

FANTASY CALVINBALL

AKA FULL CONTACT NOMIC

Think of a better title later...

THE MANDATES OF HEAVEN

In the beginning, underneath Heaven, there was Nothing. Nothing happened because nothing had to happen; and there was nothing there to stop it, of course. Entropy ruled the void, reining on a throne of illogic.

The Old Ones, finding the world full of nothingness, created Causes. Causes demanded Effect. And thus, the age of Nil became the age of Chaos, the world turning into a primordial ooze of senseless Happenings, an endless howling of insanity. And thus was the universe created.

The Titans, finding the world full of madness, created Justifications. Only Effects could create Causes, but Causes could create Effects. Slowly, the howling void of the age of Chaos became the age of Order, each Titan carving out a Plane to call their Own. And thus were the planes created.

The Sage Kings, finding the world torn asunder into competing kingdom ringed by realms of chaos, sought to unify the Causes – fire and water, air and earth, metal and wood, light and dark, holy and profane, emotion and logic. So did the Sage Kings between them craft the System, which unified the competing Causes into one System of checks and balances, reason and design, merit and necessity, an age of Laws. And thus was the world created.

In crafting the world, just like the forces before them, the Sage Kings sowed their own destruction. In creating the System, they created peoples to enact its laws: human and elf, goblin and troll, orc and fairy, each of the countless races made in the image of their Sage. People who question if the System is not a unification of the causes. merely another Cause whose Effect is simple self-perpetuation, who chafe under an unjust Heaven – but the System, being created by the combined effort of the Sage-Kings, is greater than the Sage-Kings, greater than the Titans, perhaps even greater than the Old Ones themselves. It is the cusp of a new age led by the Folk, where the races created by the Sages take up the mantle of Heaven and direct the System with their own hands.

But even if it is the time for the children of the Sage Kings to take the mantle of Heaven, none know what Age is going to come to pass...

THE SYSTEM

As far as the mortal races are concerned, there is only the System, and the System is the will of Heaven.

Far away from the mortal realm, the System is crafted by the Sage Kings. Aided by the souls of worthy philosophers and the noble dead, the Sage Kings debate in their halls about the rules of the System. The System sets down the definition of how things interact on the mortal plane. In turn, the mortals fulfill the role the System guides them to.

There are many understandings of the System. Some see it as descriptive, the results of mighty god-scientists' own studies on the World. Some see it as prescriptive, the guidelines of the god-philosophers to live a good life – under the same sort of heavily regimented bureaucracy, of course. Some see as prohibitive, and punish any who err from the System's design, serving the will of the System Designers. And some see it as illustrative, with a path to Enlightenment – even up to becoming a god themselves – hidden in plain sight. No matter what the interpretation, knowledge of the System is jealously sought after.

No mortal has ever seen the System directly. However, everything from simple parlor tricks to studies of decades of battle can lead to certain facets of the System being known. That is, until the next change to the System comes out...

THE EDITION WARS

As the races of the Sage Kings have developed, so has their influence on their creators. The Sage Kings are not above philosophic debate and contests of merit; and, increasingly, they are using the races of the World as their intermediaries, their avatars appearing to the races of men to use them in their ploys, the rivalries of the Sage Kings becoming the rivalries of their mortal underlings.

In return, the Sage Kings are known to tweak the system, tiny causes calculated to create great big effects in the working of the System. New races have been created, and destroyed. Together, the Sage Kings, their assistants, and the mortals – great and meek – are known as a House, each uniquely responsible for some aspect of reality but held in constant check by the celestial bureaucracy.

And so, in fits and starts, the System adapts, and the world turns with it. But the Houses of the Council are often in disagreement, with opposing goals,

There have been several major edition wars in history, and many minor skirmishes, as the House of a single Sage King addresses errata on tiny issues under their purview, that turn out to have broad effects that fall into another House's purview.

RETCON

The System is more powerful than the Sage Kings, but the Sage Kings have one final say: the Design Council. When in council, the Sage Kings can hold anyone accountable to them, up to and including the greatest punishment they can give out: a *return of condemnation*, or 'retcon'.

Together, the Sage Kings can unwind time around a target, and have the loom of the System weave a new timeline for the being replaced, remaking or annihilating the target as they wish. It takes time, but once completed, time seals in around the new reality. This power is used sparingly, as it is difficult to get the Sage Kings to agree, but it can be used to keep mortal heroes in check.

Of course, even the dread power of complete nonexistence is just a part of the System, and the System – and thus, the power of the Sage Kings over the world of people – can be subverted. It will simply take a *fantastic* load of bluffing, guessing, and outright manipulation in order to

keep the Sage Kings from realizing they've just retconned out of existence the very tool they use to maintain power.

FACTIONS

There are any dozens of ways to interpret the Design Council's holy System. However, some are predominant.

Despite being a worldview, the factions don't replace religion. (In fact, the System proves that the Titans *do* exist, and that their unknowable realms grant the System power!) Factions are far more temporal, by and large, regardless of one's worldview.

Characters don't have to be affiliated with a Faction. In fact, it's incredibly unlikely. They're more likely to be the pawns in a high stakes game of Thirty-Xanatos Chess.

IDEALISTS

If the system has designers, that must mean the system has a grand design!

PHILOSOPHERS...

There is a System. However, it's not capable of running the world because of the powers it harnesses. It's capable of running the world because it has tapped into deeper underlying truths. The System is not just the expression of the infinite possibilities and interactions of rules; it is a set of simple axioms anyone can understand, and through this understanding, master the universe.

All that it takes is a little study.

Idealists see the System not only as a guide to how the world works, but as a coded representation of how people in the world ought to work.

