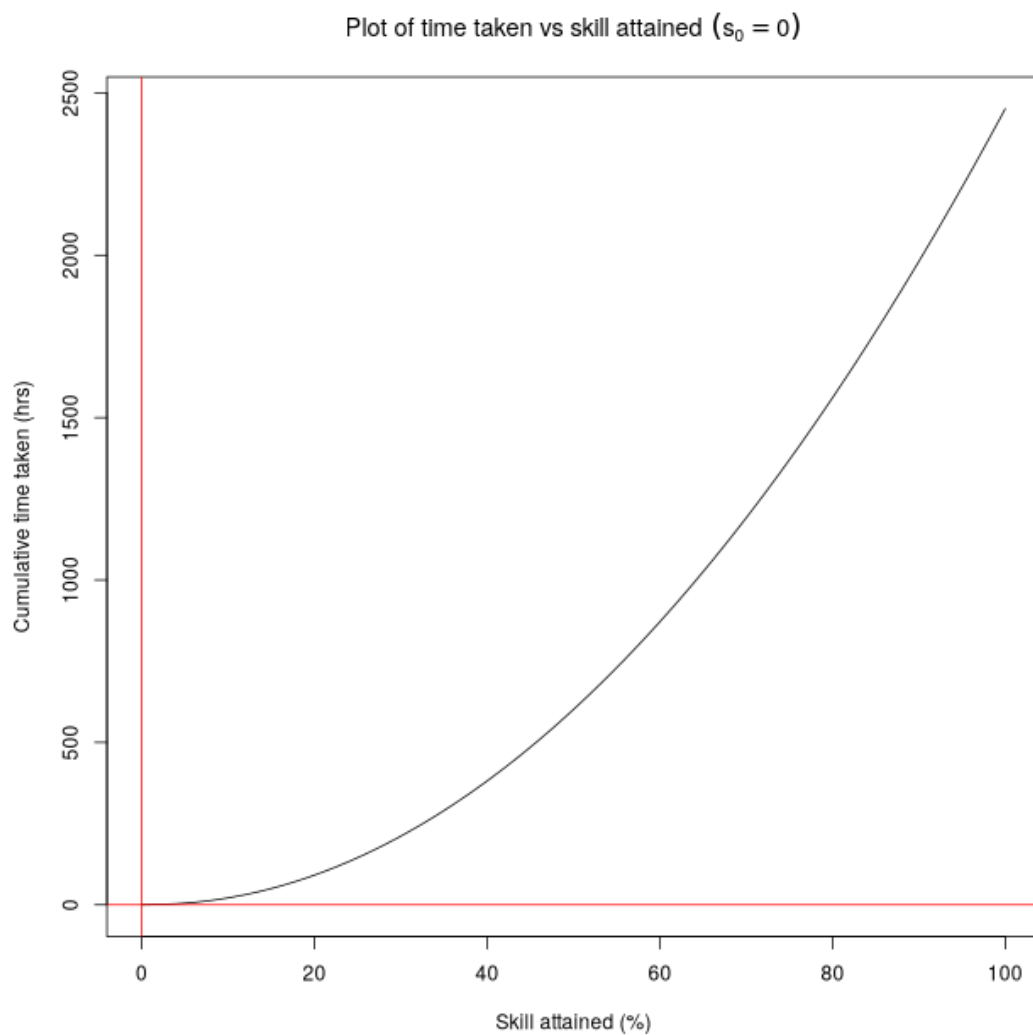


Figure 7.1: Plot of time taken vs skill attained

Bibliography

- [1] Steve Perrin, Greg Stafford, Steve Henderson & Lynn Willis (1984) *RuneQuest 3rd Edition*, Avalon Hill.
- [2] Timothy Rice (2018) *rqt: An RQ3 Training Calculator*, github.com/rpgreview/rqt

APP as Apperception

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In the first and second editions of RuneQuest (1978, 1979) the characteristic Charisma (CHA) was a measure of leadership, and “should not be mistaken for physical beauty”. The nebulous CHA value could be increased by successful adventures, decreased by failed adventures, increased with the Oratory skill with a limit, by main weapon skill with no limit (a hat-tip to a violent world, one could suppose), and possession of a “showy” magical item. In Basic Role Playing (BRP, 1980) emphasis was given to the use of CHA for characteristic tests (CHA*5), which was also used in Call of Cthulhu (1981) and Worlds of Wonder (1982). In Stormbringer (1981), CHA is described as leadership, charm, personality, and sometimes physical beauty. With no direct influence on skills, it is described as “the least important attribute”, possibly the first in-game description and recommendation of a “dump stat”.

