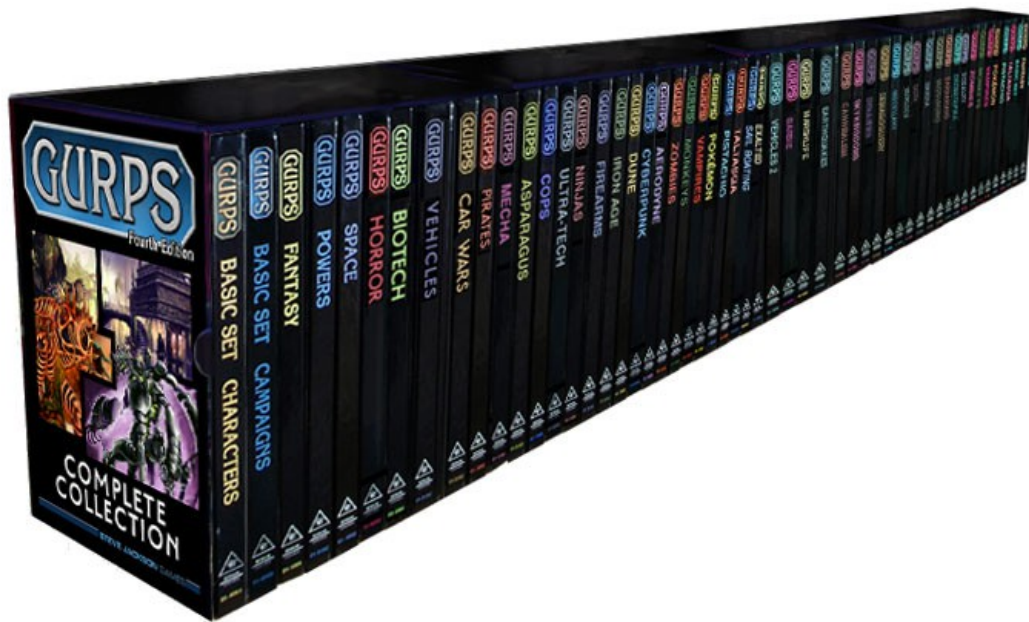


RPG REVIEW

***Issue #17, September
2012***



GURPS Special

***Interview with Sean Punch ... GURPS
Dinosaur's Notes ... GURPS Combat
Revisited ... GURPS Development ...
GURPS Narrativism ... RuneQuest Magic
Skills ... Recent RuneQuests ... Console
Games Reviews .. The Dark Knight
Returns ... Industry News***

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Administrivia

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Editorial

It has been argued by brave souls that our hobby of roleplaying and simulation games may actually have educational benefits. In other words, people can learn whilst having fun. Certainly, there is an appeal to thinkers within the hobby and within that group there are those who appeal towards "realism", in the mechanics of game systems.

At the very top of this appeal is GURPS, a game which had prided itself on "realism" from the outset, and of course as a result many of its advocates claim "you can do anything with GURPS!", which has at least a degree of truth. At the very least, if you can create a normal model of activity in your mind it is almost always easy to translate to GURPS

mechanics.



this classic game.

Our usual features are here of course, with excellent mini-reviews of some console games by Matt Lindus, a review of a very popular movie by Andrew Moshos, and of course, the industry news from the indefatigable Wu Mingshi.

Until next time,

Lev lev@rpgreview.net

Letters

Diaspora Tech Level Tables

As a result, it is with some pleasure that this edition of RPG Review is dedicated (although, not exclusively, as always) to the GURPS system. We have some neat articles to this end, starting with an interview with Sean Punch, who is one of the major developers of the GURPS system these days, some designer's notes for GURPS Dinosaurs from Stephen Dedman, showing the great scope of the game (along with an aside by Sandy Petersen, which we are very pleased with!), a lengthy revision of the GURPS 3e combat system by local aficionado, Michael Cole, and review of the four editions of GURPS and its major precursor The Fantasy Trip, a 1920s style NPC for GURPS, and concluding with a piece on the possibility of narrativism in GURPS - perhaps one area that it is just beginning to move towards.

It really is quite a GURPS-fest - but then again there's so much material to choose from!

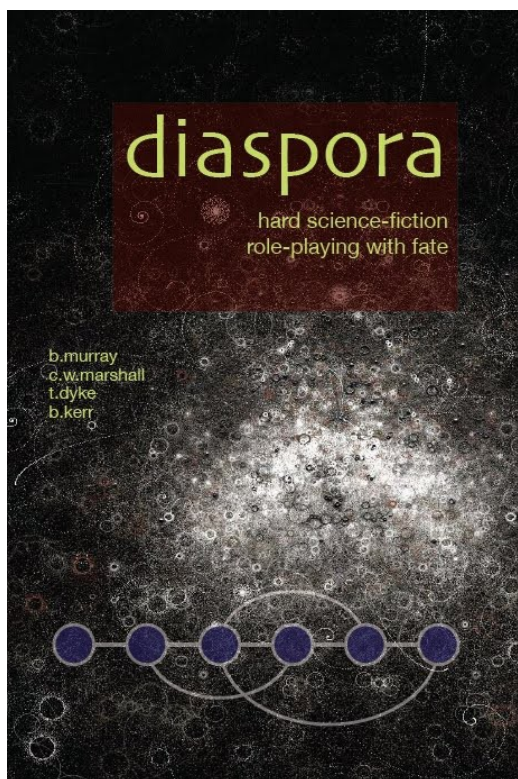
Of course, as with all issues of RPG Review we do include a little bit of diversity and a little bit of the retrospective. In this particular issue we've used RuneQuest in both cases, starting with a RQ3e sorcery article and with a review of the latest incarnations of

In the last issue of RPG Review a table describing the tech levels of Diaspora appeared. Due to an error the introduction and description of the table was omitted.

Introduction

Diaspora is a FATE based game for hard science fiction roleplaying. The authors of the game however are however not particularly knowledgeable about real-life physics (as described by the Standard Model) or likely progression of technology, essential components of good hard science fiction. I have not given references to further reading here. This table was intended to be the centrepiece of a larger review of Diaspora, please refer to that article when it is published. In the meantime a internet search for any of the scientific terms used in the table should provide some insight.

The following table lays out a summary of what I imagine is a 'hard SF' progression of technology based on current real world sources scientific (2011). Note that this progression has personal beam weapons like lasers appearing later than the authors of Diaspora imagined at their table. This is no problem except the personal beam weapons in the book need to be relabelled or not used.



Description of the table.

T: the technology level of a system in Diaspora. T levels are very broad and separated by capabilities in the core technology of space travel. For these reasons all the other columns are general guidelines only.

Approx. historical period: the period of Earth history or predicted future progression of technology the T most resembles. Note due to limitations in this authors knowledge the historical periods have a Fertile Crescent/Western Europe bias. The author is aware of the uneven advancement of technology across the Earth.

GURPS Hard SF TLs (see Ultra Tech 2 p6): GURPS 3rd Edition technology levels adjusted away from the core 'space opera' descriptions of the GURPS Basic Set as described in Ultra Tech 2 for that edition of the game. The author of this article does not have access to the 4th edition of GURPS but is aware that the TLs are very different in the newer edition.

Suggested (only) technologies: These are a range of achievements that cultures in this T might have. All these items are arguably allowed under the current standard model of physics. An internet search for some of the keywords used here will inform players on the incredible technologies that may really be possible in the distant future. Often these are more fantastic than the lazy worn-out and utterly impossible science fiction ideas you see in the cinema.

Karl Brown

Industry News

by Wu Mingshi

Hosei bo, Mr. Lev,

Lao jiao, you see Kickstarter have Project Eternity for classic computer game (Baldur's Gate, Neverwinter Night) with name Obsidian Project? Or maybe pai kia for you? No play on mouse, take dice and scribble on paper instead? At least RPG Review have console games review now for people not in stone age, lah?

Hey, also big news Horror on the Orient Express is coming back on on Kickstarter too! Not seen since 1991, this choo-choo, tcho-tcho, game have long journey across Europe. In other matter with scary Cthulhy, Pagan Publishing now release Delta Green and supplement as PDF and POD, now seen again after many years. Maybe send Angkatan Bersenjata Singapura? I wonder how national service go with Deep Ones?

The iron crab announce public playtest for new Rolemaster and say they rebuild game system from small core upwards and want to end split between RM Classic and RMSS/FRP. Maybe this like bak chor mee, put best ingredients together? Perhaps century egg instead, ar? You decide!

Abit the books go splat this issuing. Alderac start new series for Legend of Five Rings, one for each element starting with Air. Void come last and consist of blank pages, only enlightened can see magic words. Mingshi joking! Also, Catalyst releasing book of missions for Shadowrun with name Elven Blood; you might think book about Elf missions, la? And for Savage Worlds the publisher Savage Mojo make Dungeonlands: Heroes And Servitors book of pre-generated characters for fantasy.

The very interesting news with Icons superhero game going from from Ad Infinitum and Adamant. Adamant say they not have time or people to keep good game alive, and want to give game to different company to promote. But Mingshi wonder, why not combine forces?! Or maybe Mingshi has secret squirrel information about something happen in future...

Two new roleplaying games that fall into Mingshi's lap. First is "Blade and Crown" by NJW Games, which bring together "80s realism and indie narrativism" which the very exciting for Mingshi. Also Misfit Studios have new game, "Rogue Mage" with fallen seraphs and devil-spawn.

OK, that is all from me this quartering!

Mingshi! xx (mingshi@rpgreview.net)

Interview with Sean Punch

with Sean Punch

Sean Punch is the GURPS Line Editor and one of the developers of GURPS Fourth Edition. In addition to these core rulebooks, he is also the author of a small mountain of supplements for that system, including nine GURPS Dungeon Fantasy supplements. Sit down, pour a drink and have a look at the very extensive list:

-- As sole author:

- * GURPS Action 1: Heroes [4E]
- * GURPS Action 2: Exploits [4E]
- * GURPS Action 3: Furious Fists [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 4: Sages [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 6: 40 Artifacts [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 11: Power-Ups [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi [4E]
- * GURPS Power-Ups 1: Imbuements [4E]
- * GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks [4E]
- * GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents [4E]
- * GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys [4E]
- * GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles [4E]
- * GURPS Undead [3E]
- * GURPS Wizards [3E]



-- As coauthor:

- * GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns [4E]
- * GURPS Basic Set: Characters [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 15: Henchmen [4E]
- * GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1 [4E]
- * GURPS Gun Fu [4E]
- * GURPS Martial Arts [4E]
- * GURPS Powers [4E]

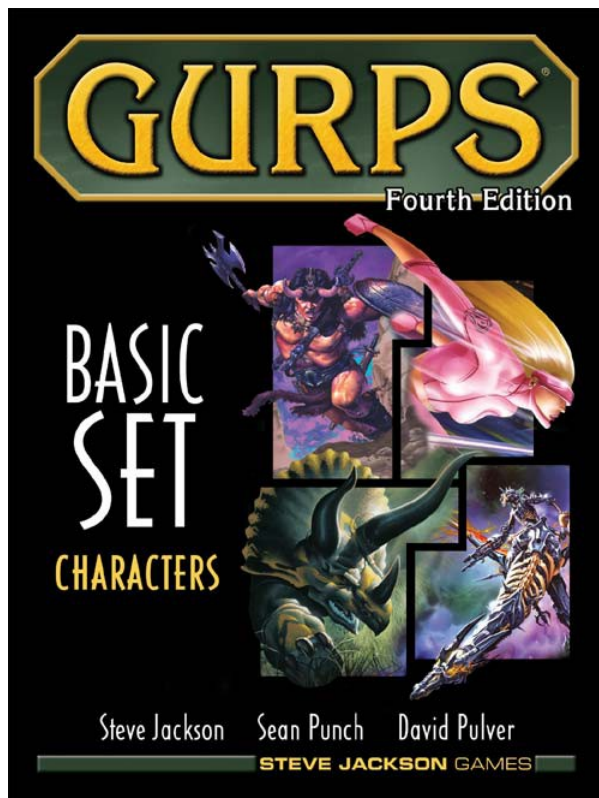
-- As compiler:

- * GURPS Compendium I [3E]
- * GURPS Compendium II [3E]
- * GURPS GM's Screen [4E]
- * GURPS Lite [3E]
- * GURPS Martial Arts Techniques Cheat-Sheet [4E]
- * GURPS Ultra-Lite [4E]
- * GURPS Y2K [3E]

-- As reviser:

- * GURPS Fantasy Folk, Second Edition [3E]
- * GURPS Martial Arts, Second Edition [3E]

Hi Sean, thanks for agreeing to be interviewed for RPG Review. We have almost a standard order for our initial question - do you mind telling us how you first became involved in roleplaying games, and what those experiences were like?



For me, it all began in 1979. I was 12 years old and starting classes at a new school. I was in a program intended as an alternative to early promotion for advanced students, and my entire cohort were picked on as "brains" and "dweebs," which led us to stick together. This meant that we played lots of tabletop games at lunch, including Ogre and Car Wars.

One day, one of my pals showed up with Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, and we started playing. I never looked back. Between 1979 and when I left home in 1990, I must have played 30 or 40 different RPGs -- if it was published before 1990, my gang probably tried it. Gaming groups came and went during those 11 years, but all of them included at least two or three of the pals with whom I first played AD&D.

I came to GURPS via Man to Man, which was published in 1985. This was essentially the low-tech combat system for what would become GURPS. My gang played a lot of it between RPG sessions in 1985-1986. When GURPS was released in 1986, we got into that, too -- not exclusively, but it quickly grew on us.

Why GURPS? What is that attracted you to that particular game system in contrast to the others that were available on the market at the time, and are now?

As I said, my gang tried lots of RPGs. We gamed in almost every genre, and between us, we had copies of every RPG published up to that time (although we didn't play them all). By 1985, a lot of us had entered university, and money and time became issues; we lacked the resources to buy and learn system after system. This put us in the target market for a

generic game that promised to handle all genres with one rules set.

At that time, there were two "generic" RPGs: Chaosium's Basic Role-Playing and Hero's HERO System. The trouble is, you had to buy each genre as its own standalone game, paying for the core rules all over again. If you used BRP, that meant buying Call of Cthulhu, Ringworld, Stormbringer, etc.; with HERO, that meant getting Champions, Danger International, Justice, Inc., etc. Also, each game had little tweaks and differences, making lessons learned in one place troublesome in another place. Eventually, Hero would solve this by reinventing the HERO System as a core rules set -- but back in 1985, that was in the future (1989).

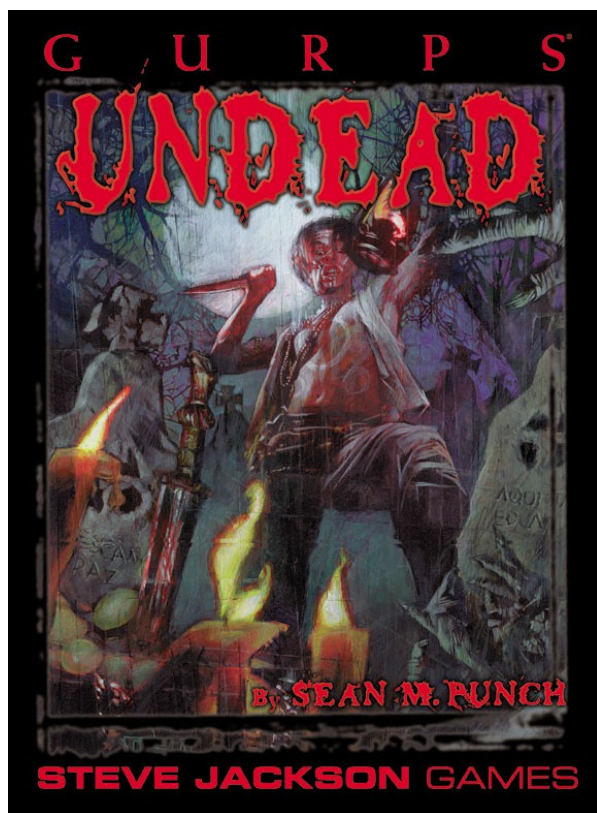
Thus, when SJ Games released GURPS in 1986, it was the answer to all of our prayers. Truthfully, it could have been terrible and we would have made it work! Fortunately, it was a good rules set, so we came to play it almost to the exclusion of other RPGs by 1990. We also went around talking it up to other RPG groups and at local conventions.

I play GURPS today for two reasons. First, I still believe that it's a good system. I understand gamers who prefer games that are fine-tuned to a genre, a setting, and/or a play style, but I'm not one of them. I doubt that I would have kept on

playing RPGs if I had had to buy and learn a new rules set for every campaign. Second, I started working on GURPS for SJ Games as a freelancer in 1994 and full-time in 1995, and I firmly believe that a line developer for an RPG has no business doing that job if he or she doesn't actively and regularly play the game -- not playing leads to getting out of touch, and from there the journey to terrible products is a very, very short one.

Do you have favourite GURPS supplements which really capture the spirit of the game for you?

After 26 years of playing GURPS and 17 years of working on it, I have such a holistic view of GURPS that I'm not sure that I have favorites in the sense you mean. The supplement I've probably used the most is GURPS Magic, and the one I'm proudest of writing is GURPS Undead . . . but neither screams "Generic!", so neither captures the spirit. Maybe that's the thing, though: A good generic game doesn't lend itself to this sort of reduction -- what captures the spirit is the breadth and depth of the whole library, not any one item on the shelf.



What exactly do you do at Steve Jackson Games? What does the day-by-day work of a line editor and author consist of?

"Line Editor" is a catchall title. There are several bits to it:

* Line Developer. This means a lot of administrative work. I post calls for freelance writers (our "wish list"); select which freelance queries will advance to the proposal stage, and which proposals will be awarded contracts; negotiate contracts; answer freelancers' practical questions about rules, style, deadlines, and so on; answer fellow staff members' technical questions regarding content and formatting; report to whoever needs a report on what's doing well or poorly, and where I want the GURPS line to go; and much, much more.

* Brand Manager. I don't have full "executive authority," but I am the person who takes interviews (such as this one!), speaks about GURPS in podcasts, writes a lot of GURPS marketing copy, posts many of the blog updates you see on GURPS, and answers customer questions. I even go to cons and talk up GURPS. Promoting the brand is part of the job.

* Editor. I review nearly all manuscripts at some stage -- first draft, final draft, or preliminary layout -- in order to ensure consistent rules and style. I do plenty of hands-on copyediting. In slow periods, such as we have them, I keep our editorial style guides up to date.

* Staff Writer. As our time and budget allow, I write GURPS books. This is also a subtle part of being a line developer and a brand manager: I establish canon for other writers, and I create products that we think will promote GURPS well at the time I'm writing them. This is actually my favorite part of the job!

Tell us about the design process and editing decisions that went into developing GURPS fourth edition. What do you think are the most significant contributions that would should encourage old GURPS players from previous editions, and to new players being introduced to the system?

Creating GURPS Fourth Edition was a lot of work for a lot of people. We reviewed all the customer input we had archived since Third Edition was released in 1988. We ran online polls. We skimmed all of the old GURPS books. We listed the things that we felt were the best new rules ideas in the supplements and feedback . . . and we also made lists of what we felt had been our worst moves.

This lengthy process led to an outline, which Steve Jackson and quite a few established GURPS writers got to hack on. The final result was what everybody felt would make the largest number of *gamers* happy. We put ego on hold for that part. Some people had nostalgic memories, a desire to radically revise, or other agendas, but both highly reactionary and extremely radical thinking were chopped off, leaving us with a plan for a system that would seem familiar but also progressive.

Then we compiled and updated, updated and compiled. The results were once again subject to serious peer review. It would be no lie to say that the revisions in response to review took as long as the initial development. The result was GURPS Fourth Edition.