...AND ZEALOTS OF THE ORTHODOXY

As the source of ultimate truth, Idealists look to the System as prescriptive, not descriptive. Everything from marriages to harvests to war to children's names are decided after consulting the collected writings about the operation of the System. Even murder can be justified... if the System so wills it, of course.

OPTIMIZERS

I want to be the very best, like no-one ever was.

SEEKERS OF THE PERFECT SELF...

The System describes, in fine detail, the way life operates. In turn, it implies the ways life can improve itself... or even break past mortal limits.

Optimizers can find the largest advantage in the smallest bylaw of the System, able to effectively abuse it and use it as any other tool a master might use.

AND BRUTES DESPERATE FOR MIGHT

Optimizers are a faction that is very powerful with warlords and petty thugs alike, the faction uniting people

who seek only their increased power. Despite the self-appointed "endless perfectionists" that founded the Optimizers, a much different breed of person has taken over the faction.

REVISERS

Down with the System, man! Down with their straightjackets!

DEFYING HEAVEN FOR MORTAL DIGNITY ...

There's no denying that humans, elves, and the other peoples of the Sage Kings don't have much power, in the great scheme of things. Some are even aware that they're abusing the subjects made in their image. And as long as the Houses of the Design Council meet, mortals will never be free of the Court or its System.

However, the System has to follow its own rules. Revisers seek the great Flaw, that one single point where Archimedes would place his lever. To find that flaw would create a massive sequential fault that would shake through the System, until the System itself disappeared into a puff of logic.

...AND TO HELL WITH THE COSTS.

Revisers don't care about anything. Not the cost to others – and certainly not the costs to themselves. Without the System, they would be naught but elements in an endless plane of elements.

But even Armageddon doesn't frighten the Revisers, for in that brief moment, they would be free.

QUANTIFIERS

My word! The abilities of this frog are outstanding for its size!

SCIENTISTS LAYING THE SYSTEM BARE...

The Sage Kings have a distribution problem. While the updated errata of the rules of the System lack publication in the mortal realm, the Quantifiers are collating their *own* documents, each group condensing the System into common axiom and publishing their own guides, with thick tomes like *The Complete Giant Slug* or *Quintessential Haberdashery* being the result.

These publications rarely use the same rules, but they work. Which, on a certain level, is horrifying.

...WITH AN ENDLESS SUPPLY OF TEST SUBJECTS.

Science demands sacrifice, and a Quantifier rarely wants it to be *their* sacrifice. Holed up in their towers, going mad as their pens lay bare impossible truths, Quantifiers are known for one thing above all else:

"More subjects, Igor!"

Many a Quantifier has turned to the looting of the dead – or the abduction of the living – once their desire to learn

about the System turns to the subject about how the System rules those who live it. Questions of the nature of free will, morale, charisma, and intelligence make Quantifiers lock up intelligent beings by the score – to get a broad enough baseline.

And of course, *someone* had to test the *Arms & Equipment Guide*...

STORMERS

If Heaven will not rule justly for us, then we will take the mantle of Heaven as our own!

REFORMING HEAVEN FROM WITHIN

The Sage Kings haven't been alone in Heaven in a long time. Since even the early days, they have created aspects of themselves to argue amongst themselves, the godlings bickering over the fine details of the System. In turn, these godlings have summoned people to their Houses: beings of knowledge and wisdom and valor enjoying a sort of demigodhood.

Being a lobbyist beyond the stars is taxing on the mortal psyche, but over the generations, the mortal lobbyists and their assistants and aide-de-camps and correspondants have come to a single conclusion: The Sage Kings are downright *mad*.

But the Design Council, ultimately, is a self-revising democracy. And all Stormers are united in the knowledge that any democracy can be revised from within.

GRUBBY-FINGERED GIBBERING POLITICOS

Upon seeing even a fraction of the naked truth of the System, the mortal aides to the Houses of the Sage Kings, to a person, go stark raving mad. In return for their sanity, they gain action to a portion of the endless revision process of the System. And once a mortal mind has had a whiff of the Divine Quill's writing, once they have scented how it feels to be one of those who influenced *everything*, there is no going back to a regular life on the farm.

Stormers storm the gates of heaven, their greed and pride like rolling thunder, as countless as the drops of a cloud and as noisy as its thunder.

SO... WHAT IS THE SYSTEM, EXACTLY?

The System, in-universe, is the roleplaying game that determines how everything in the universe works. It's a proper noun.

The 'rules', by contrast, is how *this* game works. It's a common noun.

The rules are fairly simplistic. The System, on the other hand, is an obsessively designed living document created over countless millennia by the Sage Kings, which describes how *everything* works, in exquisite and exacting detail. Take whatever system you think is complex, set that at 1, and turn it up to 11.

The rules are going to stay more or less how they are. The System, however, is up for debate – quite literally.

When you create a campaign, come up with a vague idea of what the "System" really is. Maybe it's a percentile-heavy monstrosity such as Rolemaster. Maybe it relies on dozens of levels of charts such as Exalted. Maybe it relies on keeping tracks of lots of energy budgets like Hero. Maybe it has excessive lists of feats like D&D. Maybe it has codifications for everything under the sun like Hackmaster. Maybe it has a book for everything you could possibly want like GURPS. I strongly recommend a system your group is familiar with – not only so everyone gets the joke, but so everyone has a common base in which to lampoon the system.

ABILITY RESOLUTION

Dead simple: roll all relevant dice, get the total, more dice good.

Person Vs. Person: High roll wins. Ties are ties.

Person Vs. Task: GM sets target number (TN). Player rolls the dice. Success if you meet or beat the TN.