The first big change is in Superworld (1983) where CHA is replaced with Appearance (APP), representing physical beauty and general attractiveness, and also used to determine level increases in Fast Talk and Persuade. Following suit, in ElfQuest (1984) Appearance (APP) is a measure of physical appearance and comeliness, where Elves had a notable advantage, whereas in Ringworld (1984) APP was a combination of physical appearance and bearing, and (along with Intelligence) set a maximum value for Root skills for Communication skills. RuneQuest 3rd edition also replaced CHA with APP, using it to represent within-species physical attractiveness, and as a secondary modifier to Communication category skills.

In a more contemporary sense, in the “big gold book” version of Basic Role Playing (2008), APP represents likeability or attractiveness and has a Charisma characteristic roll of APP*5 and, optionally, asks a secondary bonus to Communication category skills. In Call of Cthulhu 7th edition (2014), including the most significant changes to the core rules, APP is represented like other characteristics, as a percentage value representing physical characteristics and personality. In RuneQuest (2018) however, there is a return to the CHA characteristic with a near-identical description to the original. In game mechanics, CHA is a universal receiver of a rune modifier bonus, and a modifier to magical and communication skills.

As can be seen, the implementation of CHA/APP as a characteristic has had a diverse history, which is interesting given how modest the in-game effect the characteristic usually invokes. As the comment from Stormbringer suggests, it’s like an edge case looking for a reason for existence. Part of the trouble with CHA/APP as a characteristic is that a great deal of its value can be readily incorporated into other characteristics. The personal magnetism and leadership qualities, for example, can also be represented by the Power

(POW) characteristic, whereas the purely physical aspect is correlative with Constitution (CON).

Despite many variations in implementation, Characteristics in the Basic Role Playing family of games are “relatively fixed” whereas skills are “relatively learned”, and these exist as a continuum. For example, whilst Intelligence is obviously useful in reasoning, memory, and learning, it does not provide knowledge. One could be very intelligent but that intelligence does not confer knowledge of Swahili, even if it might help one learn it quicker. Likewise, a person could have a great deal of knowledge about running, stride, and energy etc, but without the appropriate musculature, nerves, and mass, their ability to run will not be great; consider the stereotype of the aged and overweight coach who knows a great deal about gymnastics, but simple no longer has the body to support such an activity.

Given this implicit distinction, it is curious that BRP games are absent of a Perception characteristic. To be fair, other games of a similar vintage also lacked a Perception characteristic, including Dungeons & Dragons, Champions, and Rolemaster with DragonQuest (1980) being a notable exception. Over the years, Champions transformed into the more generic Hero System using INT as the base characteristic for perception checks and with enhancements (including enhanced perceptual abilities, such as Sonar, Radio, Infrared, Ultravision, etc) as superheroic powers, making a useful elaboration between whether senses are ranged or discriminatory. One could make a similar case for various magical abilities that also feature in RuneQuest (e.g., Darksense in Trolls), infravision and ultravision among Elves, Dwarves, and Halflings in Dungeons & Dragons. In a very different approach, Harnmaster (1986) has attributes for Eyesight, Hearing, Smell/Taste, and Touch.

The proposal here is twofold. The first, as mentioned, is to roll the “charismatic” aspects of the CHA/APP characteristic in BRP games into the POW characteristic and the physical beauty aspects into CON and, depending on the specific games, modify skills as appropriate. The second part is to replace APP on the character sheet with Apperception (APP). This is partially, of course, with convenience in mind and one could simple replace it with PER (Perception) if one desired. The word “apperception” is from the Latin “ad percipere” “to perceive”. In philosophy, especially from Kant, it represents not just the raw ability of the senses, but also the mental process of making sense of what we perceive within the framework of what we have learned and our experiences. In other words, not just perceiving something, but being able to work out what one has perceived.