What's appealing for fans of older editions? Similar ideas rationalized with one another. Many popular optional rules -- and lots of good ideas from difficult-to-find supplements -- integrated into the core rules. Simplifications in everything from active defenses to skills . . . but always technical simplifications, for ease of play, not ones that cost detail. Fewer dice rolls in many instances. It's just a more polished system.

What's appealing to new gamers? Two things that haven't changed since GURPS First Edition: First, you can buy one RPG, learn it, and proceed to start gaming without digging deep to afford new core rules whenever you start up a new campaign, and without asking your players to learn *another* set of rules. Second, it's well-supported. Don't let the fact that we sell most of the content as PDFs deceive you -- there's lots of GURPS support out there, and more coming all the time.

What's planned and upcoming for GURPS, and what do you see the longer term future of the game and for the hobby as holding?

I'm not supposed to hint too much at things to come for GURPS, because that's a job for marketing. Everybody knows that we have a new edition of the Discworld RPG coming within the next year, though, and that I'm busy writing GURPS Zombies. We have more support in the works for GURPS Banestorm, GURPS High-Tech, GURPS Martial Arts, GURPS Thaumatology, and Transhuman Space. We have two more GURPS Locations items in the works. And of course Pyramid will continue to appear monthly.

As for the future of RPGs at large, that's a mixed vision. I can't see RPGs going away, but I do see them becoming progressively more digital. Will this kill tabletop RPGs? I hope not -- I hope to see integration or cross-pollination. But honestly, media have never been more in flux than they are right now, so predictions about such things are doomed to look silly just a few years from now, never mind a few decades down the road.

Where does the nickname "Dr Kromm" come from? It sounds like someone who associates with Conan The Librarian.

"Dr. Kromm" was originally the moniker of a recurring villain in a campaign I ran using Victory Games' James Bond 007 system (I picked the surname "Kromm" from a phone book!). He gradually lost body parts -- which were replaced with cybernetics -- but he didn't die. When I played in campaigns ran by various friends whom I had subjected to Dr. Kromm, I often used the name for my PC, entirely as an in-joke. In all cases, Dr. Kromm was a mad scientist of sorts.

When I got online in 1987, I started using "Kromm" as a handle as part of the same in-joke. Hey, it seemed funny when I was a geeky 20-year-old! It stuck, however, and to this day I have real-world friends and coworkers who think of me as "Kromm" . . . in fact, some of them even address me as "Kromm" to my face!

Oh, and Conan's god is "Crom." We're not related.

Prior to joining Steve Jackson Games, you completed a MSc in theoretical high-energy physics. You could be, for example, writing papers on the speculations of various types of bosons, or working in a synchrotron testing whether they actually exist. Instead, you're writing and editing roleplaying books. Ultimately do you think that was the best choice? What do you think you would be doing if you weren't a game designer and editor?

I left physics for a variety of reasons, some of them economic and some of them intellectual. It's a long, complicated story, much of it pretty boring. It suffices to say that I chose employment working on a hobby over an uncertain and

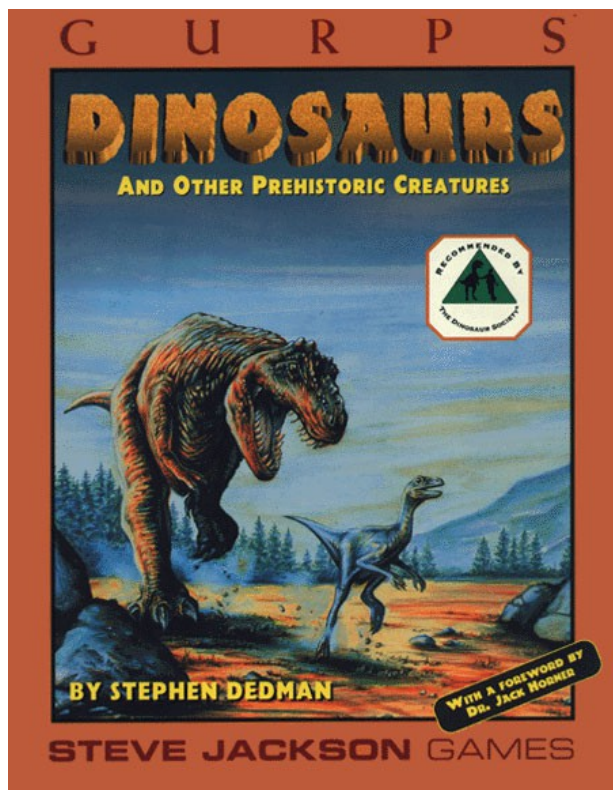
possibly unemployed future in physics, and that I have no regrets about putting creative work ahead of quantitative work. Had I not made that choice, I suspect that I would have followed many of my physics peers out of high-energy theory (which offered few jobs in the 1990s) and into either banking or defense research. Those other fields would have paid a lot better -- no part of RPG publishing pays especially well -- but while my modest means sometimes frustrate me, I'm not a materialist at heart, so I don't regret the call I made.



Mesozoic Safari:

A GURPS Dinosaurs Designer's Notes

by Stephen Dedman



Carruthers swore profusely and unimaginatively as he trudged across the floodplain. It had cost him a small fortune in bribes to smuggle his grandfather's Kalashnikov back to the Cretaceous, and he was sure that smuggling his trophies home would cost more still - assuming any trophies eventuated. He hadn't seen any dinosaurs much larger than a turkey since his arrival, and all of those had escaped into the wetlands. The longer he took to bag a dinosaur, he knew, the more likely the Timecop's were to catch him with the evidence. The weather was colder than he'd expected, most of the plants and small animals he'd seen had looked suspiciously modern, and he suspected that the insects were rapidly evolving a strain immune to his Pestguard. But his scanner indicated many large animals on the far side of the redwood forest ahead of him, so he tramped onwards.

An hour later, he was staring at a huge herd of elephant-sized Triceratops horridus as they migrated south. From the side, they were dark grey mottled with green and brown, resembling weathered rocks encrusted with lichen and moss; from the front, however, their neck frills were as shockingly colourful as a mandrill's nose

or a butterfly's wings. A head like that on the wall of his office, Carruthers realised, would give pause to anyone questioning his courage. He picked a middle-sized sub-adult - no point in choosing a head larger than the room, after all - and aimed at its ribcage, figuring that there had to be a heart in there somewhere. He'd heard that dinosaur brains were too small to be targeted, and he didn't wish to mark that magnificent face. He switched the select to full autofire, and blasted away for three seconds.

To his horror, the herd split apparently at random, like four-ton gazelle. Several stampeded in his direction; Carruthers fired his last three rounds before turning and running. In his last moments, he thought how utterly unfair it was that creatures so large could be so fast.

Scavenging Troodons found his remains just after nightfall, leaving nothing for the Timecop's but the tattered remnants of an environment suit and a twisted wreck of the gun.

* * *

GURPS DINOSAURS is a bestiary and chronology of the 'big, fierce and extinct' from the trilobites of the Paleozoic to the early tool-users of the Pleistocene. I intended it primarily as an aid for the GURPS Time Travel GM who wishes to send PCs to any era in prehistoric Earth, but it is also a source of monsters, lost realms and campaign seeds for almost any genre - Supers, Space, Atomic Horror, Fantasy, Cliffhangers, even Cyberpunk and Old West.

Though their name has become associated with everything unwieldy and obsolete, such as bankrupt superpowers and last year's computers, the tale of the dinosaurs is one of the greatest success stories ever. Mere mammals evolved alongside the earliest dinosaurs, and for more than 165 million years, survived by being too small for the 'terrible lizards' to bother chasing. Long before the dagger-teeth and dire wolves, there were five-ton carnosaurs and man-sized raptors; before the mammoths and woolly rhinos, there were sauropods as long as blue whales, elephant-sized hornfaced, armored ankylosaurs and huge herds of hadrosaurs, as well as pterosaurs larger than light aircraft and marine reptiles with ten-inch teeth. Not until the dinosaurs had been gone for 63 million years did hominids start banging rocks together.

After millenia of their bones inspiring myths of dragons and other monsters, dinosaurs were rediscovered in the mid 19th century (the word 'dinosaur' is some 153 years old as I write), and quickly bullied their way into popular culture. Now, despite being extinct, their commercial dominion is enormous. So please, show a little respect; don't just go out there and use these wonderful creatures as cannon-fodder. Take a little time to admire their strength, their size, their power, their teeth, their claws, before letting them devour you. If at all possible, please let the smaller, swifter predators - Deinonychus, Utahraptor, Troodon, and so on - make a cunning group attack on your party before Tyrannosaurs and Giganotosaurs arrive and intimidate them away from their kill. PCs with AK-47s, dinosaur lasers and paralysis rifles can take a lot of the fun out of the Mesozoic, not to mention seriously disturbing the ecological balance. Lost Realms where dinosaurs still survive might best be discovered by a party of pacifistic paleontologists armed with nothing but pocketknives, pickaxes, and false teeth. A Terminator-style time machine which sends travellers back naked apart from their implant weapons and martial arts skills might present more of a challenge for your players... or maybe a slight miscalculation, sending tourists equipped for a bar brawl in Tombstone or tourney at Camelot to the Jurassic floodplains. Remind dino hunters of the 'butterfly effects' possible if they kill the wrong animal at the wrong time (a la Ray Bradbury's 'A Sound of Thunder'), or have them arrive in the Cretaceous to find their luggage rerouted to the Cambrian. Just because dinosaurs are extinct doesn't mean they should be harmless...

* * *

Xaotetl stared past the guard to watch the Giganotosaurus drinking from the sacred pool, then returned his attention to the pistol. "We took it from one of the outsiders," explained the sergeant. "They used it to kill two of the guards, but it is now apparently powerless. This man ran from them, and survived."

Xaotetl nodded. He considered feeding the guard to the dinosaur, which seemed to be perpetually hungry, or depriving him of his ration of water from the sacred pool and letting him slowly age as outsiders did, but neither seemed an entirely appropriate punishment for desertion. He thought for a moment, and then smiled. "Cut off his feet," he ordered. Perhaps they'd grow back in time, perhaps not; either way, it would be nearly as strong a symbol of Xaotetl's power as the Giganotosaurus and other creatures that drank from the sacred pool. The soldiers carried the young guard away, and Xaotetl handed the pistol to his chief minister. "Have you seen one of these before?"

Juan Ponce de Leon examined the Colt revolver cautiously. "The workmanship is excellent," he said in his oddly-accented Xijalese. "Better than any I've seen before."

"Make it work again," said Xaotetl imperiously, and smiled even more broadly as a vulture taller than any of the guards landed beside the sacred pool.

* * *

Individual dinosaurs can liven up a game, whether encountered in a hidden valley or stolen from a biotech lab, but in my opinion, you get much better value if you buy in bulk - raptors attacking in co-ordinated packs, entire herds of ceratopsians, or best of all, a complete ecosystem, from top predators on down. The lost realm of Xijale endures because of a pool that bestows immortality and gets around the normal ecological problem of Lost Realms - maintaining and feeding breeding populations of very large predators. A warm-blooded T rex would need to eat the equivalent of a hadrosaur a week; feeding fifty or more for 65 million years would take... well, you figure it out.

Because very little of Earth remains unexplored, or at least unsurveyed by satellite, lost realms are better suited for times when terra incognita was more plentiful, or parallel worlds, or perhaps a GURPS Space campaign where the Precursors have seeded worlds with species long since extinct on Earth. Of course, dinosaurs in a lost realm have had millions of years in which to evolve...

* * *

The air was rich with oxygen, pollens, and the smell of dinosaurs; Reid breathed deeply of it, glad to be off the ship. Tau Draconis III was more 'Earthlike' than Earth had been for a millenium, and it was pleasant to be able to walk around without an air mask, heat suit, or dose of gravanol. He stared at the troodon as it appeared out of a clump of swamp cypress, a length of bamboo in its hands. "Okay, so I owe you a bottle of sake," he admitted to his science officer. "It's a tool-using dinosaur. What is that, a spear?"

"I don't know," she said softly, as the troodon turned and trotted in their direction. "Those shoulders aren't built for an overarm throw, but a spear would give it extra reach, maybe enough to attack an ankylosaur without getting too close to the tail..."

"Uh-huh. How long do you think it'll be before they ask us for military advisors?"

The troodon, now only a few metres away from the ATV, looked at him curiously, then raised the blowgun to his mouth. The dart hit Reid in the throat, and a dozen armed troodons suddenly dashed out from the trees.

* * *

I would like to thank the Dinosaur Society for their assistance with this project, and their sponsorship of dinosaur research and education. I also have to thank the paleontologists, the museum staff, the writers, and the film-makers (some of them, anyway) for fueling a life-long fascination with the 'terrible lizards' and other prehistoric creatures, and Steve Jackson and Loyd Blankeship for suggesting the book.

And if you really want to slaughter dinosaurs wholesale, after all the effort that's been put into bringing them back to life, I suggest you go to Ghost Ranch in Texas and travel back to the late Triassic. More Coelophysis than you could point a minigun at, and after all, 220 million years later, who's going to know?

The Best Dinosaur

by Sandy Petersen

We all know what the best dinosaur is. Obviously, a tyrannosaur. So here I will explain why it is that tyrannosaurs are even more terrifying than you had thought.

1) tyrannosaurs reached adulthood in their teens. Once they were mature, they had about a 20% to die per year, mostly because of fights with other tyrannosaurs. Their fossil skulls show toothmarks, scars, and occasionally imbedded teeth from other tyrannosaurs, and these were not from feeding - but from fighting (we can tell the difference). The largest tyrannosaur found - Sue - was killed by a head bite from another of its species. They fought ALL the time and were extremely belligerent and boisterous.

2) they bred extremely fast for an apex predator larger than a bull elephant. One fossil assemblage of a gorgosaur (a type of tyrannosaur) found an adult with seven half-grown young. That's seven that had survived so far. Grizzly bears don't have 7 cubs. Elephants don't have 7 calves at a time. Tyrannosaurs had AT LEAST that many young during a breeding season. Probably more, if you consider that their eggs were probably about football sized, this means a 5-ton female could have laid dozens at a time.

3) they were built for speed, believe it or not. Their bone structure is highly gracile and light for such an enormous animal. Their skulls are an exception - they are massive and thick with huge neck bones. The rest of their body is a quick-transport system to get that skull where it needs to go - up in your wheelhouse.

4) they are unlike other carnivorous dinosaurs in the strength and use of their bite. Others, even larger ones like Giganotosaurus, were slashers - their teeth were designed to strip flesh from bone, or leave huge gashes in their prey. But Tyrannosaurs were designed to chomp THROUGH bones and flesh alike, leaving deep scoop-like wounds. Tyrannosaurus coprolites (dung) are filled with bone fragments. Tyrannosaur bites on prey (sometimes survived!) indicate that they would bite off Triceratops horns, and spinal bones from duckbills, etc.

Now you know.

GURPS3e Combat System Revised

by Michael Cole

Initiative and Turn Sequence

Initiative and Turn Sequence are two separate issues: -

- Initiative determines the ability to recover from surprise or stunning. It is checked if the person is either unprepared for combat, or has been stunned through combat. It is rolled against each turn after the first, and a success means that the person can act fully again.
- Turn Sequence is the order in which each person acts during a melee turn. It is calculated when the character is designed, and generally remains constant during their life.

Initiative and Turn Sequence should be calculated and written at the top of the character sheet.

Initiative

When both sides of a combat situation are fully prepared, such as in a duel or an open field battle, there is no need to check initiative, and all participants operate at full Sequence value. But when one side or both is surprised (GM's discretion), all members of the surprised parties must check initiative. To check initiative, roll 3d vs. IQ, modified as follows:

- +1 for each level of Alertness (note that acute senses do not help, only Alertness);
- +2 per level of Altered Time Rate advantage;
- +6 for Combat Reflexes;
- +1 for Cool, Collected, Composed or Imperturbable (non-cumulative);
- +1 for Hyper-Reflexes if activated (unlikely);
- -2 for Absent-Mindedness;
- -4 for Altered Time Rate disadvantage;
- -3 for Combat Paralysis;
- -5 for Confused;
- -2 for Indecisive;
- +1 for Tactics (+2 for skill 20+).

This initiative is rolled individually. Note that a successful Danger Sense roll prior to the combat will mean that the individual is fully prepared, and will not need to roll Initiative for surprise.

Initiative rolls are reduced for the effects of fatigue.

Turn Sequence

Each player will calculate his or her Turn Sequence as follows: -

- Basic Speed - $(DX + HT)/4$
- +2 if the character has Combat Reflexes
- -2 if they have Combat Paralysis
- + Encumbrance Modifiers
- +1 if at least one point in Tactics.

Turn Sequence is also reduced for the effects of fatigue.

Advantages

Danger Sense 15 points

"However, it is important not to stare at the enemy, because he may sense the stalker's presence through a sixth sense."

- US Army Field Manual 21-150 Chapter 7 "Sentry Removal"

Danger Sense is like a sixth sense – it gives you a warning about someone's hostile intentions, but it *doesn't* warn you about mechanical traps. This is a change to B20. It also allows you to sense if someone is staring at you.

Sixth Sense 5 points

This is a cut-down version of the above – it lets you only sense someone staring at you, not his intentions. Very useful when alone, but in a crowded area it can be pain in the rear.

Offense

Basic Damage from Strength

Basic damage from strength has now changed. The new damages are shown in Basic Damage from Strength Chart (Page 28).

The progression is obvious. After a minute of study, you won't even need the Table much – with just the damage from ST 10 to 20 you can find damage for any higher ST. If ST 12 does 1d+1 Thrust, then ST 72 does 7d+1. ST 122 does 12d+1.

Strikers and kicks do thrust damage based on full ST – no change there. But punch damage changes. Instead of thrust -2 damage, use simple thrust, based on Combat ST x 2/3 (round down). For example, a ST 10 PC computes punch damage from ST 10 x 2/3 = 6.6, or ST 6. That's 1d-2.

Swing damage is calculated as per thrust for Combat ST x 1.5. For example, a ST 10 PC computes punch damage from ST 10 x 1.5 = 15, or ST 15. That's 2d+1.

To repeat:

Punch damage is figured from Combat ST x 2/3

Kick, striker and thrust damage is figured from Combat ST

Swing damage is figured from Combat ST x 1.5

Combat Skills

Changes from GURPS Rules are: -

Axe/Mace and **Two-Handed Axe/Mace** are now Physical/Easy rather than Physical/Average.

Blackjack now has an additional +2 to hit (because it is so easy). You will need the plus to hit a specific location...

Body Language is no more. Trying to spot what kind of attack is coming as soon as is possible is a fundamental part of defense and should be covered by high skill. The use of Body Language in determining lies is covered by **Detect Lies**.

Boxing is now Physical/Easy rather than Physical/Average.

Dual-Weapon Attack Maneuver: - Clarification – both weapons *must* be the same, and the attacks and parries *must* be aimed at the same target. This maneuver is considered Realistic (different targets is Cinematic).

Feint Maneuver: - A feint is never declared at the action declaration stage – when the action occurs, the attacker may then declare any attacks as a feint prior to the roll. This also works with All-Out Attacks, in which if the first is a successful feint, the second attack takes the bonus, as well as any attacks in the attacker's next action. If that is also an All-Out attack, then he or she may get up to three attacks with the feint bonus from the one feint.

Fencing: - The current fencing skill, which encompasses rapier, smallsword and sabre, now becomes a Physical/Hard skill, rather than Physical/Average. There are now three new skills, being individual skills for each of the specific types of fencing weapons, which are Physical/Average. Each defaults to each other at -4.