SUCCESS LEVELS

Sometimes, it's not just *if* you succeeded, but *how well* you succeeded, that matters. For these things, you need a *success level*.

The basic success level – anything from the minimum needed to succeed, to higher – is a Mark I success.

If you roll twice the number needed, you have a Mark II success.

If you roll four times the number needed, you have a Mark III success.

If you roll eight times the number needed, you have a Mark IV success.

Finally, if you roll sixteen times the number needed, you have a Mark V success.

This is mostly used in combat, but can be used to compare contests of a large group without having to have everyone write down huge numbers.

KENNING

The most important part of the rules is having lots of dice. The most important part of the System, however, is being able to justify being able to do something. Kenning is your "knowledge of the System" – not only how the System that controls the world works, and your knowledge of how to abuse the system for fun and profit.

Everyone in the World knows "about" the system. They can't directly manipulate it – and most of what they know is hearsay, manipulated, incorrect, or heavily edited to promote an agenda – but they know *there are rules*. When the chips truly matter, they can try to use the letter of the System to break the spirit of the System.

When to do it: You can call on your Kenning at *any* die roll. The more often you do it in a session, the less power each Kenning has.

How To Do It: When you call on your Kenning, explain to the GM exactly how you're breaking the System. Be excessive, be extravagant, be verbose, be ridiculous. After all, your point is pointing out that there's a Murphy's Rule right in

the middle of a critical part of the System, and how you can walk through that Murphy’s Rule right in the middle of a critical scene.

The Bonus: How much of a bonus you get for Kenning depends on how much the GM likes your explanation

Forbids It: Given a nonsensical explanation, the GM can forbid the explanation. The Sage Kings will keep their eyes out after that: see “Failing a Kenning,” below.

Allow It: If you successfully point out a reason the rules would end in your favor, the GM gives you an additional 1d12 for your roll.

Loves It: If the GM finds your explanation of why the rules are broken reasonable *and* amusing, the GM gives you an additional 2d12 for your roll.

Amazed By It: If the GM finds your explanation fantastic – if the GM feels you pulled off all the stops and found an extremely narrow error that may have made it past a committee of Sage Kings to the canonical system - the GM gives you an additional 3d12 for your roll.

Successive Uses: The more you call on your Kenning, the more the Sage-Kings repair the “broken” parts. The bonus for Kenning drops once per successful use, from d12s to d10s to d8s to d6s to d4s. After d4s, you don’t get any bonuses from Kenning.

Failing a Kenning: If you fail to successfully convince the GM how to bullshit the System, you don’t gain a bonus. Your ability to Kenning doesn’t downgrade until later, but you have to wait an hour (real time, not System time) before you try again.

KENNING EXAMPLE

GM: “Alright, Alex. The troll takes a step towards you, and raises its club-”

Alex: “I’m going to try to stab that arm before it hits.”

GM: “I’ll allow a try, but the TN will be high.”

Alex: “Kenning this.”

GM: “Alright, I’ll allow it. Tell us about the System.”

Alex: “You see, the troll is two size classes larger than me – which means his *target areas* are two size classes larger than usual, too. By throwing my dagger, I’ll be able to use the area/range chart instead of the target limb chart – since that turns it into an area attack, he also won’t get an evasion check. I’ll also be able to take advantage of the +2 attack bonus for blindsiding him, which combines with my innate backstab bonus.”

GM: “Blindsiding him? When you’re attacking from the front?”

Alex: “Well, yes. He needs to be able to see my weapon arm to not be caught flat-footed, and since he’s two size classes bigger than me, I can hide my arm in the shadow of his arm.”

GM: “The System sounds a lot like Pathfinder now. It sounded like Exalted earlier.”

Alex: “A little from column A, a little from column B.”

GM: “Well, I gotta say – I love the explanation.”

Alex: “Love it enough for a three-die bonus?”

GM: “Don’t push your luck. Take your 2d bonus and roll it – and impress me.”

CREATING A CHARACTER

Characters in these rules are built by buying Abilities and Perks. You buy Abilities and Perks with points. There are eight classes of Abilities, each with its own budget of points to spend.

Most abilities are rated in Ranks. Each Rank has a die associated with it, which is what you actually roll in tests. Since the rules reward having lots of dice, each rank represents a more impressive level of skill; even a rank 1 ability with a mere d4 represents a talented beginner, while a rank 6 ability rolling d12+d4 represents near mastery of the subject.

COSTS

The price of a Perk is listed with the Perk. Just pay that many points.

To buy a standard Ability, use this chart below to look up the cost for that Rank and the die that Rank gives you.

Rank	Die	Cost	Notes
1	d4	1	
2	d6	3	
3	d8	6	
4	d10	10	Standard maximum
5	d12	15	One allowed per ability area
6	d12+d4	21	One allowed per character

ABILITY MAXIMUMS

In general, the highest you can have an ability at is rank 4, or d10. But there are two exceptions.

Once per ability class, you can purchase one ability at rank 5, or d12. Anyone who also has that ability will be able to tell right away that you’re one of the best there is.

Once per character, you can purchase one ability at rank 6, or d12+d4. Anyone who sees you in action will be able to tell you’re something special.

And no you can’t combine these two rules to have both a rank 5 ability and a rank 6 ability in one class. I’m looking at you, Mr. Stabby Von Swordenhefter.

FLAWS

For each class of abilities, you can take one Flaw. Attribute flaws deal with attribute, Skill flaws deal with Skills, and so on and so forth.

When you take a flaw, add the value of that Flaw to your point budget for those abilities.

As you only have eight Areas, this means that you can only have eight Flaws. However, if you take the full eight flaws, then all aspects of your character will be impacted somehow. Choose wisely.