The “relatively fixed” Apperception characteristic thus can provide a ceiling for Ring-world root Perception category skills, a starting value in ElfQuest, a primary modifier in Basic Role Playing, and so forth. The specific skills can be species-specific (e.g., Darksense) and sense-based (e.g., Sight, Smell, Taste, Touch, Balance, etc). In a long-running RuneQuest 3rd edition campaign that ran from 2008 to 2017, this house-rule was extensively tested. APP was used as a primary characteristic for Perception skills (along with INT as a primary and POW as a secondary) and as a secondary communication skill (INT was also a primary, and POW is secondary). For the sake of legacy, one could even continue to call it “Appearance”—how things “appear” to the character.

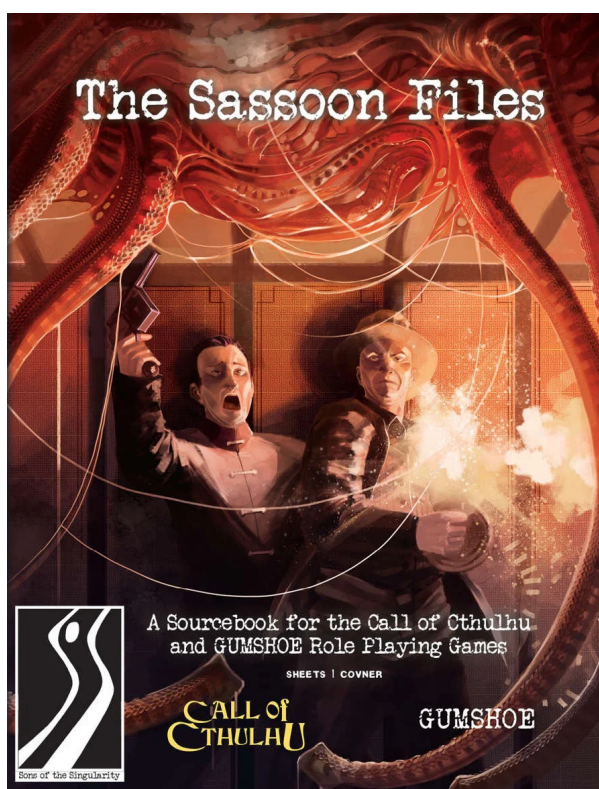
The Sassoon Files for Call of Cthulhu 7E and Gumshoe

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Physical Product and Introduction

“The Sassoon Files” is a 204 page softcover book for “Call of Cthulhu” (7th edition) and Gumshoe roleplaying games, which would include “Trail of Cthulhu”. Thick, heavy, and well-bound, the gloss paper is of very high quality, with a combination of black-and-white, greyscale, and sepia colours throughout. The two-column justified serif text is well-presented with highlighted areas and appropriate use of white-space and magenta-coloured text for system information. There is an excellent table of contents, however the page borders (apart from numbers) do not give any indication of where you’re up to in the book. The artwork is creative, evocative, and shows good skill in technique. Although the chief listed authors are Jason Sheets, Jesse Covner, et al., it is also noted that a substantial portion of this product was helped through reviews at KhanKon gaming convention in the People’s Republic of China.

The setting of The Sassoon Files is 1920s Shanghai, with the central character one Sir Victor Sassoon, a historical figure. Sassoon was a British real-estate and banking businessman, responsible for encouraging a large influx of Jewish migrants to Shanghai. Over the course of the years, he has to deal with the issues surrounding Chinese nationalists, communists, criminal organisations, other foreign powers, in addition to the usual business rivals. Adding to this is the Cthulhu mythos and cultists, which Sassoon also wants to keep at bay providing a hook for PC investigators. There are effectively six sections to the book, the first a review of the setting, then four scenarios, then a concluding chapter on factions and optional rules.



The Setting

The core setting of Shanghai is part of a wider region that was rich and interesting, as in “interesting times”. The regional history is a bloody affair of the Opium Wars, foreign domination with nominal control by the declining Qing Empire, the incredibly bloody Taiping Rebellion, the Boxer Rebellion, and finally the nationalist revolution of Sun Yat-Sen. In addition to this historical context, several example Mythos-inspired fictional cult groupings are briefly described, but in a manner that is very fitting to the setting.

There is also a timeline, and an amusing, albeit short, pronunciation guide, before moving on to several pages of Shanghai itself, with locations, maps, and main characters, both historical and for the scenarios that follow. Of particular note are the descriptions of the French Concession, the Chinese City (“Old Shanghai”), and the International Settlement. The entire chapters provides an excellent grounding and context that should interest and excite the reader of the time, place, and Mythos potential.