Flail: - This is now split into two skills, One-Handed Flail (Physical/Easy) and Two-Handed Flail (Physical/Hard). Nunchuku is no longer covered by this skill, but is a separate skill (Physical/Average). Flails retain their hard to block and parry advantages, but equally, they are also difficult to use to parry – an additional -4 in parrying only.

Katana is no more – it is covered with Broadsword and Two-Handed Sword skills. Note that the standard Kendo only teaches Two-Handed.

Main Gauche: - This is a style of fighting, not a weapon. This may only be used if utilising a fencing weapon and skill with the primary hand – otherwise use Knife skill, with off-hand penalties.

Parry Missile is a cinematic skill, not a realistic skill. In reality, it is pure luck if you manage to parry a missile. Note that you can still parry a thrown weapon, just not a missile.

Rock Throwing: - New skill (Physical/Easy)

Shield: - Purely defensive shield is per the GURPS rules, and as detailed above, but if you wish to be able to act offensively with that shield, i.e., use it for slams, pushes and bashes, then that will be a new skill. "Offensive Shield", which will be Physical/Average (Defaults to DX-5, Shield-2 or Bucker-3).

Short Staff: - Ignore the parrying stuff (see below).

Spear Thrower is now Physical/Hard rather than Physical/Average.

Sumo: - Proper Sumo wrestling, as in the professional stuff in Japan, is Physical/Hard.

Tackling & Blocking: - New skill, Physical/Easy: -

- Can be used for both Grapple and Slam attacks
- Adds +2 to strength for Grapples, Takedowns, Slams, Pins, Breaking Free
- a) Can be used for Parrying
- b) Does *not* include any locks or blows

Throwing Stick: - Ignore the damage stats as written – they are rather excessive.

Tonfa: - Ignore the parrying stuff (see below).

Whip is now Physical/Hard rather than Physical/Average.

Wrestling is now Physical/Easy rather than Physical/Average.

Also note that the **Manual Dexterity** advantage (CI 27) does not add to combat skills.

Weapon Types

Given that the current GURPS damage types or Crush, Impale and Cut, do not fully represent the possible types of damage that can be inflicted, the types of damage have been expanded to the following: -

1: Bullet	Projectiles more than 3mm in diameter that only do kinetic damage, and are travelling at supersonic speeds.
2: Energy	Both thermal and kinetic damage, e.g., laser or plasma.
3: Pellet	Large number of projectiles all less than 3mm in diameter
4: Cut	Anything with an edge, sharp or otherwise, designed to penetrate
5: Impale	Anything with a point, sharp or otherwise, designed to penetrate
6: Crush	Anything solid without an edge or not designed to penetrate. This includes subsonic bullets, e.g., from a sling.
7: Hands	"Soft Blunt", E.g., hand or foot combat, or sand-bags or billy clubs
8: Teeth	Natural weaponry used in a biting action
9: Claws	Natural weaponry used in a slashing action
10: Explosive	Missile weapons that explode in a body location (not bombs).

Hit Location

A new hit location table has been created, which does the following: -

- Uses a percentile system, to alleviate the issues with trying to use a 3-18 bell curve to fit the possible location probabilities.
- Have more specific locations, to aid in describing effects.
- Allows a simpler method of aiming, in that instead of specifying a particular location at a large minus, and then missing completely if you miss, which is not realistic, it enables the person aiming to instead aim either at the Head, Arms or Legs, and the adjusts the probabilities appropriately.
- Has a much wider variance of damage modifiers to represent the various types of weapons.

This new location chart is shown in the *Comprehensive Combat Chart*. It also includes notes on what additional damage can occur given a hit on a particular location.

As such, armour now needs to be bought by locations covered, not just general protection. Refer to the Armor Type Table and the *Costs* booklet for further information. Also note that the *Skull* and *Ear* both have an additional base DR2.

Defense

Active Defense

The major change is that the defense needs to be stated prior to attacks being rolled. This will not have any major effect on one-on-one combat, but will have a major effect of combat with multiple opponents. The defender will have to state against whom he is defending and how. If that attacker fails to hit, then the defense is effectively wasted – it cannot be transferred to another attacker.

Note that as per B98, you can only block or parry once per turn, but you can dodge as many times as you like. There is

now a new proviso that for every subsequent dodge after the first, there is now a cumulative –1 penalty.

Parry is now considered to be the same as attacking the opponent's weapon. It is now equal to the weapon skill – penalties to hit are (for the opponent's weapon that you are parrying) –5 for small weapons (knife etc), -3 for pole-arms and great-swords, and –4 for all others (B110 Sidebar). This differs from the old half of weapon skill.

Also note that those weapon skills that had listed as a 2/3rd parry are now no different from any other weapon. This includes **Short Staff** and **Tonfa**, as well as **Karate** and **Judo**. Also note that **Judo** no longer gets a bonus for parrying an armed opponent (B110).

Block is effectively a parry with a shield – it now works of Shield skill with the appropriate modifiers as above for the opponent's weapon, rather than half skill, however Shield skill is increased by the Passive Defense value of the shield, from 1 to 4, as shown on B76.

For Reference: -

Type	PD	Cost	Weight	DR	Notes
Buckler	1	24d	2	5/20	
Small Shield	2	36d	8	5/30	
Round Shield	2	42d	9	5/30	
Heater Shield	3	60d	15	7/40	
Kite Shield	4	72d	20	7/50	
Tower Shield	4	96d	25	9/60	
Large Round-Shield	4	50d	12	5/40	

Note: - The second value for DR is the actual Hit Points of the shield itself. Damage to the shield over the DR causes actual damage – once all shield hit points are used, the shield falls apart. This will generally not be bothered with in normal play, as it is way too much bookkeeping.

Dodge uses Basic Speed x 2, i.e., (DX + HT)/2. Round down. It also has the same penalties as above added on – e.g., dodging a knife is (DX + HT)/2 –5, and dodging a spear is at (DX + HT)/2 –3 (its easier to dodge a spear than a knife).

Defensive penalties are now doubled, defensive bonuses remain as they are. The exception to this is that All-Out Defence now adds a +4 to Active Defence.

Also note that as a result of this, successful feints now subtract double the difference from the AD. It also means that parrying thrown weapons, and parrying with knives is now at –2 (B99)

Retreat Bonus is only added to the **Dodge** defense, not to **Block** or **Parry**. Also note that if you use a **Dodge** defence, you cannot also step forwards in the same round – dodging implies putting distance between yourself and your attacker.

Passive Defense

Is no more. Do not add PD to Active Defense. Do not roll against PD. Say goodbye to PD.

Shields: One exception to the above, as noted previously: Do add a shield's current PD value (+1 to +4) to Block. This does not aid other defenses. It's a bonus that Block gains for the large size of the defending object, just as Parry takes a penalty when attempted with a small knife.

Damage Resistance & Edge Protection

BASIC GURPS introduces a rule for flexible armors like Kevlar and mail: A bullet that did not penetrate these armors

still inflicted one point of crushing "blunt trauma" damage for every 5 or 6 rolled.

This is a different, more comprehensive way to handle flexible armor and blunt trauma from any sort of attack:

Edge Protection Score

In addition to DR that negates the force of a blow, armor can offer lesser protection that allows the force of a blow through, but prevents an edge or point from penetrating the armor (and thus flesh).

This Edge Protection (EP) is measured in points like DR. Simply put, DR represents resistance to any deformity at all; EP represents resistance to penetration. Tough, flexible material has low DR, high EP. Tough, hard material has high DR, low EP.

In Armor Type Table (*Page 29*) are standard **GURPS** armor types, reworked with new DR and EP stats.

Setting DR and EP

The more flexible the armor, the more that protection will take the form of EP instead of DR.

To rework existing **GURPS** armors, below are rules of thumb. However, any armor can vary considerably from that, especially in EP.

- Flexible armors like mail: Set EP to about DR x 1.5, then cut DR to a third or less.
- Semi-flexible armors like cloth and leather: Set EP to about DR, then lower DR by a quarter or so.
- Hard armors like plate: Set EP to about a third of DR, then lower DR by a quarter or less.
- Very hard armors like ceramic: Use DR as is with no EP, or turn about a tenth of DR into EP.

In the end, the armor's total DR+EP should be higher than the current **GURPS** DR (much higher, in the case of flexible armors), to maintain its overall level of protection.

Varying EP

EP is interesting in that it can vary a lot more than DR. Armor quality or material would affect DR little, but could affect EP a lot. Cheap materials might subtract 1 or none from DR, but halve EP; high-quality materials might add 1 or none to DR, but offer double or better EP.

A great example of very high-quality armor material is Frodo's Dwarven *mithril* mail, which saved him from what would have been a fatal stab in the vitals. The mail's extremely high EP allowed a big crushing blow to go through, but not the spear's point itself.

Extreme Cases

An Impenetrable Coat of Armor bequeathed by the gods might have no more DR than normal armor, but *infinite* EP. You can be bludgeoned to death wearing it -- fairly easily so if it's flexible with low DR -- but it won't be *penetrated*.

Make that a thin Shirt of Impenetrable Mono-silk, and you can have *zero* DR armor that's of no value in a fistfight, yet will stop a sword from running through you.

A theoretical very hard and strong but brittle armor, perhaps ceramic, would have high DR and no EP -- damage above DR simply breaks it.

Cost of Natural EP

As natural armor, charge 1/3 the cost of DR to purchase EP.

EP in play

Subtract DR normally from damage. These points are absorbed by armor. Damage beyond that, affecting EP, is *crushing* damage, even if the attack was cutting or impaling. These points deform the armor and bruise the flesh beneath, but do not penetrate the armor.

Edged damage beyond both DR and EP does penetrate the armor. (If you're using rules for accumulated damage to armor and deterioration, this is significant.) Treat as normal edged damage.

The rule replaces the **GURPS** "roll of 5 or 6" rule.

***Example:** You're wearing chain mail with cloth underneath, for DR 2, EP 5. An axe blow for 2 or less damage doesn't hurt you. A 4-point blow, after DR, leaves 2 points of crushing damage; the mail is not cut. (If that axe were poisoned, the venom doesn't touch you.)*

A 13-point blow is reduced to 11 by DR. The next 5 points are crushing damage only, and don't cut the mail. The next 6 points break through the mail and cut you normally, for 9 damage after the cutting multiplier. You took 14 points of damage from the blow (5 crushing, 9 cutting).

A 2-point blow from a club does no damage after DR. A 4-point blow inflicts 2 points of crushing damage; a 13-point blow, 11 points of crushing damage. That's right, EP offers no special protection against crushing damage that exceeds DR.

EP and Attack Types

Like DR, EP may vary with attack type. For example, halve both DR and EP for impaling weapons versus mail or Kevlar (note that for these purposes, bullets and pellets are considered to be impaling). Or your magic Impenetrable Coat's EP may drop to a low value (even zero) when faced with the magic All-Penetrating Sword.

Also, weapon sharpness may also effect EP. A blunt edge might double EP; a very sharp one, halve EP. (This further adds to the armor-piercing ability of fine weapons, without more damage additions.)

EP and Bullets

As with edged attacks, EP represents armor's ability to turn a bullet into a crushing blow, without piercing the armor and entering the body. Armor-piercing bullets will divide EP by as much as they divide DR.

Toughness

[This replaces the Toughness (B23) trait]

The **GURPS** Toughness trait has been reworked to represent your resilience from thick muscles: you'll shrug off punches, yet a knife will hurt you. That makes it useful, but decidedly *different from* DR. It's different from old **GURPS** Toughness too. This new Toughness is a brand new thing.

Cost

Divide your Combat ST by 5 and round down. That's your Base Toughness. It's completely free for any creature.

Racial Extra Toughness above the base costs 7 points per level. **GURPS'** 3-point cost of DR (CI32) becomes the cost to *convert* a point of Toughness into DR. That means once you've converted all your free Toughness into DR, buying more DR means you'll have to buy more Toughness and pay to convert it to DR.

That puts a limit on cheap, 3-point levels of DR in the game; once an alien race converts all its Toughness into DR, additional DR will cost 10 points per level (7 points to buy another level of Toughness, 3 points to turn it into DR).

Final Note: ST gets cheaper and cheaper as it gets higher. When the cost of ST drops below 10 pts per level, adjust the cost of additional Toughness accordingly. Price Toughness at x2/3 the cost of additional ST, and charge x1/3 the cost of additional ST to turn a level of Toughness into DR.

For *Non-Racial* extra Toughness, use the standard 10 points for one level, 25 points for two, as detailed in B23.

The Basics

When you're hit for damage, follow standard **GURPS** procedures: subtract DR and multiply the remaining damage for damage type and location.

Now subtract Toughness from damage, but only up to the basic hits before multiplications.

In other words, there's no protection against the *extra* damage caused by cutting or impaling wounds, or for the hit location; those hits are always taken as injury. In other words, your Toughness protects as well as DR does against punches and falls, but less so against a slash or stab, and much less against a stab or a bullet hitting vital organs. Try some numbers and see:

***Example:** You have ST 16, with free Toughness 3. You shrug off a punch of 3 or less damage. A punch for 5 points of damage inflicts 2 points on you.*

***Example:** Razk the Evil Lizardman has DR 1, and Toughness 3 from his ST 15. You punch Razk for 5 damage. He takes only 1 point (5 minus DR 1 minus Toughness 3 = 1 damage).*

You make a 5-point thrust with the sword. That's 4 basic hits after DR. Multiply by 3 for vitals: 12 damage. Razk's Toughness absorbs only 3 points; one of the 4 basic hits gets through, as do all 8 hits of extra impaling damage.

You now deal a 9-point sword slash, reduced to 8 basic hits by DR. Multiply by 1.5 for cutting; that's 12 points for Razk to deal with. After Toughness, he takes 9 points of damage.

Even a lowly 3-point cut, reduced to 2 basic hits by DR, will hurt. Damage looks to be $2 \times 1.5 = 3$ points of final damage before Toughness. But Razk's muscles stop no more than basic hits, or 2 points in this case. The extra point of damage for cutting injures Razk no matter how much Toughness he has.

Note that Toughness doesn't protect vs. poison or disease – just whacks, stabs, pokes, falls, and so on.

Toughness and Shock

The Shock effect (as well as Stunning and Knockout) is calculated on the damage done before Toughness is subtracted. In other words, you may be punched for 2 points of damage, which will end up doing no damage to you because of Toughness, but you will still be at –2 for the next round. Toughness allows you to shrug off the damage, not to pretend that it didn't hurt.

Damage

Stunning and Knockout

As per the Comprehensive Combat System, victims may be either stunned or knocked out by attacks. This differs by what is in B127.

Stunning is checked before Knockout – only if the victim is stunned should the victim be checked for Knockout. Note that any automatic KO includes automatic Stun.

Anyone who is *Stunned* will only be able to defend the following round, and all active defenses will be at –4. For each subsequent round, they will need to make an Initiative roll to act normally again.

A KO does not necessarily imply unconsciousness, but simply means that the victim is out of play – they can take no actions, and will generally be lying on the ground. I.e., a knee to the groin can leave the victim curled up in the fetal position, but they will generally be awake. A solid blow to the stomach can knock the wind out and cause a collapse, but the victim will still be awake. The type of weapon and the hit location will define the result – the GM is the final arbiter. Generally, recovery takes about one minute per point of damage done.

Unconsciousness

To keep die rolling down, characters reduced to 0 HT or less do *not* roll to remain conscious every round. Consciousness rolls are only made when: -

- The character takes damage (even 1 point);
- The character All-Out Attacks;
- The character moves fast enough to qualify for a sprint bonus;
- Other situations up to the GM.

Normal combat actions do *not* force a Consciousness Roll. Also, Strong/Weak Will modifies the Consciousness roll. Once the combat ends (GM call), a final Consciousness Roll must be made, at -1 per -3 HT under 0, to represent a post-combat adrenaline comedown.

Bleeding

As per B130 sidebar, the victim of a cutting, impaling or bullet would must roll against HT per minute or continue to lose Hit Points due to bleeding. These are the modifiers to the roll: -

- -1 if the character moves more than 1 yd per turn
- -1 for hit locations Groin, Thigh, Heart/Arterial, Neck
- -1 per HT/2 hits taken
- -1 if the bleeding wound is in a crippled limb
- +1 if the character lies still
- +1 if the wound is in a limb and the limb is elevated (applicable only if the character lies still)

A failure causes the loss of 1HP, critical failure the loss of 3HP. On a critical success, the bleeding stops completely, on an ordinary success, no points are lost for that minute. Three ordinary successes in a row also cause a complete stopping of bleeding.

A successful First Aid roll, either by the victim or an associate, will also stop the bleeding. Note that the First Aid attempt takes a minute, which would mean sixty combat actions – perhaps not able to be done during combat, however the First Aid roll is done before the bleeding roll.

With these modifications, a crippling gunshot wound in a leg, for instance, is very bad news in the long run - to get even an HT-1 chance to resist bleeding, the character must lie down and elevate the hit leg. A crippling injury has already brought him down to HT/2, so he should probably attempt first aid during the first minute. He will thus lose the +2 for lying still and keeping the limb up, but at HT/2 he can still afford to lose a point of HT. If that fails, then wait for the medics.

Another example: a groin hit from a 9mm pistol makes 2d+2 damage, on the average 9 points. An average HT 10 person, making his HT rolls for knockdown and stun (50% chance each, combined probability 25%), can return fire after one second of operating at -9, but if he keeps fighting, the collapse after one minute of bleeding can be catastrophic. His bleeding roll would then be HT-3 (moving fast with a groin hit doing more than HT/2). His chance of success is 16%, so it is very likely that he'll bleed for one more point. After that, he has to make an HT roll against unconsciousness and a bleeding roll at HT-4 if he has foolhardily kept moving on, or at HT-3 if he lies down. The odds of making a HT-4 roll are 9%, combined with the unmodified unconsciousness HT roll less than 5%. This means that an average 9mm FMJ hit in a good but not optimal target location of an average person is not a reliable man-stopper

but will seriously injure and possibly kill the person in a timeframe of 5 - 15 minutes, unless successful first aid is applied before that.

Burns

While burns do not usually bleed significantly, the killer in large-area burns is fluid loss: therefore, whole-body burns require treatment for shock (30 minutes, as per the Bleeding rules) or the victim will lose 1 HT every hour for every 5 points of damage. This is generous: large burns are deadly.

RPGs have always underrated the effects of injury on PCs, and nowhere more so than large-scale burns: until very recently, anyone with second-degree or worse burns over half or more of the skin surface was almost certainly doomed.

Healing

All wounds should be noted as to location and extent, although HP damage is taken from the total. This is because each specific wound may be treated with a first-aid roll, and each specific wound will heal at its own rate. As such, if the player fails to do this, it will be to his detriment. Wounds can be classified according to severity, and each has its own modifier to the First Aid roll.

Two forms of damage are still additive:

- Maltreatment, deliberate or accidental, of an existing wound, enlarges the original wound rather than creating a new one. (See below.)
- Whole-body damage, as from fire, exposure, disease, or poison, adds into a single total as long as the victim is exposed to the fire, in the hostile environment, suffering from the disease, or the poison remains active. Again, apply common sense. A burn from a torch or a hot iron is localized, not whole-body burning. It's up to the GM whether to treat multiple magic attacks, fireballs for instance, as separate injuries or a single worsening burn. The latter is more realistic but considerably harder on the players.

Damage	Severity Category	Roll Modifier
1	Superficial	0
2-3	Light	-1
4-8	Serious	-2
9+	Critical	-4
HT is negative (More total damage than HT)		-1
HT is fully negative (More total damage than 2 x HT)		-2
Clean Crushing Injury		+2
Wound to head, groin or vitals		-2
Unsanitary conditions		-1
Burns damage		-4
Age Disadvantage Points / 30		-1

First Aid

A reminder that a First Aid attempts (other than to stop bleeding) takes around 30 minutes per person – it cannot generally be performed within combat. Each wound takes about five minutes to bandage, and then there is the time

required for calming the patient, administering fluids, treating for shock etc.