ARCHETYPES

Archetypes are the broadest definition of a character – where they came from, what they trained in, and even what species they are.

You have 25 points to spend on Archetype abilities. Any points left over here are added to your point budget for School abilities

RACIAL ARCHETYPES

Note that there are several abilities marked as [race] in this section. If you don't buy any race abilities, you are a Human.

ALICORN [RACE]

Anthropomorphic magical winged equine, because reasons.

Flight: You can fly at your normal speed.

Power Stat: Add your rank in Alicorn to both your Mana and your Focus.

Telekinesis: You can always cast Telekinesis without having to Focus. Focusing will allow you to pull off greater stunts, however.

ARCHER [CLASS]

One shot, two kills.

Bowyer: When you build or repair a bow, add your Archer die to the test.

Devastating Shot: When you shoot a bow, add your Archer die to the damage.

Eagle Eyed: When you try to spot something from afar, add your Archer die to the test.

Trick Shot: When using Kenning to justify an impossible shot, add your Archer bonus to the Kenning bonus.

Uncanny Accuracy: When you shoot a bow, add your Archer die to the test.

BARD [CLASS]

Eyes on my lute, not on your loot.

Escape Master: When using Kenning to get out of something that is *totally* your fault, add your Bard die to the Kenning bonus.

Loremaster: When you make any sort of knowledge check, add your Loremaster die to the test.

Magic Tricks: You can take one School marked as Arcane.

Performer: When you make any sort of performance, add your Bard die to the test.

BERSERKER [CLASS]

Blood, death, and vengeance!

Choppy: When you roll Melee, you include your Berserker die with the test.

Forager: When you roll Nature, you include your Berserker die with the test.

Frenzy: When you roll Initiative, you include your Berserker die with the test.

CLERIC [CLASS]

By the powers invested in me by a power whose name I don't quite know, be healed!

Divine: You can take Schools marked as Divine.

Head In The Stars: When you make any sort of test to know about unknowable things from beyond the stars, add your Cleric die to the test.

Medicae: Whenever using your healing powers to heal damage, add your Bard die to your test.

Power Stat: Add your rank in Cleric to both your Mana and your Focus.

DWARF [RACE]

Well, of course they're passionate. When you stare at rocks day in and day out you've got nothing to do but argue.

An Axe To Grind: Whenever you attack with an axe or pick, include your Dwarf die.

Down, Not Out: Whenever you make a healing test, or a test to resist disease or poison, include your Dwarf die.

Hot-headed: Whenever you make a Spirit test, include your Dwarf die.

ELF [RACE]

Impossibly beautiful, impossibly patient, impossibly hardheaded.

Implacable: When your quarry is in sight, include your Elf die in any tests to bring them down.

Magic-Touched: Add your rank in Elf to your Mana.

Nigh Immortal: Whenever you make a Body test, include your Elf die.

ENCHANTER [CLASS]

Don't touch that! It's a dangerous, deadly artifact! ... for anyone but me.

Arcane: You may take Schools marked as Arcane.

Artificer: Add your Enchanter rank to your Focus when trying to build up the MP to work a magical item.

Engineer: Whether crafting, fixing, or breaking something, add your Enchanter die to the test.

Item Handler: Add your Enchanter die to any test made to work with magical items.

Reserves: Add your rank in Enchanter to your Mana.

ROGUE [CLASS]

What's yours is mine.

Acrobat: Add your Rogue die to any athletic test.

Assassin: Add your Rogue die to any damage test made on an unaware target.

Sneak: Add your Rogue die to any stealth test, or any die to work traps.

Thief: Add your Rogue die to any test made to directly rob someone.

SORCERER [CLASS]

Incredible cosmic power!

Arcane: You may take Schools marked as Arcane.

Power Stat: Add your rank in Sorcerer to both your Mana and your Focus.

SQUAMOUS [ORIGIN]

You came from somewhere that people do not talk about in sane company.

Charged: Add your rank in Squamous to your Mana.

Dreamlands: When using Kenning to explain weaknesses in things outside the realm of mortal men, add your Squamous die to the Kenning bonus.

Heretic: You may take one School marked as Divine. It isn't *really* Divine, but you don't know.

Seen It Done It: Whenever resisting horror or the mind-affecting abilities of horrors, add your Squamous die to the test.

ARCHETYPE FLAWS

Angered A Sage King (3-point Archetype Flaw): It is rare that a sage king takes notice of someone directly... and unluckily for you, they *remember* you. Once per session, the GM can take any success you make and turn it into a critical failure, as the Sage King tweaks the System *just to ruin your day*.

Goblin (1-point Archetype Flaw [race]): Budget cuts in race creation resulted in this squat, unruly race, unconnected from magic. You suffer a 1 point penalty to both Mana and Focus, and treat magic with superstition and doubt even when you manage it. You also suffer from horrible teeth.

Unkennd (5-point Archetype Flaw): Maybe you believe in a logical, orderly universe set in place by a divine watchmaker. Maybe you believe in the exact opposite – in the howling of hungry gods, setting things into motion with no remorse nor sympathy. No matter what you believe, you're certain it's not a divine bureaucracy in Heaven creating the rules everyone abides by. You cannot use the Kenning *at all*.

SCHOOLS

If Archetypes define where you came from, Schools define what you learned while you were there.

You have 25 points to spend on School abilities. Any points left over here are added to your point budget for Attribute abilities.

ARCANE AND DIVINE SCHOOLS

Some schools are tagged [Arcane] or [Divine]. You can only take these if you have the appropriate descriptor.

One school, Necromancy, has both tags. You can take it if you know either descriptor.

MP

Any ability rated in MP requires gathering MP. Here's how it works:

You always have MP available equal to your Mana. If the MP cost of a spell is less than your Mana, you can just use the spell as an immediate action.