The Scenarios

Making up the bulk of the text, there are four scenarios in the book; “Strange Gates, Hidden Demons”, “Let Sleeping Dogs Lie”, “There is this One Girl”, and “Curse of the Peacock’s Eye”. The scenarios are designed to be run independently or as a longer campaign, connected by time, location, and characters, although by necessity one will need to weave Sir Victor Sassoon as a lynch-pin bringing the characters together and, indeed, this is explicitly done in two scenarios.

The scenarios are all provided with scene-by-scene plotlines with explicit scenes that lead into the current scene and exist, but also with alternate and optional scenes also added to allow for Investigators to choose alternative story tracks. The plots are in some ways fairly straight-forward; bad things happen that captures the Investigator’s attention, Investigator’s unearth secret conspiracy that caused the bad thing, Investigator’s deal with the bad thing or bad thing deals with them. Of course, it is a lot more complex than that with each component having its own colourful introduction, a range of different power groups that are identified in the course of the action, and a variety of resolutions and consequences.

The scenarios, however, also provide a diverse range of emotional content as one would expect from Lovecraftian horror set in 1920s Shanghai; at times it’s desperate and confusing, at times frightening (indeed often), in other violent, and in other scenes thoroughly exuberant and optimistic. This perhaps is the great strength of the product as it really does give a sense of the chaotic environment at the time and the sense of impending doom.

One matter where some additional attention is required; the product is designed for two different game systems and the correlation between the two are not always as strong as they could be. There are a number of examples where using the Call of Cthulhu rules as written make the scenarios somewhat more difficult for the Investigators to complete compared to the Gumshoe implementation. It is recommended that a Keeper give these a thorough review and provide some “Gumshoe-like” fudges in favour of the Investigator’s for plot purposes. They’ll still confront the same challenges in the end, anyway.

Factions and Optional Rules

The final chapter elaborates on some of the key players in Shanghai, both individual and groups. For the latter, further optional rules are provided in integrating membership to these groups in terms of the overall setting, but also plot hooks in the scenarios as well as campaign drivers that incorporate the Cthulhu Mythos into major historical events; it can get pretty wild at this point if you're running an ongoing and long-term campaign. Finally, there are "lore sheets" additional items of information that are reserved for individual player-character knowledge. As a whole, this is a useful chapter that just adds more opportunities to flesh out the setting and the potential stories.

Concluding Remarks

The Sassoon Files is an excellent contribution to the Cthulhu mythos, set in a vibrant location (recognition to chapter in "Masks of Nyarlathotep" is given here) and by people who are very familiar with the location. The storylines are interesting, the characters diverse, the physical production impressive. All in all, a thoroughly wonderful and recommended item for a Call of Cthulhu or Gunshoe game.

A copy of The Sassoon Files is available in the RPG Review library and was donated to us by Rare Roleplay, 19 Isaac Street, Westbrook, QLD, 4350 rareroleplay.com.au.

Review of *Highway of Blood: A 1970s Scenario for Call of Cthulhu* by Critical Hit Publishing