Notes: -

- Bleeding (see above) is considered as a separate individual wound, regardless of how many wounds were inflicted
- No injury may have more than half its damage restored from first aid
- Clean crushing injuries cannot benefit from First Aid unless there has been some crippling injury – meaning some bone is broken or limb badly sprained, that can be set.

Gradual Healing

For each day of rest with adequate food and water, roll vs. HT for up to three separate wounds, plus once for generic damage, plus once for bleeding damage. A success restores one hit point, and critical success restores two hit points, and a critical failure means the wound aggravates by one point. All rolls are modified for severity as above. A successful Physician skill roll adds two to all healing rolls. For bone fractures and critical injuries, refer to the *Comprehensive Combat Table*.

Fatigue

Extra Fatigue Advantage

This now costs 5 points per level, not 3.

Loss of Fatigue

Combat: - 1 point of fatigue per level of encumbrance, per two minutes of combat, for any combat that lasts longer than 10 seconds. Note that two minutes of combat is 120 action rounds, so this will generally be per combat session.

Movement: - 1 point of fatigue per level of encumbrance, per fatigue interval, as shown below: -

Move is greater than...	Up to...	Type of Move	Fatigue Interval
0	x1/3	Slow ("walking")	hour
x1/3	x1/2	Brisk ("jogging")	10 minutes
x1/2	x2/3	Very Brisk ("fast jogging")	1 minute
x2/3	x1	Fast ("running")	20 seconds
x1	x1 + Sprint bonus	Sprinting	10 seconds
x1 + Sprint bonus	??	Extra Effort Sprinting	1 second

Long Term Fatigue

In addition to the normal fatigue that is lost from physical exertion, there is a form of Fatigue called Long Term Fatigue (LTF). LTF is used for such things as starvation fatigue (B128 Sidebar), fatigue from lack of sleep (CII 173), or fatigue from disease. The difference between normal Fatigue and LTF is that LTF is not recovered until the situation that caused it is remedied, you get a meal, you get a full night's sleep or you recover from the disease.

This additional rule is that for every 3 FP you lose and recover in a single day, you take one LTF damage. This type of LTF is treated like starvation fatigue, in that you recover 3 LTF per full day of rest and meals.

For hiking, this means that 5 hours of non-stop hiking will cost you 1 LTF. If you assume that you rest of 30 minutes every 3 hours, then a 6-hour hike will cost you 1 long-term FP (and you will be able to afford quite a few days of that

pace before needing to take a day or two off for rest.

A 14 hour hike, on the other hand, with 12.5 hours worth of fatigue loss, will cost 4 long-term FP per day, and a mere two days of it will have you dragging or collapsing.

Effects of Fatigue

In order to make the loss of Fatigue more of a problem in the early stages (before you are falling down with only 3 Fatigue remaining), I have implemented the following table. It is pretty self-explanatory, simply determine the percentage of Fatigue (or LTF) that has been lost and assess the modifier to any rolls that are made. The GM is the final arbiter on whether or not a particular roll should be modified, but Fatigue should effect just about everything that a character could do, physically or mentally. The effects of Fatigue are as follows: -

Fatigue Lost	Modifier to all rolls for all Skills & Attributes
< 25% (round down)	-
25 – 50% (round down)	-1
50 – 75% (round down)	-2
75% - Unconsciousness	-4

Example: - The average character with 10 Fatigue would suffer no penalty for the first 2 Fatigue that he lost. After the 3rd point was lost he would have a -1 modifier, the 6th point would bring a -2 modifier, and 8 or more points would give a -4 modifier, with 10 bringing about nap time.

Also note that there is also a -1 to strength per point of fatigue lost – this is in addition to the above rules.

Also, any Extra Efforts (CII 172) are at -1 per point of fatigue – this supercedes the above rules. Also note that any Extra Efforts cost one fatigue, so multiple Extra Efforts quickly become non-productive.

Recovery of Fatigue

Normal Fatigue is recovered at one point per ten minutes of rest. Long Term fatigue is recovered in the opposite manner to the way in which it was gained – i.e., fatigue lost due to hours of sleep missed will require that that same number of hours of sleep be taken above and beyond normal sleep, to recover. You only get 6 hours sleep one night (1 LTF (CII 173)), then you need 10 hours the next night to recover that point.

Basic Damage from Strength Chart

Combat ST	Old Thrust	Old Swing	New Punch	New Thrust	New Swing
1	0	0	1d-5	1d-5	1d-5
2	0	0	1d-5	1d-4	1d-4
3	0	0	1d-4	1d-4	1d-3
4	0	0	1d-4	1d-3	1d-2
5	1d-5	1d-5	1d-4	1d-3	1d-2
6	1d-4	1d-4	1d-3	1d-2	1d-1
7	1d-3	1d-3	1d-3	1d-2	1d
8	1d-3	1d-2	1d-3	1d-1	1d+1
9	1d-2	1d-1	1d-2	1d-1	2d-2
10	1d-2	1d	1d-2	1d	1d+2
11	1d-1	1d+1	1d-2	1d	2d-1
12	1d-1	1d+2	1d-1	1d+1	1d+3
13	1d	2d-1	1d-1	1d+1	1d+3
14	1d	2d	1d-1	2d-2	2d
15	1d+1	2d+1	1d	1d+2	2d+1
16	1d+1	2d+2	1d	1d+2	3d-2
17	1d+2	3d-1	1d	2d-1	2d+2
18	1d+2	3d	1d+1	1d+3	3d-1
19	2d-1	3d+1	1d+1	1d+3	2d+3
20	2d-1	3d+2	1d+1	2d	3d
21	2d	4d-1	2d-2	2d	3d
22	2d	4d	2d-2	2d+1	3d+1
23	2d+1	4d+1	2d-2	2d+1	4d-2
24	2d+1	4d+2	1d+2	3d-2	3d+2
25	2d+2	5d-1	1d+2	2d+2	4d-1
26	2d+2	5d	1d+2	2d+2	3d+3
27	3d-1	5d+1	1d+3	3d-1	4d
28	3d-1	5d+2	1d+3	2d+3	4d+1
29	3d	6d-1	1d+3	2d+3	5d-2
30	3d	6d	2d	3d	4d+2

Armor Type Table

Armor Type	Old DR	DR	Cut EP	Imp EP
Heavy Cloth or Soft Leather : Thick coarse cloth (serge, bucrum) or thin leather, usually worn as winter wear or as an additional layer under other armour	1	1	1	1
Hard Leather : Thick leather or animal hide, of about 5mm thickness.	1	1	2	3
Quilt : Soft armour made from stitched cloth stuffed with wool or similar material. It is intended mostly to be worn under other armour	1	2	1	2
Padded : 4-8cm of heavy felt. It is intended mostly to be worn under other armour	1	3	1	2
Woven Cord : Much like modern macramé		2	2	3
Kurbul or Cuir-bouilli : “Boiled Leather”, hard leather plate produced by treating ordinary leather with boiling oil or wax.	2	2	3	5
Studded Leather : The riveting of studs into one of the above (Cloth , Leather or Quilt) base armour. Has no effect apart from being bulkier and looking good.	2			
Ring Mail : Involves sewing metal rings onto one of the above (Cloth , Leather or Quilt) base armour. Bonuses are in addition to the base armour values.	2		+2	+2
Bezainted : Consists of riveting metal to one of the above (Cloth , Leather , Quilt or Kurbul) base armour. Bonuses are in addition to the base armour values.	2	+1	+4	+2
Jezeraint or Scale : Made of either sewing or riveting overlapping wood, bone/horn or metal scales to a suitable backing (Cloth , Leather , Quilt or Kurbul) base armour. Bonuses are in addition to the base armour values.	4	+1	+1 (W) +2 (B) +3 (M)	+1 (W) +2 (B) +3 (M)
Brigandine : Scale armour inside a double-layer of leather – soft leather on scale on soft leather.	4	2	3 (W) 4 (B) 5 (M)	1 (W) 4 (B) 5 (M)
Lamellar or Splint : Also consists of metal plates or scales fastened together, but the pieces are larger and thicker and there is no leather lining.	4	3	2 (W) 3 (B) 4 (M)	1 (W) 3 (B) 4 (M)
(Chain) Mail : Flexible, all-metal armour of	3	1	6	2

interlinked metal rings.

Small-Gauge Mail: Differs from mail above by having smaller and thinner rings, which improves its effectiveness against impaling weapons, but doesn't absorb the impact of crushing attacks as well as standard mail.

Double, Augmented or Bar Mail: Variant of mail with rings that are either thicker and closer together, or have bits of leather or metal in the gaps.

Dwarven Mail: High-quality mail produced from improved steel and using a mixture of punched or welded rings and ordinary riveted rings.

Small-Gauge Dwarven Mail:

Laminated: Metal strips which are overlapped and articulate upon each other

Plate: Thick, single piece metal armour. It is used in helms, breastplates and small plates for spot protection. Full articulated suits are very rare and expensive.

Heavy/Ribbed Plate: A variation of plate with even greater thickness of armour or transverse/diagonal ribbings designed to reduce the effectiveness of blows directed at the armour.

- 0 4 4

- 1 7 4

- 1 20 10

- 0 20 15

3 1 1

6 4 2 2

7 5 2 2

Standard Combat Procedure

- 1) Start with unmodified weapon skill
- 2) Apply environmental modifiers: -
 - a) Bad footing -2 (mud, loose gravel, waxed floors etc), foot-deep water or stairs -4, deeper water -6 (B107) (Negated by aiming for missile attacks)
 - b) Invisibility and darkness (CII 70)
- 3) Apply personal modifiers: -
 - a) Movement for missile attacks - Walking -1, running -2, x3 for crossbows, x6 for bows.
 - b) Off hand (if not ambidextrous) -4
 - c) Unfamiliar weapon -2
 - d) Wild swing (attacking to side or rear) -5 with a maximum TH of 9 (B105)
 - e) Close combat with a hand weapon -2 (B111)
 - f) Position: -
 - i) Crouching, sitting, kneeling -2

- ii) Prone -4 (except with gun or crossbow)
- g) Shock from Wounds – subtract what damage you took last round
- 4) Missile Attacks – apply *Firing & Range Modifiers...*
- 5) Roll to hit. Remember what the success was.
- 6) If hit successful, then opponent rolls to defend.
- 7) If defence unsuccessful, then: -
 - a) Roll hit location on *Comprehensive Combat Table*
 - b) Walk location based on success on TH roll
 - c) Subtract total DR for that location from the total damage
 - d) For Bullet, Impale and Cut, damage less than the EP at that location is treated as Crush
 - e) Multiply Damage by the multipliers and add together.
 - f) Damage over Blow-through is lost.
 - g) Check for Stun
 - h) If Stunned, check for KO
 - i) Check for Additional Damage
 - j) Note actual wound
 - k) Subtract Toughness from total damage, and take from total Hit Points.
 - l) If Hit Points at 0 or less, roll against HT for Unconsciousness.
 - m) If Hit Points at -HT or less, roll for Death

The Melee, Eglinton Tournament, Irvine, Ayrshire, James Henry Nixon, 1839

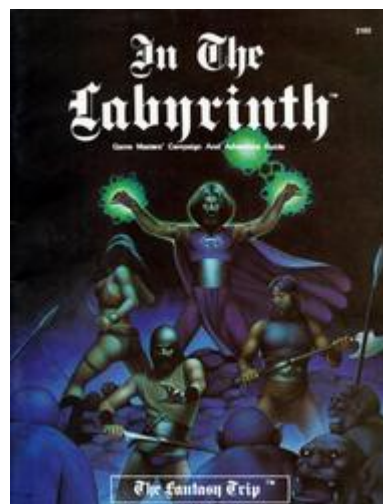
GURPS: From The Fantasy Trip Onwards

by Lev Lafayette

There can be no doubt that what was the goofy code-name GURPS (Generic Universal Role Playing System) has become an overwhelming success in the history of roleplaying games. First published in 1986, GURPS won the Origins Award for Best Roleplaying Rules of 1988, and become part of the Origins Hall of Fame in 2000. GURPS is now into its fourth edition with hundreds of supplements to the core rules with at least 1.5 million books in print. With an obsession with "reality checking" GURPS has produced some of the finest introductory texts for "realistic" settings (e.g., GURPS Space), speculative technologies, and, most famously, historical sourcebooks. GURPS does come with its own history however. This article looks at the development of GURPS, from its ascendant *The Fantasy Trip*, and major influences such as *Champions*, through the four editions that have been released, to successful games that have been heavily influenced by GURPS.

The Fantasy Trip

The story of GURPS begins in 1977 with "Melee", a single-unit combat system with a hex boardgame. Each character had two characteristics, Strength and Dexterity. Strength determined hit points, what weapons a character could use, and their hand-to-hand combat. Dexterity determined weapon skill, ability to disengage, and speed. Dexterity could be adjusted by armour, wounds and so forth. Armour, as the industry was just beginning to learn, reduced damage. The combat system had five second turns, and initiative was based on a random roll. Actions depended on whether the character was engaged or disengaged, and facing was important. Attempts to strike were based on rolling under the character's adjusted DX (as it was already called) on 3d6. The game had critical hits and misses, and damage was based on a random roll (unadjusted by Strength). Missile weapons were given range increments in 3-hex diameter "megahexes". The game even had an experience point system, based on the ability of the opponent and deadliness of the encounter. This could be used to purchase improvements in characteristics.



A well-crafted and inexpensive game, "Melee" was followed by "Wizard" in 1978 which introduced magic-using characters. It introduced a new characteristic (IQ), but interestingly only allowed for the same number of points in *Melee* (8) to be added to the now three characteristics (Fighters were assumed to have an IQ of 8). Strength was extended to include how many spell points a wizard had. Spell casting would cause an energy drain that was just as effective at harm as physical damage, which could be especially challenging with spells which required renewal each turn. Intelligence determines how many spells a wizard can know, and their resistance to illusions and control spells. Due to invisibility and secret protection from magic, a new rule allowed for the introduction of hidden movement; as this system was slow it was noted at this point that the game should include a referee. Missile spells (e.g., fireball, lightning bolt) were treated like missile weapons in terms of line-of-sight and blocking. These were differentiated from "thrown spells" which targetted at distance, but not directly at the caster. Over 60 spells were provided, albeit with minimal description.

The two supplements underwent a fundamental reconstruction in 1980, with the simultaneous release of "In the

Labyrinth: Game Masters' Campaign and Adventure Guide", along with "Advanced Melee" and "Advanced Wizard". As one can imagine, Advanced Melee was an elaborated version of its earlier, thinner edition, which included such marvels such as aerial combat, trampling, and the like. Advanced Wizard included casting spells from written material, laboratories, alchemy, and plenty of additional spells. Combined, the three books constituted the complete system for The Fantasy Trip (yes, as adolescent boys we giggled and aped LSD-addled Gandalf-like hippies). Starting attribute values were the same as previous editions, but with ST expanded to include encumbrance, and resistance to knock-down, and IQ expanded to include Talents, the equivalent of skills, but with a binary level of development. The experience point system was elaborated to include a wider range of activities, with a point-based purchase based on complexity, IQ-level prerequisites, and variable cost based on the broad professions of "Hero" or "Wizard"; there were close to 100 Talents, briefly described. Much of the rest of the book was a description, not so much of the game world (Cirdi), but rather more generic aspects such as employment, law, guilds, and encounters.

GURPS 1st and 2nd editions

GURPS first and second edition were both boxed sets containing two books, one for characters and one for adventuring, along with booklets for solo and group adventures, charts and tables, and a collection of "cardboard heroes", the cheap and practical alternative to metal miniatures. Whilst second edition included marvels such as cardstock covers, the rules-set and layout were pretty much identical being published in quick succession of each other (1986 and 1987, respectively). It was here that GURPS made its core claims, which are worthy of serious testing: Generic, meaning a universal set of rules that satisfied different styles of play; Universal, with an explicit claim to realism and "reality checking; Role-Playing, where "the rules are written to make true roleplaying possible"; and System a set of rules which were presented as a universal whole. The game also made claim of influences from Champions (certainly true), Tunnels & Trolls (only in the sense that GURPS produced solo adventures), and Empire of the Petal Throne (not in the least). To be perfectly honest, GURPS was a synthesis and elaboration of The Fantasy Trip and Champions - but certainly containing more than the sum of those parts.

Attributes were extended to four (Strength, Intelligence, Dexterity, and Health), the latter providing a foundation for hit points, and representative of physical size. Explicitly defined Advantages and Disadvantages were added with a sometimes incoherent mix between realism and and combat-orientated game-play; Combat Reflexes, which provided a modest benefit to initiative came with a cost of +10 points, whereas a package of +10 to all musical skills - bringing superheroic skill levels into play - also cost the same amount. Nevertheless, most of these examples of character individualisation had a degree of realism and balance with each other, plus they were very enjoyable to play. It is with some fondness when I recall a young D&D player encountering GURPS and the look of surprise on his face when the GM insisted that the character had to roleplay their psychological disadvantages and that this had in-game effects.

The skills system generated a value based almost always on DX or IQ as a base, with an expenditure of character points, with the actual levels based on the quantity of points (from 0.5 points upwards), and the difficulty of the skill (Easy, Average, Hard and, in the case of mental skills, up to Very Hard). Notably physical skills had a maximum increase of 8 character points per level, whereas mental skills had a maximum of 4 per level. The skill system also allowed for specialisations (sometime required, sometimes optional, sometimes based on technical level), and a default system either from characteristics or from other skills. Approximately 150 base skills were described in a couple of paragraphs each, often with particular resolution modifiers. As with other tasks in GURPS, resolution is based on a 3d6 roll under skill level test, with room for contested rolls, critical successes and failures, etc. It must be said here that this particular resolution mechanic has a significant bell-curve which radically distorts modifiers and gives meaningless die results. There have been several articles to smooth this effect (e.g., RPG Review #4, Semi-Linear Universal Role-Playing System).

A lot of realistic features of GURPS are derived from the attribute levels in a linear manner. Encumbrance capacity is based as a direct function of Strength, and has quick reductions in speed (itself a function of Dexterity and Health), but a high overall potential. Likewise the capacity to lift, throw, dig, jump, climb, perceive etc. It is obviously unsurprising to discover a direct relationship between Strength and damage as well, although the game distinguishes between "swinging" damage and "thrusting" damage. These ratings are applied directly to weapons, so instead of a the weapon forming the base damage roll, modified by Strength, as is common in many games, GURPS starts with Strength and is modified by the weapon, which acts as a lever or focussed point. Weapon damage is further modified by the damage type; impaling, slashing etc. The most dangerous weapons are swung and piercing (e.g., a pick) and the least are thrust and crushing damage (e.g., a punch). Ranged weapons have an incremental negative on skill resolution and a half-damage range.

As mentioned in the introduction the combat system is modular, although that is hardly sufficient itself to justify the claim of being generic. Broadly speaking however, the core differences between the basic and the advanced combat systems is that the latter concerns itself with hex-based movement, reach of weapons, hit locations, and close combat. The second-by-second combat turn, which particularly allows for realistic action times, has an initiative based on character speed. On their turn characters are entitled to select from a wide-range of actions, which include important tactical choices (e.g., do you risk all and go for an all-out-attack but lose active defenses?), which is always a good feature. Defenses are either passive (e.g., armour) or active (dodge, parry, or block). The combination of active and passive defenses equate with a total defense which is rolled against a successful hit. Thus there is up to three rolls for every turn (attack, defense, and damage) which is fairly average for resolution speed.