You can Focus to add extra MP. Even if a spell is nominally too complex for you, you can still try to cast it with patience. Every turn you concentrate on building up the spell, you add MP equal to your Focus to the MP you already have.

Casters with high Mana but low Focus can cast good powerful spells immediately. Casters with high Focus but low Mana can cast almost any spell, but require incantation and enhancements.

THE CASTING ROLL

If you had to Focus to cast a spell, you have to roll for it. The target number is 1 per turn you had to focus.

If you succeed, the spell goes off as planned.

If you fail the roll, but still had a positive roll, the MP (and time) is lost, and you take one point of fatigue.

If you fail the roll, and roll a *negative* roll, you take one point of Fatigue per point below zero – and the GM comes up with a stunning magical mishap that happens *instead* of the spell going off!

BLESSING [DIVINE]

The best offense is good preparations.

Purify [Blessing 1, 10MP]: One meal or skein of water becomes good to drink. For +5MP, you can bless another meal or skein of water in the same action.

Bless Water [Blessing 2, 20MP]: A vial of blessed water will quench all thirst, and deal 2d6 damage when splashed on undead.

Bless Weapon [Blessing 3, 40MP]: The person whose weapon is blessed includes your Blessing die with their next attack roll, and with their damage roll if it hits. Lasts one combat or until it fails to hit.

Smite [Blessing 4, 80MP]: By pointing at a target for your favored Titan to smash, the light of heaven opens up and engulfs the target, dealing 6d4 damage. That's a solid thump!

Battle Hymn [Blessing 5, 160MP]: You, and one friend per rank of Blessing, may add your Blessing die to any Soak tests.

Consecrate Ground [Blessing 6, 320MP]: One temple becomes consecrated against undead, which lasts for a year and a day or until the undead are invited inside.

BODY HARDENING

Punch waterfalls and shower in granite.

Hard To Kill: Add your rank in Body Hardening to your Wound Tolerance (see Derived Stats).

Strong Back: Add your rank in Body Hardening to your Encumbrance Limit.

Unyielding: When using Kenning to prevent damage, add your Body Hardening die to your Kenning bonus.

DISABLE

Trap, spell, or intervention, you know how to effortlessly defuse it.

Hard Won Experience: When trying to see a trap, add your Disable die to your roll.

Trapspringer: Whenever trying to undo any sort of trap, add your Disable die to your roll.

DYNAMIC ENTRY

First impressions count the most.

First Impressions: The first time you make the acquaintance of someone and try to make a social roll, add your Dynamic Entry die to your roll.

Force Door: Whenever trying to get past a door, add your Dynamic Entry die to your roll.

EVOCATION [ARCANE]

Zap boom pow.

Magic Missile [Evocation 1, 10MP]: A single bolt doing 2d6 damage. For +10MP each, another target can be hit by another bolt at the same time; roll damage for all targets at the same time

Ray of Frost [Evocation 2, 20MP]: A long ray doing 3d6 damage.

Fireball [Evocation 3, 40MP]: A room-sized burst doing 4d6 damage.

Lightning Bolt [Evocation 4, 80MP]: A long line that penetrates targets, doing 5d6 damage to each. For +10MP, the bolt can chain to a new target, instead of having to be set up just so

Disintegrate [Evocation 5, 160MP]: A black ray that deals one automatic wound, *then* damages for 6d10, *then* does a debilitating effect. For +80MP, it deals an extra automatic wound.

Gravity [Evocation 6, 320MP]: The target crumples in on itself. For +160MP, there's nothing left to clean up afterwards.

HEALING [DIVINE]

Healing is probably the most common request made of clerics.

Staunch Flow [Healing 1, 10MP]: Any target that is bleeding stops bleeding, regardless of risk.

Lay on Hands [Healing 2, 20MP]: A brief healing incantation that heals for 2d8. A person can benefit from this spell once an hour.

Cure Poison [Healing 3, 40MP]: Relieves the target of one debilitating effect from poison.

Raise Dead [Healing 3, 40MP]: Convinces the target's soul not to leave yet, if they've been dead less than an hour. The target rolls all their attribute and subattribute dice; any that come up a 1 loses one rank permanently. As long as no attribute becomes rank 0, the target wakes up.

Mass Healing [Healing 4, 80MP]: Everyone who can see you clearly is healed for 4d8.

Cure Critical Wounds [Healing 5, 160MP]: The target loses one debilitating effect (or wound, if they have no debilitating effect), then is healed for 6d8.

Reincarnate [Healing 6, 320MP]: The target comes back to life. In fact, they can even reassign one ability as another

of the same type, or swap the values of two abilities of the same type. Just don't botch this spellcasting roll!

ILLUSION [ARCANE]

Now see this!

Enhance [Illusion 1, 10MP]: One non-living item looks like the finest example of what it could be.

Disguise Self [Illusion 2, 20MP]: You conceal your looks, allowing you to add your Illusion and any dice that enhance Illusion to your Disguise roll.

Illusory Person [Illusion 3, 40MP]: You create a simple illusion of a person, that can do no more than shout and only perform actions while you're thinking of it. A single hit will dispel the illusion.

Invisibility [Illusion 4, 80MP]: You and up to (Illusion rank) of your closest friends are hidden from sight until you attack or do something similarly stupid.

Phantasmal Army [Illusion 5, 160MP]: Roll Mind + Magery + Illusion, including any dice that enhance Illusion. That's how many phantasmal images appear. Phantasms can appear to be intelligent, carry on a conversation, and move on their own accord, doing their best to follow their creator's agenda – but they'll disappear with the rising sun or when struck. While this army is active, your group's effective Threat is increased by 1.