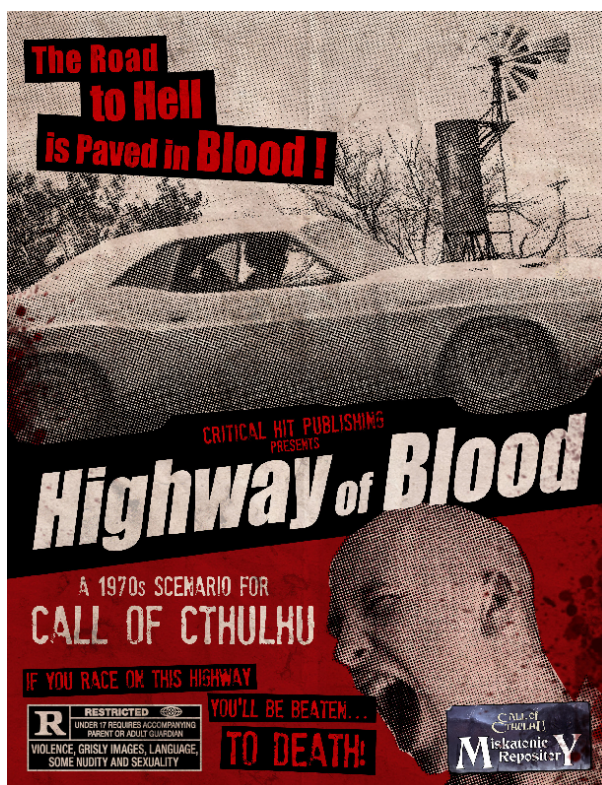
Timothy Rice

Highway of Blood is a 2019 scenario for *Call of Cthulhu* 7E written by Alex Guillette, Ian Christiansen and Davae Breon Jaxon of Critical Hit Publishing. It riffs on an evocative 1970s grindhouse/slasher concept of fast cars and (hopefully this isn't too much of a spoiler for *Call of Cthulhu*) murderous cultists.

I ran this scenario over a couple of sessions in 2023. The review that follows is coloured by the perspective that I had previously only played *Call of Cthulhu* a couple of times, I had never GMed *Call of Cthulhu* (or any other BRP-style game) before, and I was (still am, really) figuring out how to be a *good* GM for any game. This is not meant to be a negative review, but from my naïve perspective I found some aspects of the scenario to be flawed, even though overall I loved the concept and presentation. I could see myself using material from this scenario again in future, albeit with modifications. So hopefully what follows will be seen as a balanced appraisal.

The core of the scenario is what TV Tropes would categorize as “Deadly Road Trip”. The investigators are travelling through a rural area in a 1970s muscle car and “oh noes!” suddenly realize they’re low on gas. Luckily some road signs point towards a nearby town featuring a gas station, and of course it’s not on their map. What could go wrong? Well it’s the 1970s, they have a muscle car, and it’s *Call of Cthulhu* in the desert, so you can probably guess what. To help get into the mood, *Highway of Blood* comes with audio assets and a 1970s music playlist featuring artists such as Jimi Hendrix and Black Sabbath.

I wrote some of the previous paragraph flippantly, but as a fan of the driving and folk horror genres as well as acid rock and heavy metal, I honestly felt (and feel) like this is a very cool concept. I did lift-and-shift our game from Texas to Australia’s eastern



Northern Territory, an isolated red-desert country known for few road rules, especially back in the 1970s. I thought I could open a pub somewhere between *Mad Max* and *Wolf Creek*. In the course of researching how to drive *Highway of Blood* to the Northern Territory, I learned about Australia's 1970s "supercar arms race" that resulted in much more restrictive road rules being implemented by the mid-1980s; and also that some Northern Territory indigenous communities have UFO-style beliefs that seem ripe for cosmic horror appropriation.

As I don't want to spoil the rest of the scenario, I'll skip key plot twists, especially those that come later. In fact, we never encountered them anyway, due to the players subverting the plot very early on. Which brings us to the crux of my criticism of *Highway of Blood*: if players don't *want* their characters to fall into the cult's clutches, it's easy enough to just get out of dodge. Once their car was fuelled up and they realized they were in the cult's crosshairs, a couple of good drive rolls were enough to take the car offroad, back to the highway, and be on their way, with a band of cultists shaking their fists while eating dust in the rearview mirrors.

When this happens, the GM has only a couple of options: let the characters go, or railroad. Sure, some traps or cultist roadblocks could have magically appeared with a wave of my hand, but it would have been dishonest and unfair. Personally I hate railroading my games as it makes me feel like I am not faithfully and consistently representing the fictional world to the players. It also would have robbed the driver of some very good dice rolling. I don't see it as my job to retcon success to failure just to force the players to stick to a scenario which didn't convince them to stick around.

Now that thing about sticking around, that's maybe how the scenario could be fixed. If a sympathetic NPC who felt trapped and in need of help had approached the PCs early on, I'm sure my players would have taken the bait. My players love being big damn heroes and there is no way they could ever turn down a damsel or dude in distress. It could be my failing that I didn't think to insert such a hook into the scenario, but then again this is a review of the scenario, not of my GMing skills. The scenario didn't make it clear how to frontload any bait which would make players want to hang around, and the scenario would have worked better if it had.