After armour reduces rolled damage, the effects of varies significantly by location and type; a piercing blow to the vitals or brain is absolutely devastating, and a lot less disconcerting to a limb. Breakpoints exist for crippled or permanently damaged limbs, for being stunned, knocked out, or knocked down. Once characters are brought to less than hit points they become unconscious. At negative hit points, the character must roll against HT or die - and for every -5 hit points thereafter up to -5*HT, when death is automatic. Healing depends significantly on technology level and the availability of skilled medical staff. As a correlate to injury, there is also the accumulation of fatigue, based on Strength rather than Health. This is acquired through over-exertion (e.g., battle), long-distance marching or running, spell-casting etc.

Finally, GURPS 1st and 2nd editions concluded with brief descriptions of running the game (good advice, logical, but nothing particularly special), game worlds and especially technology levels (arbitrarily chosen), and a few pages on special characteristics of animals, albeit with very few examples themselves. Of particular note is character development, where additional character points are awarded for narrative contributions (to be applied to the simulationist character), but with the realistic option of learning by training or work. Some of the major and unexpected gaps included at least a somewhat more comprehensive selection of animals, and equipment.

GURPS 3rd Edition

The third edition of GURPS was released a mere year after the prior edition - three editions in three years 1986, 1987, 1988. Originally in a softback, it really reached its height with the revised hardback edition. Whilst in one sense the release of three editions in as many years was a sign of a fast and popular developing game-system (RuneQuest, for example, had a fairly rapid succession between first, second, and third editions too), this was becoming a little hard to keep up with. In a delightful move, SJG released "GURPS Update" which included pretty much all of the changes from

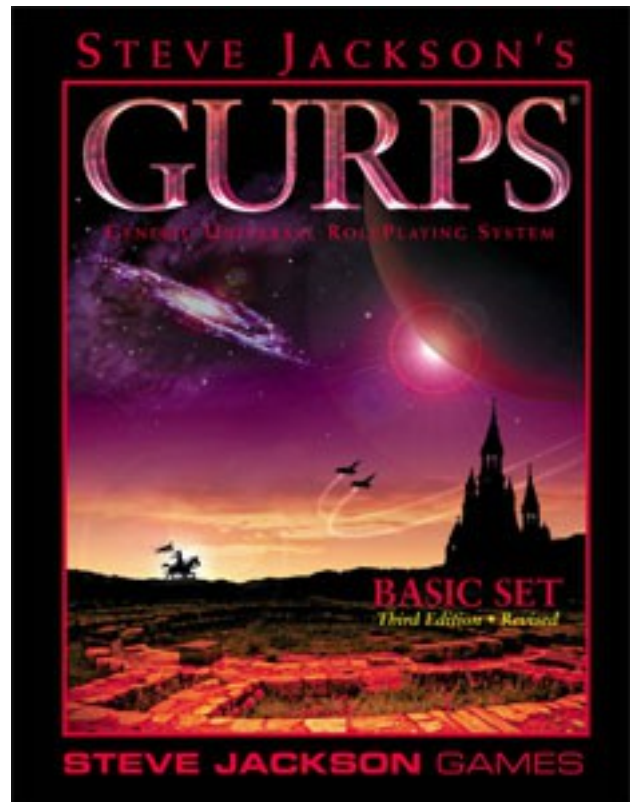
2nd to 3rd edition in one handy book. This was quite a serious edition change; whereas the differences between first and second edition required a fine-toothed comb, the third editions included some fairly significant elaborations and system alterations.

Firstly, there were however a wide collection of changes and tweaks to existing advantages and disadvantages (e.g., Double-Jointed no longer provided a bonus to Acrobatics). In addition, the number of Advantages and Disadvantages was increased to include such staples as Allies, Military Rank, Legal Enforcement Powers, Code of Honour, Intolerance, and Vows, etc. There was also the introduction of some fifty new skills, many of them technologically related, but also including new generic skills such as "Area Knowledge", along with many minor modifications. Likewise there are technological elaborations in equipment (weapons and armour, primarily). There was the introduction of material from some of the source books, such as Fright Checks, along with changes in movements and maneuvers, such as the very short chapter on Flight.

The three big changes, which really constitute "edition level changes" rather than mere revisions, were to combat, magic, and psionics. Apart from some fairly minor changes and additions to combat maneuvers, massive changes were introduced to ranged weapon attacks. This included the introduction of a combined speed, size, and distance modifier table, the introduction of accuracy bonuses which kick in after a turn of aiming, and the introduction of a snap-shot number, and additional penalty which applies when a character fires without aiming (an annoying figure to calculate during the speed of actual play). There are additional rules for automatic fire, the type of damage that bullets do (no longer crushing by default), and the capacity to retain consciousness when in minus hit points. In addition there is a new chapter for Mounted and Vehicle combat, additional movement rates according to terrain, and options for cinematic campaigns.

The Magic chapter is largely derived from the early GURPS Fantasy books. Each magical spell is treated as a separate skill, collected into colleges, with a range of prerequisites (the most important being the levels of the advantage "Magery" required), and with a casting cost of Fatigue. There is additional rules for particularly powerful magics in the form of ceremonial magic, plus rules for creating and using magic items. Whilst a necessary inclusion in the wider GURPS system, the magic system does not have any "realistic" historical association (although the 'real world' Earth is described as a "magic poor" location!), is rather unexciting in flavour and slightly annoying in the level of out-of-game accounting required to ensure prerequisites are satisfied.

The Psionics system, in contrast, is a lot clearer and more flexible in actual play. Like an advantage, the classification of a psionic ability is bought in levels, which determines the raw power. For example, Telepathy 10 - at a cost of 50 character points - gives any Telepathy skill a range of 50 yards. In contrast, individual skills within the ability are bought as normal mental/hard skills (e.g., telesend, telereceive). It is true that some psionic skills have prerequisites (e.g.,



mental blow requires telesend at 12+) but these are relatively few. An interesting system effect of the way that psionics are implemented is that it allows for "wild abilities" - high power, but quite unskilled.

GURPS 4th Edition

After over one hundred supplements made for third edition, the fourth edition of GURPS came crashing from the skies in 2004 with a massive Basic Set consisting of two, very large, hardbacked books, one for Characters and the other for Campaigns (rather like first and second edition). Combined these tomes came to almost 600 pages - twice the size of the previous edition, produced in very slick gloss paper, full-colour art throughout, colour-coded chapters, and with a GURPS Lite and GURPS Update to help make the transition easier to the new edition. Also notable was the addition of David Pulver and Sean Punch as developing the game system.

Significant differences appear straight away. In previous editions Strength was considered a linear attribute. In fourth edition, the values had a quadratic relationship; a character with Strength 20 could lift four times the amount that a character with Strength 10 could, although basic damage followed a more linear increase; this had a particularly significant change for the Strength scores of animals, especially those notably larger than humans. Character point costs for attributes radically changed as well, with the skill-heavy DX and IQ now costing 20 points per level, rather than 10. Point costs however were now linear for attributes. There were new, explicit, secondary attributes as well; including Hit Points, Will, Perception, Fatigue Points, Speed and Move, Damage, and Life. The core attribute for Fatigue and Hit Points changed as well; Strength now determining Hit Points, Health determining Fatigue. Related modifiers (age, appearance, societal tech level, reputation, culture) were placed right at the start of character generation. It is impossible not to notice that the default character has increased from a 100-point character (exceptional-heroic) to 250 points (larger than life).

The chapters for advantages and disadvantages were massively increased with an attempt to include as much as possible from various genres and sourcebooks, including special notification of powers considered "exotic" and "supernatural" compared to "mundane". This is somewhat of a questionable decision; whereas previous editions provided one most of what a player would need, GURPS 4e attempt to provide everything and the kitchen sink. Thus there are pages and pages of material that is really only useful for particular campaigns (e.g., characters with Altered Time Rate, Compartmentalised Mind, Elastic Skin, Hyperflight, and so forth). There are, of course, a number of rules tweaks as well; Musical Ability finally costs 5 points, rather than 1 point per level and Eidetic Memory is reduced to a mere 5/10 point cost, however without any bonus to skills that was provided in previous editions.

In GURPS4e, the division between physical and mental skills is removed as is half-point skill levels, the former sacrificing realism for playability, the latter flexibility for internal consistency (what's the point of having a base game currency if there are further divisions?). All skills now have a "controlling attribute" with point expenditure determining level and a division into Easy, Average, Hard, and Very Hard. A number of skills have undergone name changes (e.g., Appreciate Beauty becomes Connoisseur, Agronomy/TL becomes Farming/TL), whereas others have been altered in technology (e.g., Orienteering becomes Navigation(Land)/TL). Like the attitude towards advantages and disadvantages, the skill system in GURPS 4e appeals towards comprehensiveness, however as skills are usually more prosaic the experience is less jarring. One other integration is the including of particular techniques in a skill-like fashion, for example martial arts maneuvers. One substantial change is the treatment of languages to ensure that high IQ characters did not have better than native language skills after a short period of training.

The magic system and the fright check system underwent very few changes in 4e, which is opportunity missed. In

contrast there were some fundamental changes to psionics. Psionic powers are now defined as broad categories represented by particular advantages that they are manifested. A particular limitation, when applied to all these advantages, becomes a psionic ability within the power, and finally a Talent makes it easier to use the abilities. The equipment list is slightly increased, albeit split over the two books, as is the collection of animals. Success rolls also remained pretty much the same, although there was a hint of indirect narrativism with the option for buying and guiding success.

Surprisingly, there are few changes to the combat system as well, although there are some elaborations such as the extensive reference to non-human hit location charts. One cannot help but be impressed by the ability to squeeze in an enormous variety of animal forms (including arachnoid, cancriod, winged quadruped etc) into a 3d6 range. A significant elaboration was the introduction of vehicle hit location with a better reference to occupant hits. The previous distinction between basic and advanced combat is removed in favour of standard, tactical, and special situations, with "standard" and "tactical" pretty much the equivalent of "basic" and "advanced". As a major change Passive Defense (PD) has been removed, although some protective items provide a Defense Bonus which adds to active defenses. Also notable is that the "somewhat difficult in play" snapshot number has been removed. The effect of shock from injuries has also been capped to a maximum of -4 per turn.

An Assessment and Beyond

It is impossible not to recognise the extraordinary influence that GURPS has had on roleplaying standards as a whole and developing its own particular niche. For historical roleplaying there is simply no better alternative currently on the market and it certainly set a standard for simulationist gaming of some scope that remains within the realms of playability. Having successfully generated a loyal market because of success in these characteristics, it is extremely probable that GURPS will continue as a major game system for many years yet. Indeed, GURPS-like game-systems (of which CORPS, TriStatDX, and Savage Worlds must be mentioned) have acquired a degree of popularity of their own. It is also notable that *after* GURPS the two major other generic systems (Hero System and BRP) have both been released a single system books.

Nevertheless there are some issues which attention must be drawn. Firstly, there is some debate over the relative virtues of GURPS 4e over 3e, with a substantial portion of the GURPS community remaining with the earlier edition. Part of this reason comes down to efficiency of the respective products; GURPS 3e provides most of what any player would need in a single average-sized game book. GURPS 4e pretty much covers everything, but with twice the page-count as it attempts to deal with corner-cases in the same detail as general cases. Introducing a new roleplayer to GURPS used to be easy; now it is seriously intimidating.

GURPS has made some very minor steps towards narrativist play, an area which is missing in the current edition and was virtually unknown when it was first created. A carefully considered introduction of such play may broaden its scope and popularity. In addition reconsideration of the 3d6 roll under method must come into play; the variation of effect that this has on die-roll modifiers is dissonant to the simulationist approach. Serious consideration of what does the die roll actually represent and what the result represents needs to be carried out.

Despite these minor criticisms GURPS remains the highest expression of a complete, realistic and playable game system that is available on the market today, with an absolutely superb collection of source material which is easily translatable to other game systems. With some twenty-five years of playing GURPS it still manages to be a default option among a local gaming group due its flexibility and conceptual ease. Not so bad for a game with a goofy code name!

Narrativism in GURPS?

by Lev Lafayette

GURPS has always been the epitome of excellence in simulationist gaming. Whilst advocates of GURPS have often argued “you can do anything” with GURPS, an acceptable retort in contemporary times is “GURPS can't do narrativism”. However in the fourth edition there is just the tantalising hints that this process might be changing in favour of allowing a little bit of a narrativist influence in the game. Specifically, there is the optional rule (p347) which allows PCs to “buy success” by spending 2 character points to turn a critical failure into a failure, 1 character point to turn a failure into a success, and 2 character points to turn a success into a critical success.

This is a very good idea, and is already much used in other RPGs (e.g., from Hero Wars onwards) and is, of course, fully endorsed a just little bit of player buy-in. However, it should also be expanded to include being able to spend the character points on *others* to change their success or failure in the game world. The cost for this however, given that it is not the PCs character, should be increased by an additional 50% (yes, you can cause others to critically fail – for eight character points). For GM's if you really want to give your players the willies, assign a pool of character points to NPCs as well. The following should make a good rule of thumb:

Plot Importance	Example	Character Points
None	Various extras	0
Minor	A few lines, a character with a name	2
Moderate	A recurring NPC, sidekick, or minor antagonist	5
Major	Major NPC character, antagonist, major ally etc.	10



Note that this has *nothing* to do with the power or ability of the character in question. Podo and Kodo were merely a pair of ferrets in the movie Beastmaster (1982). They had very few character points in the classic GURPS sense. But by goodness, they played a critical part in the story. Probably more that Rip Torn's character for that matter...

Rather oddly however the same optional rule suggests charging PCs 2 character points for adding in-story

elements after a successful roll, or 1 point for a critical success. This is a rather incomprehensible price for what is effectively colour to the story, and indeed, players should be encouraged, not punished, for engaging in such narrative addition. In this view, regardless of whether a player succeeds or fails in their task attempt, they should always be given the option for providing explanatory narrative in addition to whatever the game system provides, at no cost.

This does lead into what has been a long standing incoherence in the GURPS system; the awarding of character points for “good roleplaying” and “story development”, between 0 and 5 points per session (p498). This is certainly an example of encouraging player buy-in to the story development, but it does not make sense that this *player* award translates into *character* improvement. It is a rather incongruous game rule, especially considering that time-use sheets are also available. Indeed, according to the rules player characters develop, all other things being equal, twice as fast as non-player characters. So much for realism.

As a result, a simple rule of thumb is to allow character points to be used *only* for narrative purposes, whilst allowing time-use forms *alone* for character development. This simultaneously encourages player buy-in to the story development for dramatic purposes and it aligns the character development system with a higher degree of realism. Narrative purposes does not mean, of course, only spending character points for the purpose of successes in skill rolls. It means any change to the game world which the player enforces, such as buying off disadvantages, adding advantages, and so forth – anything of the sort which is not explicable in terms of something gained within the unfolding of the narrative itself (which comes for free, cf., p291) or which is acquired through the realistic time-use training, learning, and otherwise off-screen development. The same +50% rule for other characters can even apply here; if the player wants to turn a bad tempered antagonist into one which suffers from bloodlust as well, by all means let the player spend those character points.

One of the results of this distinction between narrative and development character points (heck, call them “narrative points” and “development points” just to make it abundantly clear) is the necessary removal of a couple of the most popular advantage/disadvantages in GURPS - namely Luck and Unluckiness – in the general sense. Such a status can still be acquired by magic of course. But in terms of a realistic game-world their narrative effect is pretty much replaced by the now existing narrative input.

Remember the rule of thumb: it's their game too. The oft-quoted words from Robin D. Laws in *Over The Edge* come to mind:

GMs will find it fruitful to approach decisions as an artist creating a collaborative work with players. The idea of collaboration is important: the GM is not a "storyteller" with the players as audience, but merely a "first among equals" given responsibility for the smooth progress of the developing story.

The GM is not a movie director, able to order actors to interpret a script a given way. Instead, he should be seeking ways to challenge PCs, to use plot development to highlight aspects of their character, in hopes of being challenged in return.

For years, role-players have been simulating fictional narratives the way wargamers recreate historical military engagements. They've been making spontaneous, democratized art for their own consumption, even if they haven't seen it in those terms.

Lillian St. John

A Paranormal Investigator from the Roaring Twenties

by Erica Hoehn

Lillian St. John has several characteristics which make her an extreme example of her age and a threat to the establishment; she's independently wealthy, well-educated, intelligent, and runs her own detective agency. Surprisingly nonplussed by encounters with paranormal and other-worldly monstrosities that she encounters with surprising regularity, she has the good sense of when to investigate, and when to turn and run - and activity which she is quite competent at!

By all standards, Lillian St. John is the epitome of a heroine of her time. She does however have some weaknesses; with a propensity towards hedonism, Lillian displays slightly too much interest in powdering her nose, and has outraged conservative sections of her home city's (Melbourne) establishment that she has been in contact with. The combination of these factors will undoubtedly be her undoing; if she isn't eaten by some creature beyond space and time first!

Nota bene: Variations of Lillian St. John have appeared in GURPS 3rd edition, Cthulhu d20, and Call of Cthulhu. This particular incarnation is a variation of the GURPS3e character, redeveloped for 4th edition and the same character for Call of Cthulhu (1920s). Lillian St. John has previously made an appearance in RPG Review (see issue #7, Leopold's Crypt), although that setting was in the mid-1960s! Is this prescient that Lillian is captured by the Great Race of Yith, and transported forward in time, with her memories altered?

Lillian St. John (GURPS, 4th edition, 150 character points)

ST 10 (0 points) IQ 13 (60 points) DX 12 (40 points) HT 10 (0 points) = 100 points

Dam: 1d-2/1d Basic Lift: 20 lbs Hit Points 10 Will 14 (5 points) Perception 14 (5 points) Fatigue 10 Speed 5.5 Move 5

Height 5'8" Weight 100 lbs Age 28 Fashion Sense (5 points)

English (Native), French (Accented) (4 points)

Independently Income (10 points)

Reputation (Among Conservatives -2, large class) (-5 points)

Attractive (+1) (4 points) Charisma (+1) (5 points)

Clairsentience (Sight only -10%, Reduced Range * 10 -30%, Unconscious -20%, Uncontrollable -10%) (15 points)

Compulsive Carousing (-5 points), Addiction (Cocaine, Expensive, -10 points), Curious (-5 points), Sense of Duty (fellow investigators) (-5)

=18 points

Acting 13 (2 points), AK: Melbourne 15 (4 points), First Aid 14 (2 points), Guns 13 (2 points), Lockpicking 13 (2

points), Occultism 14 (4 points), Persuade 14 (4 points), Psychology 13 (4 points), Research 14 (4 points), Savior Faire 14 (2 points), Stealth 13 (2 points)

= 32 points

Lillian St. John (Call of Cthulhu, 5th edition)

STR 10 DEX 12 INT 13 (Idea 65%) CON 10 APP 12 POW
14 (Luck 70%) SIZ 10 SAN 30% EDU 15 (Know 75%)

Sanity Points 30 Damage Bonus nil Hit Points 10 Magic
Points 14

Credit Rating 85% Cthulhu Mythos 20% Fast Talk 90%
First Aid 90% Handgun 80% Hide 80% Locksmith 80%
Library Use 90% Occult 90% Persuade 90% Psychology
80%



RPG Cultural Appropriation

by Jonathan Korman

Geek culture has recently seen a series of heated and messy [1] online conversations about the intersections of genre, cultural appropriation [2], sexism, and racism. Long overdue. The racism implicit in our cultural symbols needs a good hard look and a vigorous response, and I feel delighted that this part of the world has started having the conversation.