Phantasmal Terrain [Illusion 6, 320MP]: Anything as large as a house can be hidden from view for (Illusion rank) fortnights, or disguised as something it isn't – a fort becomes a pig sty, an outhouse becomes a palace, a study becomes a hovel, or a witch's hut becomes a more respectable hut.

JURY-RIG

You can make anything work... for a while.

Last Gasp: When having to work with something *broken*, the GM rolls Jury-Rig alone. That's how many uses (or rounds) it will work. You'll find out when it needs to be fixed again when it breaks again!

Repair Master: Whenever trying to repair something, add your Jury-Rig die to the roll.

MAGIC RESISTANCE

Defense against the dark arts begins at home.

Ward: Whenever trying to resist *any* magical effect, from magical damage to mind control, add your Magic Resistance die.

MAGIC RESERVE

You've got the touch! You've got the power! Yeah!

Power Stat: Add your Magic Reserve rank to your Mana and Focus.

NECROMANCY [ARCANE][DIVINE]

They're dead. They're evil. They're under your command!

Talk to Spirit [Necromancy 1, 10MP]: Perhaps the only use of Necromancy that won't get you turned into the

authorities, Talk to Spirit allows you to talk to ghosts. They might not have much to say, however.

Animate Skeleton [Necromancy 2, 20MP]: Raises a single teeth-clacking skeleton with d4 for all four attributes. It's getting the skeleton that's the hard part.

Wither [Necromancy 3, 40MP]: Deals 3d8 damage to one single target, and also deals 1 level of Fatigue. Also kills potted plants dead.

Raise Zombie [Necromancy 4, 80MP]: Raises one corpse as a zombie with a case of the munchies, extremely poor social manners, and d6s in all four basic attributes. Every 20MP adds another zombie.

Necrosis [Necromancy 5, 160MP]: Causes one debilitating effect on the target, with no saving roll.

Dark Gate [Necromancy 6, 320MP]: A gate opens up, and the poor soul gets to see who's on the other side of it.

SYSTEM LORE

Almost everyone knows something about the System. But few know as much as you.

Illuminated: Add your System Lore die to the roll whenever you need to know directly about a Sage King or their House.

Kens like a Kenning Kenner: Add your System Lore die to the bonus you get when you successfully use Kenning. For any reason.

TARGET VITALS

The best side of a person is the inside.

Bloody Mess: Whenever rolling for damage, add Target Vitals to the roll.

Precision Striking: Whenever attempting a called shot to injure, add Target Vitals to the roll.

SCHOOL FLAWS

Blind [4-point School Flaw]: You can't see. You can't dodge an attacker until they've hit you once, you can't read unless it's specially printed, and ranged attacks are right out. Finally, reduce your Threat by 1.

Manaless [2-point School Flaw]: You just don't have a mana supply – at the end of chargen, reduce it to 0, and it can *never* be improved. You can still cast low-level spells with Focus and a lot of work, but you'll always be having to make control rolls.

Pacifist [3-point School Flaw]: You won't fight people for any reason. This can be a problem in dungeon fantasy – particularly since it won't be a problem for anyone else in the System!

ATTRIBUTES

The classic ability split, four attributes. You have to buy at least one rank in each of the four basic abilities: Body, Grace, Mind, and Spirit. You may optionally buy ranks in Magery (and if you're going to be a caster, Magery is *highly recommended*).

You have 25 points to spend on Attribute abilities. Any points left over here are added to your point budget for Subattribute abilities.

BODY

Being tough and powerful.

Subattributes: Constitution, Strength, Toughness

GRACE

Being agile and graceful.

Subattributes: Dexterity, Reflexes, Speed

MIND

Being intelligent and smart.

Subattributes: Knowledge, Intellect, Perception

SPIRIT

Having soul and spirit.

Subattributes: Charisma, Willpower, Wisdom

MAGERY [OPTIONAL]

Not all characters have Magery, but Magery is a very powerful attribute – it increases *all* spellcasting, regardless of type, and improves both key magic derived attributes.

Magery has no subattributes.

ATTRIBUTE FLAWS

Confused [4-point Attribute Flaw]: Your mind isn't as sharp as it used to be. Whenever you roll a task including your Mind stat, roll twice and keep the lowest.

Unthreatening [2-point Attribute Flaw]: You don't threaten others as much as you could. Reduce your Threat by 1, to a minimum of 1.

Winded [3-point Attribute Flaw]: You tire easily. Whenever you gain a level of Fatigue, gain one more.

SUBATTRIBUTES

Each attribute has one of several subattributes, listed above. They're included with any skill in situations where that subattribute applies. The subattributes for each attribute are listed above.

You have 25 points to spend on Subattribute abilities. Any points left over here are added to your point budget for Skill abilities.

SUBATTRIBUTE FLAWS

Butterfingers [3-point Subattribute Flaw]: You just can't keep a grip on things. When you roll for tasks requiring fine manual dexterity, roll twice and keep the lowest.

SKILLS

Skills are the backbone of a character, describing what characters *do*.

You have 25 points to spend on Subattribute abilities. Any points left over here are added to your point budget for Specialty abilities.

ACROBATICS

Being a swashbuckler, basically.

Specialties: Jump

ART

The finer things in life.

Specialties: Painting, Sculpting, Writing

ATHLETICS

Putting your back into it.

Specialties: Climbing, Lifting, Throwing

BRAWL

Getting into fights!

Specialties: Grappling, Kicking, Punching

CHARM

Using your force of personality, not your powers of reason.

Specialties: Bluff, Intimidate, Seduce

GAMBLING

Making money the old fashioned way.