The lack of a sympathetic NPC in need of help is perhaps a symptom of a broader design issue, which is all the NPCs feel kind of disjointed from each other, and information about them is distributed through walls of text. It makes the NPCs seem like cardboard cutouts, and it seems like any GM hoping to run the scenario needs to be prepared to do a lot of reading and manual cross-referencing if they want to compile a full understanding of what makes this town tick. The maps are great, but could have been improved with more overlays showing locations or routes of NPCs. I'd also like to see a social network diagramming NPC factions and attitudes towards each other and towards the PCs.

That's the negative stuff out of the way. I said earlier that I could see myself using material from this scenario again in future, so let's explore that some more. I think there are at least two ways of repairing or compensating for the weaknesses that I've described.

The first is as I've described already: frontload a sympathetic NPC who needs help. I can see potential in Russ Williams, who owns the gas station. He's already written in as one of the first NPCs who the PCs encounter, and he's afraid of the cult to the point that he tries to warn the PCs to get out of town.

So why doesn't he just leave, himself? It's implied he stays in town because the cult

might notice if he tries to leave, but it doesn't strike me as a realistic motivation. Plenty of people try to get out of bad situations when faced with worse opposition than what Russ faces. The cult aren't actively guarding him, he has access to fuel and car parts, so he could easily get his son out of bed in the middle of the night sometime and slip away, but he doesn't. So, fix Russ to actually need something in town, and the PCs can help him get it. Maybe the cult are keeping the son hostage? Maybe the son is even getting a bit of stockholm syndrome? If Russ made sense as an NPC, his plight would be almost irresistible to many players.

For the second way to use this scenario, I think it could make sense as a kind of a secondary location in a sandbox campaign. Then, if the PCs skip town on their first pass, that doesn't mean the problem is going away. They are now on the cult's radar and the cult is then ever present in the background until they are dealt with once and for all.

So what would the larger sandbox have to look like for Abattoir to make sense? Well, I really dig the idea of a group of characters who just cruise around in a muscle car together, forever getting in and out of trouble, the Scooby-Doo gang in a *Mad Max* universe. It would require adjusting the premise a bit from a regular *Call of Cthulhu* campaign, perhaps making it more near-future in the middle of a William Gibson "slow-motion apocalypse". Perhaps the gang are kind of like "the milkman" in the *Twisted Metal* TV series, couriers needed to safely transport goods around the proto-apocalyptic outback. And there are people relying on them, so they can't just drive into the sunset every time a cultist says "fhtagn" right out loud.

Let me wrap up the review with a summary. *Highway of Blood* has an awesome concept and great presentation. It has some good flavorful assets like maps and NPC pictures which allow presenting a creepy desert town in a suitable *Call of Cthulhu* campaign. It suffers a bit in two key aspects: it frontloads scary bad guys who chase the PCs away before they get hooked, and a lot of the NPC information, especially their relationships with each other, could be presented in a clearer way to make it easier to treat them like real people. I'd recommend the scenario to experienced *Call of Cthulhu* or BRP GMs who are prepared to either adjust a lot of the material as-written, or else spend time extracting and cross-referencing key data from large amounts of flavor text. Fhtagn!

★★★★ Concept

★★★★☆ Presentation

★★☆☆ Playability

ElfQuest: Review and Themes

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Many years ago, during the playtesting stage of what would become the Mongoose version of RuneQuest, there was an early discussion on the purpose of the game. Steve Perrin had just joined the group and the discussion when I referred that RuneQuest first edition (1978, p8) contained description that was concise (like most of that rulebook): “The title of the game, RUNEQUEST, describes the goal. . . Acquiring a Rune by joining such a cult is the goal of the game, for only in gathering a Rune may a character take the next step, up to the ranks of Hero, and perhaps Superhero”. This led to a further discussion about other games and their purpose and Steve Perrin made (again, precise and pithy) comment that ElfQuest was about Elves questing for Elves. He was, of course, speaking with some authority as the co-author of both RuneQuest and author of the ElfQuest RPG (with additional material by Jeff Okamoto, Greg Stafford, and Kenneth Brown).

It is in the spirit of that line that the following article on themes and narratives within the ElfQuest RPG is written. It is also written with recognition that ElfQuest was very recently noted by Sean Hollister, senior editor of The Verge, as the primary book that changed his life (heck, RuneQuest is only number 2 on my list). With an evocative title, author and Electric Lit contributor Madeline Ffitch describes “How a Comic Book About Feral Elves Got Me Through Middle School”. Their article (<https://electricliterature.com/how-a-comic-book-about-feral-elves-got-me-through-middle-school/>) is well worth a read in the context of this article, as it does a more

thorough and insightful contribution to the themes than I could ever aspire to. Still, it drives the thematic considerations in this article.