That said, I have to confess my own ambivalence about some of the rhetoric of “cultural appropriation”, which implies that Group X “owns” some ideas/images/practices/etc such that if Group Y employs them this constitutes “stealing” from Group X. This carries a whiff of Maintaining Cultural Purity which spooks me. Plus it seems to suggest an unrealistic conception of culture, which in practice always transmits itself across borders of all kinds and manifests a stew of crisscrossing influences. One cannot simply say, for instance, that White people *stole* rock ‘n’ roll from Black people. That succinct summary points to injustices which birthed rock ‘n’ roll as a White genre, but a close look [3] reveals a much stranger and more complicated story. Rock ‘n’ roll, like so much cultural innovation, comes not from within a unified people but out of an *encounter* between different people, embedded in a history of injustice but not wholly authored by one group.

Plus, if a White guy like me enjoying Stevie Ray Vaughn playing the blues is wrong, I don't want to be right.

While I have no shame about enjoying hearing a White guy like Vaughn play the blues well, I also recognize the need to face the underlying ugliness of the story of how a he came to perform in a musical style primarily developed by Black people in a context of horrifying oppression — indeed, largely as an expression of that horrifying oppression — and how a White guy like me ends up enjoying the result. I confess that my pleasure comes born of a history of injustice, and at the very least I must not shrink from that awareness. Even as we enjoy some things, we can — we *must* — criticize the problems inherent in culture even while we enjoy it. Rachael at Social Justice League has a terrific piece How to be a fan of problematic things [4] which talks about this problem.

Liking problematic things doesn't make you an asshole. In fact, you can like really problematic things and still be not only a good person, but a good social justice activist (TM)! After all, most texts have some problematic elements in them, because they're produced by humans, who are well-known to be imperfect. But it can be surprisingly difficult to own up to the problematic things in the media you like, particularly when you feel strongly about it, as many fans do. We need to find a way to enjoy the media we like without hurting other people and marginalised groups.

That constitutes the very *least* a person in a position of privilege must do. Sometimes awareness of the problems with things we enjoy does not constitute a strong enough response. Sometimes we have not just “problematic” culture but *minstrelsy*, in which a people and a culture become twisted into cartoon parodies of themselves, and I think we have to reject that completely [5]. So I support and take seriously the growing critique which travels under the banner of “cultural appropriation” despite my discomfort with some of its arguments.

The foment over this in geekkultur reflects in large part how the genre literature which geeks love has racist symbolism sewn deep into the tradition. Can we clear away the problematic implications of genre literature while retaining as much as we can of what people love about those stories? We need to figure that out. I suspect that in many places it will

turn out that we cannot square the circle. Perhaps the charms of something like Star Trek depend too much upon the elements of the colonial narrative to rescue, and a decade or two from now we will find it hard to enjoy it at all. As I have said before [6]:

I sometimes reflect that Al Jolson, the famed blackface singer from the dawn of recorded music, is inaccessible to us. He was reputedly a master of his art, brilliant and moving, but he sang in blackface and like most contemporary Americans I just can't get past that; it goes past offensive all the way to baffling. So his artistry is lost to me ... and I insist that it is a loss. Any artist's work that we can no longer enjoy diminishes us. But I would have it no other way. The dignity which that loss buys us is more than enough compensation.

I have this on my mind because in recent years I have made a middle-aged return to one of the very geeky pursuits of my youth, tabletop roleplaying games. It turns out that middle-aged social skills, plus drinking beer at the table, make this much more fun. Though I will not deny the deeply geeky character of tabletop roleplaying, it owes more to improvisational theatre than most uninitiated folks realize. In order to make the story of the game work, players need to share an image of the world in which the story takes place, so RPGs tend to rely heavily on genre imagery. The granddaddy of tabletop roleplaying games, *Dungeons & Dragons*, of course draws on the heroic fantasy genre spawned by Tolkien's work. Other games imagine worlds drawn from Westerns or cyberpunk or spy movies or post-apocalyptic science fiction or superheroes or other geeky genres. So if we bring the critical tools that look for racism and sexism and cultural appropriation and so forth to the gaming table, as we should, some tough questions start to surface.

My reentry into tabletop roleplaying came when a few years ago I started gamemastering a steampunk game about a zeppelin-borne group of adventurers in an alternate-history Victorian era. I tried to dodge the Kipling-esque colonial tropes that lurk in that space ... mostly unsuccessfully. So I have had this collision between RPGs and genre and culture on my mind for a while.



Other middle-aged guys like me have started asking themselves similar questions about games and what stories they tell, and have had the internet as a tool for discussing them. As a result, the last few years have produced an energetic movement of experimental “indie games” created by hobbyists; weird and wonderful games about cops in a fantastical version of 19th Century Utah [7] and the hardworking minions of master villains [8] and chivalric tragedy at the end of time [9] and academics using an evil alien cockroach to get tenure [10] and more.

With H. P. Lovecraft lurking on the bookshelves of many of the people making games (and *Call of Cthulhu* a hugely influential early roleplaying game) we have seen several recent attempts at Lovecraftian games.

The racism in Lovecraft presents a problem.

All horror literature has fear of the Other as a part of how it works, and many of the moves which play on that carry racist symbolism. But Lovecraft's world presents bigger problems than this fundamental note in horror, and many people have remarked [11] on how racism animates much of his work. It contains ooga-booga cults of “savages” and fear of miscegenation and more. Lovecraft was an exceptionally racially bigoted man [12], even for his time. So contemporary writers and game designers try to avoid surfacing that aspect of his work.

A group of designers recently announced a Kickstarter for *tremulus: a storytelling game of lovecraftian horror* [13], and I threw in a few shekels. The fundraiser has been going well, so as the pledges have piled up the authors have been offering expansions to the game as stretch goals if the game reaches a higher funding target. So a couple of weeks ago, they circulated this announcement [14] to project backers:

We shall now turn our attention away from the creepy little town of Ebon Eaves and cast our eyes to strange, foreign soils with The Congo Playset. That's right. You'll be able to quickly create a framework to let your characters explore the heart of darkness. And it comes with three playbooks: The Captain, The Guide, and The Wild Man.

Whoa.

Seeing that, I tried to gather my thoughts and comment on the Kickstarter page about the problems with it. Before I got to it, other backers were also on the case.

Just ... be careful with this one. Reading the phrases “Congo”, “Heart of darkness” and “Wild Man” makes me worry that you're coming dangerously near some cultural third rails like racism and colonialism. Obviously the original material of the Mythos is full of that stuff, but Lovecraft had the excuse of writing in the 1930s (and Conrad in 1899). Revisiting those tropes nowadays will require some tricky balance between faithfulness to the original works, respect for different cultures, and healthy fear of creating a shit-ton of bad feeling.

Anyway. Sorry to go all Edward Said on you, and maybe you've already thought through all this, but I thought it was worth bringing up.

....

Put me down as another person whose red flags went up upon hearing “The Congo”

....

Ah, so “the Congo” is all about exoticism, going to the Other Place, and experience the primal alienness there. And the home you return triumphantly to is presumably an industrialized nation. With Tarzan.

....

I have to say, I'm really, really, REALLY not cool with this playset, and the update/comment intended to be reassuring really isn't. Taking someone's home, and then saying “well pretend the PEOPLE aren't there, and just the cool exotic place is, and it's all okay” ...no. That's not okay. I'm going to have to reconsider this.

So the game designers dropped it [15].

We pride ourselves on planning and foresight, yet none of us anticipated the strong reaction by some to our announcing the latest stretch goal of The Congo playset, so we have had some meetings over the last few days to decide what we'd do. You see, we aren't trying to advance any secret agendas nor is it our desire to offend anyone, so at this time we are presently setting aside The Congo

The critique of cultural appropriation has reached the geeky sphere of roleplaying game enthusiasts, a territory rich in middle-aged White guys.

Little victories. We don't have this worked out yet, but we are working on it.

[1] http://fanlore.org/wiki/RaceFail_%2709

[2] <http://www.racialicious.com/2008/09/18/cultural-appropriation-homage-or-insult/>

[3] <http://miniver.blogspot.com/2007/06/hear-that-long-snake-moan.html>

[4] <http://www.socialjusticeleague.net/2011/09/how-to-be-a-fan-of-problematic-things/>

[5] <http://nativeappropriations.blogspot.com/2012/09/paul-frank-powwow-party-update-am-i.html>

[6] <http://miniver.blogspot.com/2007/02/chief.html>

[7] <http://www.lumpley.com/dogsources.html>

[8] <http://www.halfmeme.com/master.html>

[9] http://swingpad.com/dustyboots/wordpress/index.php?page_id=243

[10] <http://www.bulypulpitgames.com/games/roach/>

[11] <http://www.contrasoma.com/writing/lovecraft.html>

[12] <http://nnedi.blogspot.com/2011/12/lovecrafts-racism-world-fantasy-award.html>

[13] <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1227949612/tremulus-a-storytelling-game-of-lovecraftian-horro>

[14] <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1227949612/tremulus-a-storytelling-game-of-lovecraftian-horro>

[15] <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1227949612/tremulus-a-storytelling-game-of-lovecraftian-horro/posts/307007>

RQ III: Speedcast and Multitarget

by Peter Marcani

I've been running a multi-genre classic RuneQuest III campaign for a year now, and one of the PCs is playing a sorceress. We've been using the standard sorcery rules. I know all the objections to the standard sorcery system, and my campaign has a number of alternate magic systems in use (including ones that transcend the system, operating on a strictly conceptual basis).

But the sorceress is basically crippled. It takes her more than a round to cast a single spell, since a decent Venom or Palsy requires a fairly high number of magic points. She stands there, trying to cast, and at best only gets off one or two spells before the combat is over - and often, her spells have no meaningful impact on the combat at all. Her long-term enhancement spells are very helpful to the party, of course, but those don't require her presence in dangerous situations. And she's not getting a shot at Power gain rolls.

So I recently added two new sorcery skills to try to balance sorcery. Both are treated in the same way as the other standard sorcery spells; they don't increase from experience, for example, and the casting roll must be under the skill as well in order to apply the skill to the spell.

With one exception: I know that some people have no use for the RQ III sorcery system. I don't need to be told once again about the many alternatives. I use alternatives - hell, I wrote one, and have created many others - but I'm interested in adapting THIS system, not replacing it outright.

Here are the new skills:

Speedcast: Each magic point used in Speedcast halves the casting time of the spell, with a minimum casting time of one strike rank. The maximum number of points of Speedcast that can be used is limited to 1 MP per full 10% in the skill, so a sorcerer with a Speedcast of 37% would be limited to no more than three points of Speedcast - allowing him to reduce casting time to 1/8th of the original time needed. Of course, each magic point spent on Speedcast does count towards the total casting time!

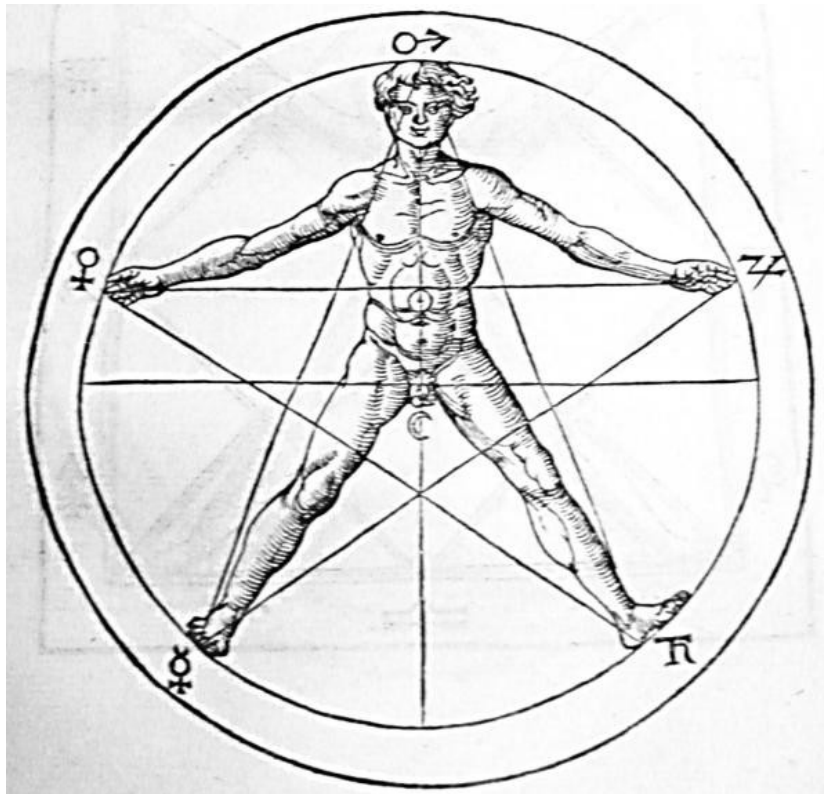
Example: A Venom spell is cast with Intensity 10 and Range 3 by a sorcerer whose Dex SR is 1. By adding Speedcast 3 to the spell, he ups the total cost of the spell to 16 MP, but if his casting roll is under his Speedcast percentage he halves the casting time (9 SR), halves it again (4 SR), and halves it again for a final casting time of 2 SR. If his roll is over his Speedcast skill percentage but under all other skills used in the spell, the spell takes 17 SR. The MP spent on Speedcast must still be paid for even if the skill fails, and increase the casting time by 1 SR per MP.

Multitarget: Each MP spent on Multitarget increases the number of targets by one. As with Speedcast, the points that may be spent are capped to full 10% increments of the skill, so a caster with Multitarget at 43% couldn't target more than five enemies total in a single casting.

The spell being cast must be the same for all targets, including all sorcery manipulations; in other words, Intensity, Range, Duration, and anything else must be the identical. The full MP cost is required for each target, i.e. if a Palsy spell is being cast on two targets with Intensity 6 and Range 2, the total magic point cost is 17 - 8 for each spell, plus an additional MP for the Multitarget itself. The caster must designate the primary target before casting, since if they fail their Multitarget roll but succeed otherwise the spell will be cast on the primary target only.

Only one POW vs. POW roll is made. It is applied against all targets, so it's possible that not all targets will be overcome. If combined with Speedcast, the Speedcast skill is applied to the combined spells rather than to each spell individually.

Multitarget could be used to simulate an area of effect spell. A Glow spell could be cast on five enemies simultaneously, for example.



The Recent RuneQuests

by Lev Lafayette

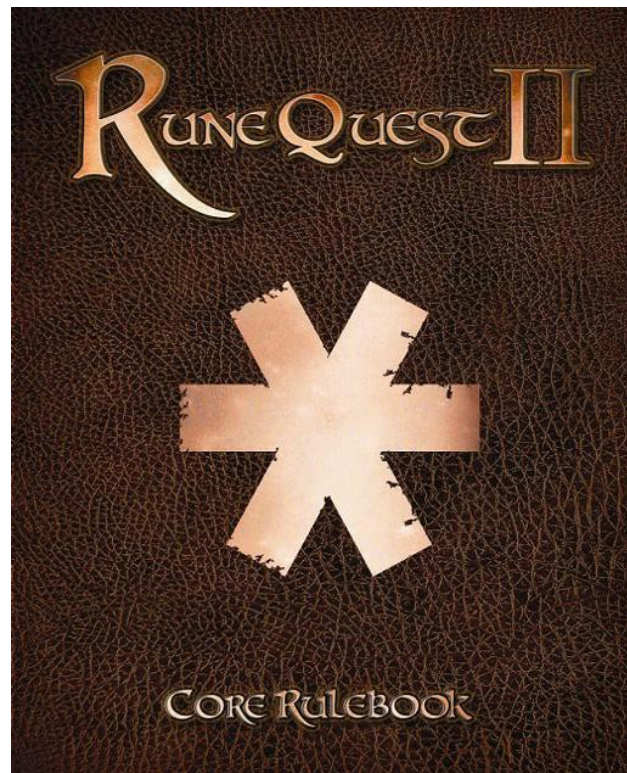
Introduction and Product

After a number of ordinary-to-positive reviews, the folk at Mongoose Publishing decided that it was time for a second edition of RuneQuest, which it must be admitted was a very good decision and shows that the company was listening, even if a little late in such an execution. Bringing in author's Whitaker and Nash was also a wise choice given their prior writing histories. On the other hand the decision to call the product RuneQuest II was a bit of a marketing disaster. Clearly they wanted to capture the popularity of RuneQuest second edition fans; instead they annoyed the grognards from that era - lose 0.1 points of style, right away, for not being cool.

The product itself is a very pleasing hardback, faux brown-leather stamped with a gold rune (either luck or fate). It is very well bound, stitched and glued and should last a lifetime. The internal layout is pretty tight, with thin margins albeit without chapter identifiers and with too small page numbers. Whilst mostly having a good content-to-whitespace ratio, there are some exceptions especially in the creatures chapter. With a summary table of contents, and a good index, the writing style, in two-column, justified serif, is concise and formal. Most of the internal art is contextual, fairly good in execution (albeit quite inconsistent in style), but there are some notable exceptions that simply shouldn't have made it in to the book. At under two hundred pages, this does back to the "all you need is this book" school of gaming, almost as good as RQI and II, with subsequent supplements being truly optional.

Adventurer Generation, Skills and System

After a brief and interesting introduction to roleplaying and RuneQuest one is into character generation by the third page of content. Helping us through the process is the sage of Edric The Restless. The characteristics are Strength, Constitution, Size, Dexterity, Intelligence, Power, and Charisma, determined by either random rolls or point allocation. Attributes include age, combat actions (derived from DEX and INT), damage modifier (STR and SIZ, needs "etc" at the end of the table), hit points (CON and SIZ), magic points (POW), strike rank (SIZ, INT, and DEX), and movement. There are twenty three core common skills, each with a starting percentage chance equal to the sum of two characteristics. These are augmented by background experience, derived from "culture" (either primitive, nomad, barbarian, or civilised) and by profession. Each of the cultures provides a set of common skill bonuses, combat styles, advanced skills, and starting money. Professions are restricted by culture with increasing levels of labour differentiation, and provide common skill bonuses, and the opportunity to open advanced skills, as well as an opportunity to learn magic. In addition characters receive 250 free skill points. This can be extended with the option of advanced starting characters, which



also includes bonus characteristics, status, and hero points. Characters also begin with community ties, including family and family connections, allies, contacts, rivals, and randomly determined background events. Finally, the character (with Glorantha being the default, magic-rich setting) receives six points of common magic.

The game system is the classic roll-under percentile method, with four levels of result (critical, success, failure, fumble). There are modifiers for difficulty and haste, expressed in a single table, with a handful of difficulty examples. Criticals are achieved at 10% of the modified skill level or less, with a 01 always being a critical. Fumbles occur at 99 or 00, or 00 if the skill is over 100. An roll of 01-05 is always a success, and 96-00 is always a failure. If circumstances permit, a default advanced skill can be attempted at -20%. Skills can augment other skills, and group tests (team and sorting) are recommended as a time-saving device. Opposed skills are resolved by degree of success and then by highest roll. Skill descriptions themselves are presented with a few paragraphs each. Time is expressed in combat rounds (five seconds) or variable strategic time. Characters gain three improvement rolls per session, modified by CHA (community ties, etc). As per prior editions, skill improvements occur on d100+INT, seeking to achieve above the current skill rating, resulting in a benefit of 1d4+1 points, or only 1 if below. Improving characteristics requires an expenditure of a number of Improvement Rolls equal to the existing characteristic, and there are sensible rules for training. Aging, poisons, disease, and other environmental issues are given spot rules, along with some improved encumbrance and movement rules, fatigue rules, and a pretty unrealistic odd-jobs table for down-time. Finally Hero Points are offered as an excellent narrativist currency, ranging from 0 to 4 per session, allowing for last chance actions, second chances, heroic insight etc.