Specialties: Cards, Dice

LARCENY

Robbing from the rich.

Specialties: Lockpick, Pickpocket, Traps

LORE

Knowing odd facts.

Specialties: History, Science, Tongues

MANIPULATE

Tricking people into doing your bidding.

Specialties: Fast-Talk, Leadership, Rally

MEDICINE

Treating injuries.

Specialties: Diseases, First Aid, Poison

MELEE

Hitting things with other things.

Specialties: Axes, Clubs, Polearms, Shields, Swords

NATURE

Surviving in the wild.

Specialties: Forage, Track

PERSUASION

Using your powers of persuasion, not your animal magnetism.

Specialties: Bargain, Diplomacy

PILOT

Getting things where they ought to go.

Specialties: Boats, Sleds, Wagons

PERFORM

Putting on a show.

Specialties: Dancing, Disguise, Music, Orate

RANGED

Shooting things.

Specialties: Bows, Crossbows, Siege Weapons

REPAIR

Being able to fix things.

Specialties: Buildings, Weapons

STEALTH

Being sneaky.

Specialties: Hide, Move Silently

TACTICS

Coming up with clever strategies.

Specialties: Army, Naval, Squad

SCHOOL FLAWS

Blabbermouth [5-point School Flaw]: You say whatever comes to mind. When making a roll to Manipulate, roll twice and keep the lowest.

Black Thumb [2-point School Flaw]: You don't know the difference between a house cat and a porcupine. When making a roll against Nature, roll twice and keep the lowest.

Shallow Pockets [1-point School Flaw]: There's no space on your body! Halve your Encumbrance Limit, round down.

SPECIALTIES

Each skill can have one or more specialties. They're included with any skill in situations where that specialty applies. Suggested specialties for each skill are listed above; you can also come up with your own.

You can only purchase a Specialty if you own the related Skill.

You have 25 points to spend on Specialty abilities. Any points left over here are added to your point budget for **Perks** Gear.

PERKS

Perks are binary abilities – you know them or you don't.

~~You have 25 points to spend on Perks. Any points left over here are added to your point budget for Gear.~~

Author's Note: The curse of sleep took me and I don't have enough content for this section. Just ignore it and move on to Gear.

GEAR

You have 25 Gear Points (or GP) to spend on Gear. Any points left over here are... lost!

ARMOR

To build armor, combine the traits you want to get the cost in gear points:

Resistance: From simple 1d4 robes to fierce 2d12 battle plate. The GP cost is (Max Resistance).

Encumbrance: By default, armor has 1 encumbrance. Every point of encumbrance extra makes the armor cost four less GP; getting rid of the default point of encumbrance makes the armor cost 4GP more.

WEAPON

To build a weapon, combine the traits you want to get the cost in gear points:

Damage: from a lowly 1d4 pen-knife to a mighty 4d12 halbard of massacre. The GP cost is (Max Damage)/4, round up.

Accuracy Bonus: From -4 to +4. The GP modifier is equal to the Accuracy Bonus.

Handedness: By default, weapons require one hand. Two-handed weapon cost two less GP.

Encumbrance: By default, weapons have no encumbrance. Every point of encumbrance makes the weapon cost four less GP.

Procs: A proc is a bonus debilitating effect that is granted whenever an attacker has a certain outstanding success. The GP modifier depends on the level of success required to grant it. For example, the *bec de corbin* has *Proc: Disarm (Mark III)*, because the claw is designed to pull weapons out of hands. The cost is 2GP for a Mark IV proc, 4GP for a Mark III proc, and 8GP for a Mark II proc. (There are no Mark V procs, since Mark V damage kills!)

Range: The GP cost of range is 1 GP per 50 foot of range, up to 500 feet. Adding range to a weapon also makes it use ammo.

Reach: Your weapon's long enough to reach into the next area over for +1 GP.

WEAPON DESIGN EXAMPLES

Axe [4 GP]: 2d12 damage [6], 1 Enc [-4], Proc: You weren't using that hand, were you? (Mark IV) [2]

Bec de Corbin [6 GP]: +1 Accuracy [1], 3d8 damage [6], Two-handed [-2], 1 Enc [-4], Proc: Disarm (Mark III) [4], Reach [1]

Longbow [11 GP]: -1 Accuracy [-1], 2d8 damage [4], Two-handed [-2], 2 Enc [-8], 500' range [10]

Longsword [6 GP]: +1 Accuracy [1], 2d10 damage [5]

Knife [9 GP]: +2 Accuracy [2], 1d6 damage [2], Proc: bleeding (Mark III) [4], 50' range if thrown [1]

Mace [5 GP]: 1d12 damage [3], Proc: knockout (Mark IV) [2]

EQUIPMENT

Every piece of mundane equipment – backpack, tent, rope, 10' pole, towel, so on and so forth – costs 1 GP.

TOMES

Tomes describe part of the System in fine detail, making it easier to perform. When you use a Tome, tasks take twice as long (*so many chart lookups!*), but you do it right: +d12 to include with the roll.

Additionally, when you use Kenning with a tome you own and have used previously, you gain one extra die to the bonus.

The cost (and weight!) depends on how broad the tome is:

Specific Task [5 GP]: A heavy book with everything you need to know about doing one task. Enc 1.

Specific Specialty [10 GP]: Several books in a sleeve describing the important tasks of your specialty. Enc 2.

Specific Skill [15 GP]: A small encyclopedia, with names like *Knights & Knappers*, describing all known uses (and theorizing many unknown uses) of a skill. Enc 3.

DERIVED STATS

Encumbrance Limit: Your Encumbrance Limit is equal to your Body Rank plus your Strength Rank.