What is ElfQuest, anyway? In the primary sense in popular culture, it is a comic book series written by Wendy and Richard Pini which started in 1978. The story is set in a Earth-like world called “Abode”, but also is known as the descriptive “The World of Two Moons”. The world is inhabited by prehistoric Earthly creatures, initially with a European and North American focus, albeit with Elven “primitive” names. Thus one will find bear, bison, deer, elk, “long tooth” (sabre-toothed tigers), “mad horn” (wooly rhinoceros), “no hump” (horse), “serpent nose” (mammoth), “shell back” (glyptodont), “wave dancer” (dolphin), and wolves. There are also dinosaur-era creatures, e.g., “sword foot”, as well as gigantic species (e.g., giant spiders, giant leeches).

Among the sapient species there are three alien species introduced by an artifact falling from the sky; the elves, trolls, and the winged preservers. Initial contact with the indigenous humans did not go well: “The humans, already terrified by these apparitions, attacked the elves with their clubs”. The Elves, in their contemporary form, are short and light with telepathic powers, longevity, and an especially low birth-rate. They also have a psychic romantic connection known as Recognition. In contrast there are the tall and bulky trolls, known for their metal-working skill. The highly intelligent, and enigmatic preservers, apart from winged flight, are also asexual and immortal. Finally, there are the humans, which are pretty much identical in culture and form as neolithic humans on Earth.

The Elves that most player-characters start with are from the Wolfrider tribe. Their history comes from a shapeshifter who changed to wolf form to aid the survival of the tribe, and eventually was adopted by a wolf-pack and gave birth to half-wolves. Understandably, at least with some magical thinking, wolfrider thus have an empathic bond with their wolves.

The early issues of the comic series involves members of the Wolfrider tribe needing to flee their ancestral forest due to a conflict with the humans. Both helped and betrayed by the trolls, the Wolfriders eventually make their way into a desert where they encounter another elf tribe, the Sun Folk. Further attempts to find other elf tribes results in encounters with friendly humans (hashtag notallhumans), a conflict with another elf tribe (hashtag notalelves), eventual encounters with even more elf tribes, conflicts with trolls, and so on.

The original ElfQuest RPG left the story summary at issue 18 of the comic. This would be part of “Elfquest: The Original Quest” of twenty issues running from 1978 to 1984, plus a bonus issue of reviews, editorials, etc., which would then be followed by the eight-issue series “Siege at Blue Mountain” from 1986–1988, the nine-issue series “Kings of the Broken Wheel” (1988–1990) and then, in 1992, the ElfQuest series split into numerous multiple concurrent series, until 1996 when the lines were merged into a monthly anthology with multiple storylines, along with mini-series and one-off issues, with new comics, various reprints, and novelisations following.

As indicated the ElfQuest RPG came in quite early in the piece with the ElfQuest RPG being released as a boxed set in 1984 and consisting of a 72p “Elfbook” and a 32p “Worldbook”. The Elfbook introduced the world, the character generation process, the game system, the skills and magic systems, combat and hunting, and several pages of other tribes and folk. The Worldbook consists of information about hazards, flora and

fauna, and three scenarios. The boxed set also came with an A2 map of the regions of the comics to that point, and a 32p booklet of character sheets with elf and trolls outlines.

An “ElfQuest Companion”, by numerous authors (Pini, Cerritelli, Okamoto, Petersen, Perrin), would be released in 1985, consisting of various characters, errata and elaborations, elf names (quite literal), elaborations on character design, a very interesting article on wolf ecology by Sandy Petersen, the Wolfhaven holt, and two scenarios. Steve Perrin wrote an afterward with the explicit idea of using a longer-term campaign to bring the various Elves tribes together. Also in 1985, Chaosium would release “The Sea Elves” culture book by Elizabeth Cerritelli. At 48p it includes cultural and character generation notes, the setting of the islands, sea elf magic, a bestiary, and three scenarios. Finally, in 1987, a 40p book of linked adventures under the title “Elf War” would be released, with two substantial adventures written by Elizabeth Cerritelli and Sandy Petersen. A second edition of the game, published as a single paperback book, was released in 1989 which effectively combined the first edition with content from the companion.