Equipment and Combat

The currency system is primarily based on copper, silver and gold; 10 coppers to the silver, 20 silvers to the gold. Armour provides between 1 (soft leather) to 6 points (plate) of protection, reduced from any damage scored, along with encumbrance, and penalties to strike rank and movement. There's a lengthy list of clothing items, along with melee and ranged weapons, food and lodging, and general items, mounts and other animals, and transportation. Oddly, only the general items are expressed as being culturally specific. A particularly interesting component to the weapon list is their combat maneuvers, special effects that they can achieve depending on successful degrees of opposed success.

Weapon skills are expressed as styles, which pretty much come down to (a) two handed weapon, (b) one-handed weapon and ..., or (c) missile weapon. The idea is on the right track, but insufficiently elaborated. Combat itself is conducted in short rounds, with initiative derived from strike rank and a number of combat actions per round. Most actions occur at initiative value, but some can occur in reaction (parry, evade). There are simple rules for weapon length and reach, and successful parries can deflect all, some, or none of a hit, depending on effective size (shields are useful!). The degree of success, as mentioned, allows for the implementation of offensive and defensive combat maneuvers, such as impale, bleed, sunder, and so forth. There is, unsurprisingly, a range of modifiers to style chances, along with spot rules for cover, knockback, multiple opponents, surprise, etc. Assuming a successful hit, location is rolled, followed by damage, and then armour protection is subtracted. Anything that doesn't reduce the location to zero hit points is a minor wound; beyond that the wounds become serious, rendering the location useless in some cases (resilience test), and at negative hit points or more, the wound is major, "severed, transfixed, shattered or ripped off", which is fairly serious if that is the character's head, chest, or abdomen. A three page(!) example illustrates all the components of combat.

Magic and Runes

Four types of magic are available in RuneQuest II, with runic association; common magic ("the echoes of the Runes... ubiquitous but weak"), divine magic ("power granted from the gods ... becoming a Rune... strength from scalability), spirit magic ("incorporeal entities.. fractured incarnations of a Rune's sentience... coercing a Rune.... strength from

sustainability), and sorcery ("study and comprehension of how the Runes work.. emulating a Rune... strength from flexibility). The runes are explained as the sources of power and differentiated by elements (earth, air, fire, etc), forms (beast, man, chaos, dragon, spirit, etc), the paired opposites of power runes (death-fertility, fate-luck, movement-stasis), and conditions (magic, mastery, infinity, etc). Characters become "rune-touched" by initiation, spirit dreams, studious insight etc., providing a runic power with visible effects. Typically cast with a related skill, spells can often be resisted by persistence or resilience skills checks.

Characters impart energy via magic points, equal to their POW, and regain this every twelve hours, or six if resting which is certainly quite fast. Magic is rated in order of magnitude, the power and the magic point cost behind the spell. Common magic is relatively cheap and easy to learn, consisting of about sixty quick utility spells (befuddle, bladessharp, disruption, heal, second sight, etc) that were once called "battle magic", "spirit magic", or even "rune magic" in prior editions. Spirit magic now is the location and binding of spirits (limited by cult rank and CHA), whilst divine and sorcery magics are as per prior editions. Divine magic is powered by "dedicated POW", reducing the amount of free magic points that the character can use, but providing a pool from which the divine spells can be cast. Divine spells, of which around fifty are described, are particularly noted for their power, and the size of the pool is limited by the standing of the character within the cult. In contrast, sorcerers have a grimoire skill for each book from the selection of around forty spells, and are limited by their INT on how many they can hold in their memory at any one point in time. Their ability to modify spells depends on the manipulation skill, which determines limits to changes to magnitude, range, duration, targets, and combination.

Cults, Heroic Abilities, Creatures, and GMs

Cults are those organisations which provide influence, magic, and training in return for devotion and donations, and are associated with compatible runes. Cults also have mythologies, which a character can call upon (using their culture skill) to gain inspiration (e.g., bonuses to skill rolls) and insight. Three sample cults are offered, which descriptions of their associated runes, magic, skills, core myths, and membership. These include Orlanth The Dragon (a theist cult), The Fire Dancer (a spirit cult), and the Black Serpent (a sorcery cult). Of particular note here is how the game includes a step-by-step process on how to interact with a myth through a cultic ritual - finally some core rules in print for HeroQuesting!

Derived from the previous edition of RuneQuest, the next chapter include examples Heroic Abilities, extraordinary abilities that require Hero Points, and minimum ability scores. These are effectively superhuman feats, and could be just as easily represented by extraordinary skill tests. Hero Points are better spent on narrative effects. Immediately following, the creatures chapter notes the classic distinction in RQ between variable intelligence and fixed intelligence, and provides a small collection of creature traits (dark sight, poison, etc), before allocating a page each (with far too much white space) to a short collection of a mere twenty-one creatures with Gloranthan flavour (alas, no ducks, nor rubble runners).

The final chapter on Gamesmastering, is a short set of advisory notes, which starts with emphasising the core themes of RuneQuest being community, magic, quests, and cults. In terms of plot development, it offers the succinct objective of "a good story, well told", before moving into the support material for campaign planning, bookkeeping, and the dramatic moments of risk. A selection of scenario aids is offered as well, including weather, travel conditions and expenses, and encounter tables.

Evaluation

Mongoose RuneQuest II is a significant improvement from its predecessor, and the ratings provided reflect that

evaluation. Indeed, on a system level, if I were to list every complaint I had with [the prior edition](#), it is almost like a checklist was made to ensure that they were fixed. The greatest problem - as much as it is a problem - is that the book comes to a halt. With an already existing excellent ratio of content to page count, it would have been absolutely spectacular to have just a few more pages (and tighter layout) of creatures, a little more elaboration on guilds and cults, a short Glorantha chapter, and so forth. As it is, there is a complete game here, with an excellent system, great scope, *thoroughly* enjoyable, and nice wrapped up in a physically good book.

Style: 1 + 8 (layout) + .5 (art) + .7 (coolness) + .7 (readability) + 1.0 (product) = 4.7

Substance: 1 + .7 (content) + .8 (text) + .9 (fun) + .7 (workmanship) + .8 (system) = 4.9

RuneQuest 6th Edition

Introduction and Physical Product

We're now into a sixth edition of RuneQuest (seven if you include the unpublished RuneQuest: Adventures in Glorantha), and no less than three in six years, which is a pretty rapid turnaround. One can be a little forgiving of game designers churning out multiple editions in quick succession in the early years of the game as they try to find their "sweet spot" in terms of design. Dungeons & Dragons certainly did, as did RuneQuest, and GURPS, and the various White Wolf games; but this is a game that's had over thirty years of backing design and it is notable that this most recent edition comes from a new publisher, and one which is a little closer to the grognard RuneQuest community. It is assumed that the reader has some familiarity with previous iterations of RuneQuest, or at the very least, has read reviews of such products.



The latest iteration does come as a design from Pete Nash and Lawrence Whitaker, two pretty solid contributors to recent editions, and with a preface by Steve Perrin. The attractive cover by Pascal Quidalt is reminiscent of the first two editions with a female warrior fighting off a dragonnewt; except we are informed this time it's a slargr. The internal art, black and white line drawings, is contextually appropriate and shows a modicum of skill and creativity in most cases, certainly an improvement from more recent editions. The massive text, weighing in at over 450 pages with heavy grade paper, uses a two-column justified serif font throughout the main body with far too much whitespace, uncommonly used sidebar notes, and occasional boxed text. Page numbers are very clear and each page indicates chapter as a top-bar, along with a rune indicator. There is a good table of contents and one of the more extensive indices. The writing style is formal, but quite verbose and lacking in excitement. Despite its thoroughly unwieldy size in a paperback format, the book seems very well-bound and glued.

Character Generation

Rather than give an introduction to roleplaying games, there is an introduction to RuneQuest, an organisation summary, a glossary, and dice usage. As per previous editions of RuneQuest, the characteristics are Strength, Constitution, Size, Dexterity, Intelligence, Power, and Charisma. Characteristics are determined by either random rolls or point allocation. A series of example characters are introduced, used throughout the book (Anathaym, Kara, Zamothis, etc) in the fine tradition of Rurik Runespear and Cormac the Pict et. al.. In addition to characteristics, there are attributes, derived from characteristics or a combination thereof (except Movement Rate, which is species-based). These include Action Points, Damage Modifier, Experience Modifier, Healing Rate, Height and Weight, Hit Points, Luck Points, Magic Points, and Strike Rank (SIZ has been dropped as a contributing factor). Each of these are set up to scale, and mostly do so in a linear fashion. Each character has some two dozen standard skills with the base score derived from the sum of two characteristics (e.g., Athletics = STR + DEX), representing a percentage chance of success. In addition there is a number of Combat Styles, all based on STR + DEX.

RuneQuest has always emphasised cultural issues, and this edition is no exception. Following the Lewis Morgan inspired categories of primitive, nomad, barbarian, and civilised, RuneQuest since the third edition has assigned particular professions, equipment, magic, and beliefs according to these broad cultural types, albeit with Mongoose's initial RuneQuest edition making some rather incoherent variations. Cultures in RuneQuest 6 provide a selection from a set of skills and Passions, an optional rule which allows (in this case) "ingrained preferences and prejudices", which really comes down to a loyalty (to leader), a love interest, and a hatred. With the addition of Customs and Native Tongue (both at +40%), effectively there is a +100 points of skill percentages across cultural standard skills, cultural combat styles, and professional skills. Characters also receive an optional randomly determined background events roll, which can act as a spur to character development, and also vary according to age. There is a good set of character social class tables to determine status and wealth relative to each culture, although it is more than a little weird to roll this randomly after selecting cultural skills, especially professional skills. Following this is several charts to determine family and siblings, a nice touch, family reputation, and allies, contacts, rivals, and enemies.

Added to this are career paths according to culture. Appropriately, as cultures become more technologically and socially complex, there are increasing degrees of specialisation. Characters have three skills from the professional skills available to a particular career, and may allocate 100 skill points to those skills and standard skills. The suggested professional range has a couple of errors in labour differentiation e.g., suggesting literate scholars for the paleolithic primitive cultures (a very loose definition of literacy is given), officials in nomad and barbarian cultures. The career chapter is also an opportunity to determine a character's age, plus additional skills points if relevant, and example starting equipment according to social class. Also introduced at this stage are the magic types of RuneQuest 6; folk magic (petty, aka "spirit magic" or "battle magic" from earlier versions), Animism (spirit control), Mysticism (inner mastery), Sorcery (natural manipulation), and Theism (deific power). It is possible for characters to join a cult or brotherhood at this stage as well.

Skills and System

Skills are divided into two categories: Standard and Professional. Every character has the same set of some twenty-two core standard skills (not including combat styles), with an additional thirty-six core professional skills (which includes all the magic skills). Skill resolution is roll-under percentile, with 01-05 being an automatic success, with a critical at one tenth of a skill's value, automatic failures at 96-00, and fumbles at 99 or 00, except is the skill ranking is over 100, then it is 00 only. A difficulty grade from "automatic" to "hopeless" has some strong variation (e.g., "Easy" is add half again to skill value), but with a more memorable simplified method (e.g., "Easy" is +20%). As per other recent editions of RuneQuest, there is no characteristic rolls or use of a "resistance table". Mechanically putting everything under the

aegis of skills makes things easier, but it does mean that characteristics lose some simulationist importance. There's a few pages on skills in special circumstances, such as opposed rolls (best level of success, then by highest skill roll), augmenting (add 20% of the secondary skill), and group skill tests (team rolls and sorting rolls).

A game mechanics chapter effectively covers a range almost twenty spot rules in alphabetical order from acid to weather. Of particular interest the progressive decrepitude embodied in the ageing rolls, the character improvement rolls which do allow skills above 100%, but at 1% increments, a simple but progressive encumbrance system which allows a very generous free allowance, albeit with specific movement restrictions due to armour. The progressive approach is included in healing, with minor wounds being cured in multiples of days, serious wounds in weeks, and major wounds in months. The Passion spot rules allow for augmentation and are prone to significant 'deepening and waning' according to experience. In contrast the weather charts, whilst providing mechanical and descriptive effects, contribute very little to world design issues.

Equipment and Combat

The equipment chapter (oddly located between skills and game mechanics), starts off with an coinage standard and ratio (silver piece standard, 100 silvers to the gold - about an order of magnitude off). A basic standard of living table is provided with slaves at 1 sp per day, freeman at 2, all the way up to rulers at 250 per diem - which really doesn't work at all with the relatively egalitarian primitive societies as noted in character generation. The subsequent price list ends up a little odd as well; whilst a hard working freeman has the sort of daily standard of living that costs the same a chicken, or even a duck, they can forget about buying a pig or goat - those beasts cost 25sp! As for a 2800 sp draught horse, they are clearly for nobles only. This aside, the equipment list, whilst making an offering on livestock, tools, clothing, vehicles, and food, is primarily about weapons and armour, which make up the bulk of the material. The range of armour material is up to 1 to 8 again, as per RQIII. The weapon list is quite extensive, providing all the necessary game detail, including "combat effects", such as "Bleed, Impale, Sunder" for a greatsword. In addition there are rules for haggling (contested skill rolls giving variant prices), and some fairly easy rules for manufacturing, repairing, and enhancing equipment.

The core combat skill is one of many styles, of which somewhat vague design descriptions are provided, along with a more useful set of rules for weapon similarity outside of the style. Unfortunately only two actual styles are provided as side-bar examples. This is quite unacceptable; in a book that's on this side of 500 pages, the presence of several such combat styles should be the bare minimum. This aside, the combat system is a blow-by-blow affair fought over five second rounds, where characters have a number of Action Points, which determines how many actions they have (including reactions, such as parries and counterspells), and Strike Rank, which determines when those actions occur. Depending on the degree of success, the attacker or defender receive special effects bonuses. As per all prior editions, rolled damage is absorbed by armour, or by parrying weapons. Damage that gets passed these defensive barriers is applied to specific locations which carry their own hit points. Up to the hit point level is a minor wound, beyond that is a serious wound, which usually incapacitates the limb, and bringing the location to negative hit points is typically destroyed in some manner. This is particularly bad news if it is the character's head, chest, or abdomen. As a whole, the combat system is very colourful, interesting, and with plenty of tactical options.

Magic

The six magic chapters (magic, folk magic, animism, mysticism, sorcery, theism) take up over 100 pages of the rulebook. RuneQuest magic comes from runes, "the archetypes of creation", divided into elements, forms, the diametrically opposed powers, and conditions, and is powered by magic points, a primary source being the character's Power. As an example of many of the optional rules within the game (a checklist would have helped), there is no set rate of return for magic points, although the "medium" is a painfully slow 1 magic point per day. Likewise, the

consequences of a complete loss of magic points is also open to several options, ranging from fatigue to death. Developing a conscious relationship to a rune gives a character a "Runic Affinity", which is pretty much colour for how the disciplines of folk magic, animism, mysticism, sorcery, and theism, are implemented. In each case the degree of power available in magic is often strongly differentiated by the social status of the magic-user. For example, in Theism, the available miracles are limited by whether the worshipper is an initiate, acolyte, or priest. Likewise so is their ability to draw additional magic points from the Devotional Pool. Animists have variable trance preparation time and abilities, depending on whether they are followers, spirit worshippers, shaman, or high shaman.

Folk magic, the "lower discipline" is what was previously called "common magic". It allows relatively easy and immediate castings from a selection of some seventy spells such as Bladesharp, Demoralise, Heal, and all the old classics. The new Animism is pretty much what the old shaman used to do, that is contact, negotiate, combat, exorcise, and bind spirits, using the skills of Trance (enter and travel in the spirit world) and Bind. Mysticism involves achieving a higher state of consciousness to transcend normal physical limits with almost thirty special abilities, using the skills of Meditation (maximise spell intensity), and Mysticism (invoke traits and abilities). In contrast, sorcery invokes magical effects through the "understanding and application of transcendent knowledge" from selection of just over fifty spells. Their key skills are Invocation, the ability to cast, and Shaping, the ability to manipulate. The latter doesn't so much act as a skill, but rather sets the degree by which a sorcerer's spell can be manipulated in terms of combination, duration, magnitude, range, and number of targets. The powerful Theism, what was once called Rune Magic, is associated with the skills of Devotion (defines potential intensity of spells and devotional pool of magic resources), and Exhort (base chance to call from some sixty-five miracles).

Cults, Creatures, and GMs

RuneQuest has always had a tradition of social relationships in game settings, and this edition is no exception with a chapter dedicated to "Cults and Brotherhoods", with a listing of organisational types (magical orders and cults, companies, colleges, gangs and guilds), and membership processes, progression, benefits (training, protection, aid etc) and restrictions, and runic affinities. An important aspect of organisations is to have an organisational base, and in this case meaning temples, shrines, monasteries, and schools (guild halls and the like could have also done with a mention). Temple facilities are described in some detail in terms of size, staff, library, lodgings, stables, and training facilities. A handful of example cults are described in some detail, along with summary information for a much larger number of well-defined generic cults and orders.

The hefty creatures chapter (102 pages) starts off with the innovation of Instinct, a bonus to fixed intelligence beats for when their low intelligence ratings aren't really appropriate to simulate the animal cunning. Following this is several pages of special creature abilities, such as the ability to fly, breathe fire, regenerate, or trample. Creature character generation is discussed, along with an option for PC creatures. There is few pages of combat considerations (tactics, reach, natural weapons), before moving into the sixty or so detailed critters. Although provided from about half to a page per creature, with a modicum of discussion of their ecology and appearance, but mainly their relative capacity in conflict situations. Several pages in particular is spent on the various types of spirits and elementals.

The final chapter is "Games Mastery", a set of "tips and techniques for running enjoyable games". It starts with the assertion of the well-known Rule 0, the five principles of good gaming from Sandy Petersen (of which I agree with about 1.5), followed by notes on preparation and game aids, character creation issues, social integration for characters, investigation scenarios, combat, encounter pacing and challenges, cults and mythologies. Overall, it is a fairly disappointing conclusion; where it is a good it is obvious, and for the space it takes up, far too little useful information is provided.

Overall Evaluation

Overall, there is no doubt that RuneQuest sixth edition can be described as an good game. Most errors or omissions raised in this review in terms of content, workmanship, and system, are relatively minor to what it generally provides; a consistent and detailed game system of playable realism, with an good style for fantasy settings. The more substantial issue that arises, is that it really is standard on the shoulders of giants, being previously published editions. One will found themselves a little at a loss to explain, with substance, to a gaming group why they should play this particular edition of RuneQuest compared to previous editions (especially MRQII, which it has significant similarity), particularly given its lack of developed setting and its variety of options offered for core system mechanics.

The most punishing grades given in this review refer to the poor signal/fluff ratio, some of the layout decisions, and what is general unwieldiness of the product. This is however, it must be emphasised, a fun game, one that is largely well-designed, that covers a lot of ground. There is greater flexibility in character creation, the inclusion of Passions is a necessary quasi-narrativist inclusion, and the contentious "legendary/heroic abilities" have been dropped. These are certainly all positives that add to the classic features that have made RuneQuest a popular game over the decades: classless, percentile skills, culture/religion rather than abstract alignment, creature equality, gritty combat, evocative and intersting magic, with a flexible and adaptive system.

Style: 1 + .4 (layout) + .7 (art) + .8 (coolness) + .4 (readability) + .6 (product) = 3.9

Substance: 1 + .9 (content) + .3 (text) + .7 (fun) + .7 (workmanship) + .8 (system) = 4.4

These reviews were previously published on rpg.net (<http://www.rpg.net/reviews/archive/15/15689.phtml> and <http://www.rpg.net/reviews/archive/15/15688.phtml>).

Console Games Review

by Matt Lindus

Cogs : <http://www.cogsgame.com/>

This simple looking puzzler has some quite tricky problems to solve in it. It also has some frustration levels where timing is just as important (if not more so) than order of movement.