In September 2024 Chaosium announced with Wendy and Richard Pini that the classic RPG would be re-released and a Kickstarter backed by over 2190 people saw the release of a remastered 40th Anniversary boxed set of the ElfQuest RPG. The new Deluxe edition added new creatures, new characters, and new lands from developments in the comic series. In addition there was a new world map, a gamemaster screen, an ElfQuest dice set, figures, and more. However, the rule system was the same as the original edition which is, of course, exactly what Chaosium said they were doing.

This is both a problem and a benefit. It is a benefit because, for the time, ElfQuest was a clear and relatively simple RPG, following the RuneQuest-BRP engine. It’s a problem because it is far from simple according to contemporary tastes. Further, although Recognition was a substantial and impressive plot device for the time, it is written at a time when player-directed narrativist input was minimal, to say the least. The possibility for a GM-directed romance contrary to the will of the player is a blazing red flag and a reason why “X” cards were invented. Finally, whilst there is a strong sense of the ElfQuest narrative within the game system such as the Sending ability, Wolfrider and other tribal bonds, and of course Recognition. These are very big steps in the RPG world and certainly different to what was common at the time.

Improving ElfQuest is relatively painless. The relatively crunchy combat system can be sped up substantially by the optionally rules suggested by Sandy Petersen in the “Elf War” supplement. These included (as individual choices) (a) No strike ranks and acting on DEX (2) No hit locations, damage subtracted from total hit points (3) No criticals, impales, or fumbles (4) No parries or dodges and (5) Simply movement with a move and combat phases only. These are generally agreeable, although I prefer to use DEX as the equivalent of Strike Rank for physical actions (with “threaten parry” rules for long arms), INT for mental actions, and POW for magical or social. Hit locations are useful, sometimes, as well. For example characters specifically targetting vital but unarmed locations (e.g., -25% for the head, -50% for an eye, etc), especially given some particularly sizeable fauna. But the general idea of making combat more “comic-like” and less “SCA-like” is a sound one for the game and setting.

Recognition is a relatively easy fix as well. As a driving theme of the setting, it could be as detailed as Sanity in Call of Cthulhu, but a simple method is to invite player input in director stance contributing to the narrative. That is, the player and the GM can

agree on a point of Recognition for narrative purposes. Or, if a slightly simulationist component is desired, a POW*5 can be added as well. Other Elven personality traits should be encouraged as well. The Longevity, Low Birth Rate, and physical frailty of Elves would imply that they are supremely cautious about mortal conflicts even in such a dangerous neolithic environment. This is more of a trope for NPCs, as PCs are overconfident protagonists to the point of being foolhardy, but can be emphasised every step of the way with an adage “An Elf lost is an Elf lost forever”.

Bond beasts are a very significant part of Elf personality. Wolfriders should be wolf-like, aggressive and feral. Wave-riders should be playful, Gliders individualistic and far-sighted etc. The general social formation is likewise influential; Elves are at a neolithic level of technological development, and their social mores reflect that. They have “elders” rather than chiefs, they have lore and conventions, rather than laws. The metal-working trolls and human herders and farmers have more of an early traditional society with chiefdoms; they will have a greater level of social stratification, “chiefs” rather than “elders” and so forth. The differences in social formations leads to some interesting narrative challenges; for example in Elf War, the Plains Elves considered herd animals to be common property, whereas the Humans goatherders invoke private property rights.

Apart from conflicts and challenges between the various species a developing theme in the comics and one highlighted by Steve Perrin in *The ElfQuest Companion* is to bring the Elf tribes together. Of course, discovering other Elf tribes is interesting in its own right, but it is strengthened by providing additional impetus. Resource conflicts, environmental issues, and other external threats are a blunt instrument, but they can also invoke the internal differences. It provides a broader social narrative that is far advanced from aimlessly travelling from one adventure to another.

This article has covered the history of ElfQuest, a review of the roleplaying game associated with the comic series, and an exploration of common themes. Finally, a current ElfQuest campaign is being run through the RPG Review Cooperative and a github repository for characters, events, and programs is being generated, including a copy of this article. It is located at <https://github.com/rpgreview/ElfQuest>

Next Issue of **RPG REVIEW**

Issue #60

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TO THE *10TH BIRTHDAY OF*
THE *RPG REVIEW COOPERATIVE!***

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