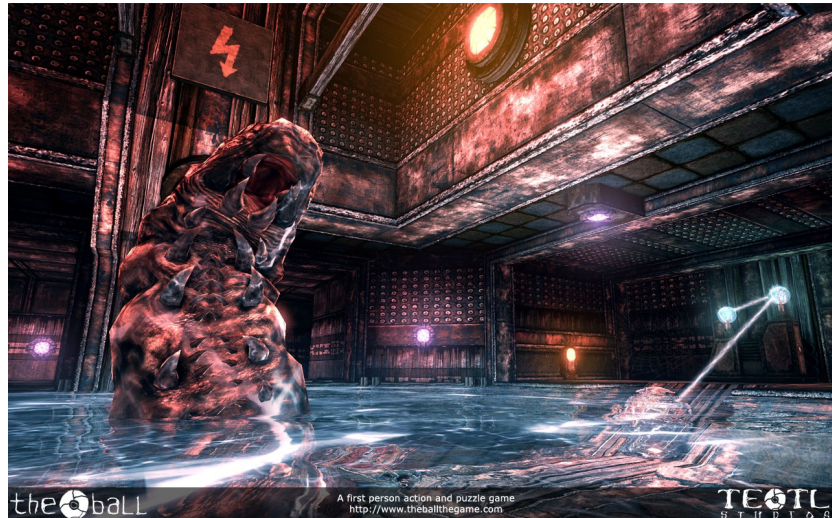
This game takes the old slide puzzle and changes the numbers into cogs, which you have to get to turn in order to do some work. Sometimes it's to drive a wheel, or make the contraption fly, or even play a tune. The textures are very nice, and a light steampunk feel to the objects helps with the feel of the game.

The difficulty increases nicely as you progress through the challenges, and having speed and move count challenges to make as well as just solving the puzzle makes for additional targets to aim for other than just getting the puzzle out. There are 50 different puzzles in the game, which isn't a huge amount, but it is enough to get value for the money you will spend buying the game. It retails for just under \$10, though it was included in a Humble Bundle early on, which is how I got it and I've enjoyed at least 10 hours of fun and frustration from it. \$1 an hour (or less if you picked it up in the bundle) is quite good value for money I'd say.

The Ball : <http://www.theballthegame.com/>

This game is an exploration puzzle game, with some combat using the ball as your weapon.

As part of an archeological dig exploring the area, you have fallen into a cavern and are separated from the rest of your group. They go for help telling you that if you are ok, you should at least use the time to explore the area. It doesn't take long before the star device of the game 'The Ball' is found and some simple puzzles are completed to teach you how to control this large steel mass. The Ball is larger than you by the looks of it, and goes mostly transparent when you are looking to push it away so you can see where you are pushing it.



When it comes to it though, you can push away, or attract the ball. For the most part, that's your tools and there are a decent amount of challenges to complete as you go through the different areas of the cave system. And they get more difficult as the game goes on. They also get more complex and time consuming.

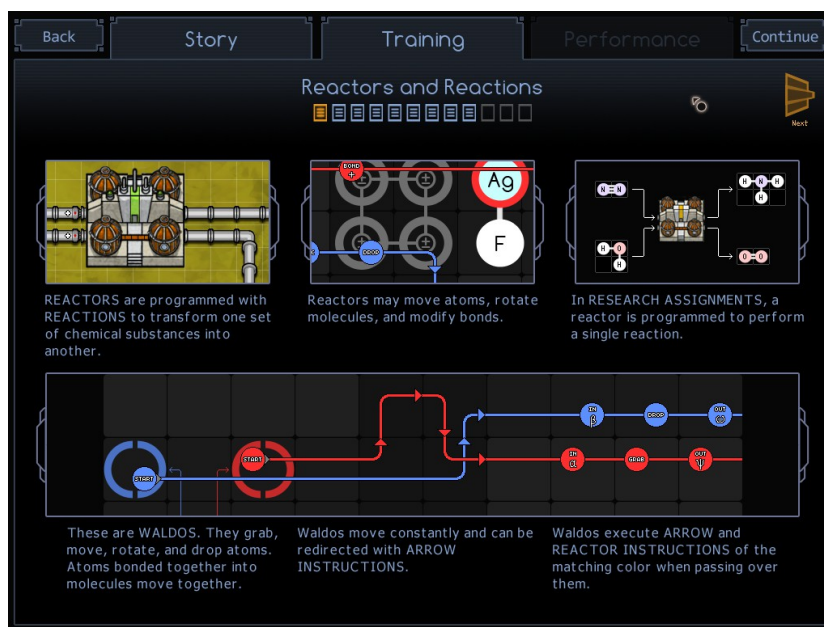
I've put over 20 hours into the game, completing the main story and all of the challenges in it. I have struggled at the survival maps though, as combat really isn't something that I found easy with this, and I struggle to get to round 7 of 9 in any of the survival maps. Having said that, I still enjoy it from time to time, and might even replay the main story again at some point, although I don't think it will hold up too well to replay, since the challenges will be the same and it's just a matter of remembering the solutions and order to do things in instead of having to figure them out.

Overall, this is a very good game, and I think anyone that likes puzzle games should at least check it out

Space Chem: <http://www.spacechemthegame.com/>

This is a neat little Chemistry puzzle game by Zachtronics Industries. You play the part of a manufacturing company, where you need to produce certain chemicals. Initially you would get just the right building blocks to make the compound that is needed in just a single step and all was simple. As things move along, and you get to some harder problems, you need to be producing 2 or 3 different things, but you are starting with a compound already that contains the building blocks for all of them. You need to work out how to strip the elements off the initial compound, and combine them into the appropriate target compounds. The difficulty comes from scheduling the movements so that the components don't collide. This is a bad thing, and has to be avoided for factory safety. Also, to finish the level.

Of all the games I've reviewed so far, I had hopes that this would be good and help with chemistry understanding. However, while it does try to be educational, a lot of this is glossed over or missed totally. It also doesn't really explain the concepts properly or how the elements are bonded and split. Also, most (all?) of the time, the Hydrogen atoms are just assumed to exist, which is fine, but seems to be mentioned once and then ignored. The story is nice enough, but I think the game tries to do too many different things, and doesn't actually succeed greatly at any. It is a fine game, but it could have been so much more with a little bit of focus.



I'm hoping to finish the game at some point, but currently, it's sitting in the pile of 'take another look later' games that I have. If I return to it and complete it, I'll look at reviewing it again, or just updating this review, but for now, if you can

pick it up for < \$2.50, certainly grab it and give it a few hours play and see what you think.

Scoregasm: <http://www.scoregasm-game.com/>

This little indie game from Charlie's Games is most like an Asteroids variant. A game of it takes you through up to 15 levels provided you survive in an effort to defend the Earth from the invading craft. You control a spaceship that by default fires at wherever the mouse cursor is, though you can stop firing if you want, and is required for a couple of achievements. You are also equipped with an explosive devise that destroys anything within a small range of your craft, but it has a limited charge which is only recharged with time and shooting enemies.

Using these weapons, and steering your craft out of danger, you need to kill all the invaders of each level, or wave as they call them. During each level though, there are additional goals that need to be achieved to reach other harder levels, as well as to unlock a challenge mode for each level and some awards too.

I have found the Normal difficulty levels vary from very easy to not too bad, though still manage to die regularly enough to have only completed the 15 levels successfully once. The harder levels do indeed get more difficult, and most of my games have ended in either a hard or insane level. With a very simple interface, and nice clear aims and goals, this is certainly a well constructed game. It is only a short game, taking me around 20-30 minutes to get through all the levels and win the game, and less when I fail to successfully defend the Earth! It is however full of replayability options, with a total of 43 levels, with a single start difficulty level and then 14 levels in each of Normal, Hard and Insane difficulties. You can only play a level by achieving the required goals in the previous level to access it, or by selecting it as your start level. Once you select a level of a specific difficulty though, you will still have the ability to

access any of the 3 difficulties for the next level, provided you reach the required target for that difficulty on that level.



Outside of the standard game mode, there is a challenge available for each level, which has a very high target to complete it, which I haven't actually managed to meet for any of the levels. They are the most challenging format of the game, though it is set up to repeatedly play the same level if you want. This allows for quite a quick run of attempts at the same challenge.

I still have a long way to go with regards to all the achievements that come with the game, and there aren't actually that many of them (19) so I can see me playing it for a reasonable amount of time still. It is a nice quick, fairly mindless game where you just destroy anything that comes near you. Lots of fun when you just have half an hour to kill between things too.

Movie Review: Dark Knight Rises

by Andrew Moshos

The Dark Knight Rises dir: Christopher Nolan

The Dark Knight Rises is a very good film, let's just get that out of the way right from the start. It was like nothing I expected, and exceeded what were insanely high expectations right from the beginning and especially at the end. It's not a perfect film, but it's the best Batman flick we're ever going to have access to in this universe.

In that other parallel universe, they'll keep making great Batman flicks, Heath Ledger's still alive, and the law of diminishing returns doesn't apply. We, on the other hand, are stuck here in this sucky one for the duration.

Eh, it's not too bad. After all, we have two great Batman films, at least.

I didn't like Batman Begins that much, and I had a couple of issues with the second one too (over-edited, visually incoherent at times), but this third one not only gets everything right, but it is entrenched within the story told by the first two movies. It doesn't stand entirely alone, and is the better for it.

It's interwoven with the other two, with actions and decisions made in the first two films coming back to haunt all the main characters. Within that is a lot of stuff, to put it mildly. It doesn't feel overstuffed, but it does feel like they're trying to encompass every single level of seriousness and complexity anyone ever aspired to have in a superhero movie but was too afraid to ask for.



If Batman Begins was Year One, just to draw analogues with the comic books from which these stories sprang, and Dark Knight was a blend of Killing Joke and The Long Halloween, then Dark Knight Rises is something of a meld of The Dark Knight Returns, the Knightfall storyline and Cataclysm / No Man's Land, which sees both Gotham and its protector broken. A starting point doesn't dictate an ending, though. The two Nolan brothers took those storylines and

transformed them into something completely their own, which is a great, great thing.

In *Batman Begins*, the main villain Ra's al Ghul, leader of the League of Shadows, decides that Gotham, like Carthage before it, must be destroyed. It's part of the natural balancing-of-the-world function that they like to think they provide, gratis, of course. Gotham, not really a stand in for New York, and more the metropolis of all Metropolises, is seen as being way too big for its britches. Arrogant and hubristic like an American college student on holidays overseas, the League decides the city and everyone in it must burn.

The city's protector, who sees more than anyone the level of corruption in its heart, fights to save it and the people in it. And does so, naturally. The second film has Batman seeming like he's getting somewhere in his battle against the cancer of crime within the city, as even petty dealers think twice about dealing, and the heads of the crime syndicates grow so worried about their continued existence that they hire a maniac to take him down.

But Ledger's Joker didn't care about earning his pay. His only thought, to quote my daughter talking about one of the kids at her school, is that of violence (chaos). He mocks Gotham's sense of order, and is less concerned with killing Batman than he is with showing the Dark Knight that when Order flies out the window, the brave and innocent souls of Gotham will turn on each other and him in a heartbeat.

To 'save' Gotham the second time, Batman elects to protect the reputation of a killer, and takes the blame for several murders, including the blame for Harvey Dent's death. This is with the complicity of Police Commissioner Gordon (Gary Oldman), who goes along with the lie because it will restore Order to the city.

Well, they got what they wanted. Batman hangs up his cape, hobbles around with a cane, a shadow of his former self. He doesn't need to fight crime, because there isn't that much crime to fight. Dent's Law, passed in his honour, has taken most of the crims off the street and kept them in Blackgate Prison.

That's the world they want, where Law and Order in Gotham City are in the complete ascendant, and they've made their sacrifices and upheld the necessary grand lies to achieve this end.

In this third film, along comes a Man, a Man with a Plan, long in the making. He thinks the people of Gotham, blessed with such peace and order, deserve even more Order. He wants to give them Order until it's coming out of their ears. And he's not afraid to break a few eggs for this orderly omelette. In fact, it seems he loves breaking eggs without having any intention of making an omelette at all.

Bane (Tom Hardy) is this Man. His voice is a curious cross between Darth Vader and the pimply teens who usually serve at fast food drive-thrus. He is a monstrous brute of a man, but not too sadistic. He's not a maniac, for god's sake. His plan to break Gotham involves first coaxing its protector out of dormancy, isolating Gotham from the rest of the world, and then giving them all a glimmer of hope to make their eventual despair all the more brutal.

The mask is horrifying, but stylish, and it sets him apart from the other men he leads. Powerful men of Gotham, who bring him in and think Bane works for them, don't really understand who they're dealing with (they never understand who they're dealing with in these types of films - how hard is it to figure out that the very creepy huge guy with the bad

technology where his mouth should be is not to be trusted and will probably murder you most brutally?).

Ben Mendelsohn? Ben Mendelsohn is in this? How the hell did he manage to get into this flick? Did he sneak onto the set, then start wearing a suit and quoting the lines of the character until everyone just believed he was meant to be there? Was it based on the strength of his performance in *Animal Kingdom*, or *Mullet*, or *The Big Steal*, or *The Year My Voice Broke*? I like to think it was *Mullet*. Who knew Chris Nolan liked films about mopes who return back to their home towns much to the disinterest of everyone who was happy to see them leave?

Ben Mendelsohn plays a sneaky Mitt Romney-like corporate raider called Roland Daggett who plots to take control of Wayne Enterprises. But he's on the board of directors, so what can you do? That's worse than having tenure. Not only does he want to consume Bruce Wayne, he's also smoothing the way for Bane and his fanatical devotees, who are making key changes to the city's infrastructure, in the way that the French Revolution made key changes to people's necks.

See what I did there, I made a historical funny! There are a fair few bits of imagery and callbacks to the French Revolution, not least of which is the rhetoric Bane spins to make it seem as if he's liberating Gotham's oppressed peasants from their evil aristocratic masters. Lot's of rich people get soaked, but let's not ignore the fair and balanced way they are tried in a court by their peers. If found guilty, and they're always found guilty, the wealthy are given a choice between Death and Exile.

You can't be fairer than that. And who but the Scarecrow (Cillian Murphy) could be a fairer judge? If the American Idol judges are looking for a replacement, they could do worse. It'd be a blast to watch performers perform their performance after exposure to Scarecrow's insane fear toxin.

At least then their general behaviour would make sense.

When Gotham becomes a transformed city, where pray tell is Batman? Him? Oh, he's long gone. You see, Bane's plan is so watertight, and so well thought out, and he is so brutal as a fighter that Gotham and its protector didn't stand a chance from the start. He comes from a darker place than Batman, and when two traumatised psychotics fight, surely it's the most traumatised who wins.

Oh sure, there's technology this and that involved, and a convoluted plan that would make a tax return look straight forward, but the real problem is that Bane is too good at what he intends, and Batman horribly underestimates him. Alfred (Michael Caine) didn't underestimate him, though. He spends most of the film tearing up and begging, outright begging Bruce not to be Batman anymore, and in the end uses the only trump card he possesses. A person watching him choke up who doesn't choke up themselves is a harder person than me, with a heart full of granite, and an inner voice that sounds like Bane's.

Poor Bruce, poor poor Bruce. He really cops it hard in this one. I wondered how far they were going to go, and they took it about as far as a PG-13 film can go. Sure, many of the people of Gotham suffer worse fates, but you can't help but feel sorry for him, and even, despite the knowledge of how films of this type usually go, for a while, even our hope is extinguished that he will survive, let alone prevail.

Sure, there are way too many characters, and the main villain's plot is overly complicated where a simplified version of the same plan would have gotten them what they wanted with no-one, including Batman, much the wiser, and all dead. But who quibbles with such majesty? What churlish churl complains about the cinematic mana from the heavens delivered up to them? I know there's a world filled with people who complain and whine for the sake of hearing the sound of their own complaints emanating from their own cry holes, but I am not one of them.

Of the multitude of characters on offer, the two others that deserve singling out are played by Anne Hathaway as Selina Kyle and Joseph Gordon-Levitt as a young cop loyal to both Batman and Gordon. Levitt perhaps struggles for screen time in this epic, but his character owns the scenes he's in, especially when Gotham becomes a fascist dictatorship under Zod, I mean Bane. With most of the cops out of the picture, someone who believes in the light has to look out for the city's orphans. Who else is going to, otherwise?

His cop role has a bit of a character arc, an enjoyable one that feels earned, which leads to a place that's perhaps not too surprising, even as it perhaps evokes a few eye rolls right at the end.

To say that Hathaway plays her role broadly would be an understatement, but I guess they were trying to shy away from camp or the fetish aspects of the character. If there's a more fetishised female character in the Batman comics in their 73-year history than Catwoman, I haven't seen her yet. They kind of avoid it a bit, but then they still have her swanning about in skin-tight clothing so skin-tight I think I saw her ovaries.

She's kind of funny and kind of evil, in that much of the flick's misery occurs directly because of many of her actions. A kind reading of her character would be to say that generally she looks out for number one, being horribly selfish. She fights like a dervish, loves stealing, and is not above acting girly to get her way. Will she finally side with the forces of niceness, or is she going to betray Batman a ninth and final time?

She is as experience has made her, and she is Bane's tool as much from fear as necessity, and it is fitting, in a way, that she plays such a crucial role in events to come.

Who knows? No spoilers here, thank you very much. Of the elements of the film that I appreciated the most, the main one is the editing. I'm not sure what prompted it, but Nolan abandoned the chaotic over-editing that rendered several of the action sequences in the earlier films look like dance routines from Moulin Rouge! Here, especially in the first brawl between Bane and Batman, the strong emphasis is on long sequences of Bane beating the absolute shit out of the Batman. When it's filmed and put together like this, its brutality is impossible to ignore.

We're all grown ups here, who can tell the difference between reality and fantasy, at least most of us are, unlike that vile moron who shot up the cinema in Aurora, Colorado at a midnight first screening, so we know this fight isn't real. On the other hand, it feels horribly real, and has an intensity lacking from other flicks of this type.

Bruce ends up in the worst place on Earth, allegedly, and we are not sure how he's going to come back and save Gotham. How's he going to do it? What does he have to do? Why do we fall? What will he do after he falls?

He has to Rise, of course.

Cheesy, I know, but the film walks the fine line required, and I think mostly stays on the right side of it. It builds and builds and builds into an impossible climax, one where I couldn't see where the solutions were going to come from, and, also, to a plot reveal that made sense but wouldn't be too obvious to people who haven't read the comics (to the rest of us dateless comic-book reading types, it was obvious from the opening credits). Scenes and set-pieces are lovingly crafted, with everything feeling as if it's exactly what Nolan wanted, exactly what he foresaw in his imagination.

So, visually, it's stunning, the story is intricate and intense, the soundtrack pummels you into submission like Bane's fists, and the culmination of the three movies in the ending is so appropriate, so emotionally satisfying for the characters concerned (for them in my eyes, of course) that I can't help but call this one of the clear best films of the year. It's not as fun entertainment-wise as The Avengers, but then it wasn't trying to be. It instead sells a very mature, very dark vision of where such stories can go on the big screen, and I feel it was tremendously successful at doing so.



And with that, I don't want to see any more movies based on comic-book films, okay? They're never going to be up to this level, so don't bother trying. And no Batman movies for at least 10 years, none of this embarrassing reboot stuff before the popcorn from the last film is stale crap. Know when to say no. Go out in style. Have some class about it. Be the heroes I know you can be.

9 times don't be afraid to use your nails, boys, out of 10

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"When Gotham is ashes, you have my permission to die" – that's mighty generous of you – The Dark Knight Rises

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