Wound Tolerance: Your Wound tolerance is equal to your Body rank plus your Spirit rank. It forms the basis of your Soak test.

Threat: Your Threat is equal to your Grace rank plus your Mind rank plus your Tactics rank.

Mana: Your Mana is equal to your Spirit rank plus your Mind rank plus your Magery rank. It forms the basis of any Spellcasting test.

Focus: Your Focus is equal to your Magery rank plus your Spirit rank.

COMBAT

INITIATIVE

Every round, fighters try to get as many actions as possible. And every round, leaders try to prevent openings in their line. Here's how it goes.

Your opponents' Threat sets the difficulty. If fighting more than one, the best Threat is what counts.

Difficult terrain (such as a cramped tunnel) and hostile circumstances (a battle in the middle of a ballroom, outnumbering their foes) can give a bonus to effective Threat – anything that makes it harder or riskier to fight.

Surprised Targets give half the Threat. If you surprise the biggest threats, the first round will go *much* easier.

Actors roll Initiative: Grace+Speed+Tactics. Each actor attempts to overcome the other leader's Threat.

Successes determine phases. There are six phases in a round: from Five to Zero. Each actor figures out their degree of success against the opposing team's leader reduces the bonus. If you have a Failure, you move in phase Zero; if you have a Mark 1 success, you move in phase One, then phase Zero; if you have a Mark 2 success, you move in phase Two, then phase One, then phase Zero; and so on and so forth.

If order matters, your Initiative score breaks ties.

MOVEMENT

When setting up a battlefield, the GM should break out a one-inch dry-erase map grid, and carefully draw a map showing all the elevations and lanes of attack, being sure to draw furniture and obstacles with the lines. Then, they should ignore their pretty drawing and use a different color pen to create a Venn diagram of adjacent areas.

The only thing that really matters is if you're in the same general area. In a pub fight, these areas might be "behind the bar," "at the bar," "at the entrance," "at the normal dance floor," "at the lounge," "at the raised dance floor," and "in the employee break room." As long as you are in the same area, you can hit each other; as long as you have line of sight, you can shoot each other. Make it clear which areas can connect to which.

To move around the battlefield, roll Grace+Speed against the opponent's Threat. On a success, you can move one area. If you have an exceptional success, each level of success beyond the first lets you move into an additional area.

If you fail the movement roll, your foes keep you pinned down for this phase.

ATTACKS

Nothing special here. Roll to hit (attribute + subattribute + skill + specialty). Your foe rolls to evade (Grace + Reflexes), or parry (include Melee skill and the weapon skill). If you hit, the effect is done to the target.

EFFECTS

DAMAGE

Damage is the most common effect that'll be laid on you.

Whenever you deal Damage, your defender will make a Soak test to resist it. This is your Wound Tolerance, plus your Body die, plus your Toughness die (if you have it), plus any Armor dice from armor you're wearing. Your attacker will make a Damage roll. The effects depend on your success:

Failure: Bruise. It connects, but doesn't significantly impair them.

Mark I success: Wounded. The target takes one wound.

Mark II success: Seriously wounded. The target takes two wounds.

Mark III success: Critically wounded. The target takes three wounds, and suffers a GM-created debilitating effect until they heal all wounds.

Mark IV success: Mortally wounded. The target takes four wounds, and takes one more wound per round until dead.

Mark V success: Dead. The fewer wounds they had when they take Mark V damage, the better the look on their face.

DEBILITATING EFFECTS

A "debilitating effect" is a negative status that inflicts a wound on your character. It can be anything – from a verbose description "can't wield a weapon" to a cosmetic condition like "Skin raw and flaking from fire burns" to something banal like "All fights are +2 Threat to you."

We don't have space here for an encyclopedic list of all status conditions. Instead, debilitating effects – short of death – are freeform and created by the GM, based on the attack and how bloody the System seems to be lately.

Debilitating effects can be healed, one at a time, when you heal wounds.

ENCUMBRANCE

Things get in your way. Things weigh you down. *Valuable* things really weigh you down!

As long as your total Encumbrance is below your Encumbrance Limit, you're fine. However, each level of Encumbrance you have above your Encumbrance Limit gives you -1 to all active tasks.

FATIGUE

Where Wounds keep you from resisting damage, Fatigue prevents you from *doing things*.

Each level of Fatigue gives you a -1 penalty on all rolls you perform actively.

You heal a level of Fatigue with each full meal, and all Fatigue with a night's rest.

HEALING

Everyone heals a little. Proper medical care (and magic!) helps people heal a lot.

Once per day with bedrest, someone can try to heal on their own; the roll is Body + Constitution.

If they are receiving proper medical treatment, the doctor can roll Mind + Medical.

And of course, if you're receiving magical healing, you roll whatever the magical healing effect is.

No matter what you're rolling for the test, the difficulty number is the same: one per Wound, plus three per debilitating effect that has been suffered from critical wounds. As with damage, the effects depend on your success:

Failure: Palliative. At least it's better than nothing.

Mark I success: Stop the bleeding. The target loses one wound.

Mark II success: Bruises close. The target loses two wounds.

Mark III success: Bones knit. The target loses three wounds.

Mark IV success: Muscles mend. The target loses four wounds, and one debilitating effect.

Mark V success: Complete recovery. The target loses all wounds and debilitating effects.

WOUNDS

Wounds are a common effect. Each Wound gives you a 1-point penalty on your Soak tests.

If your Wounds exactly equal your Wound Tolerance, you are Incapacitated, and probably on the verge of death. If your Wounds are greater than your Wound Tolerance, then you run the risk of a *negative* Soak roll; any such negative roll immediately kills you!

MONSTERS

By default, assume “Attributes” exclude Magery.

Dragon: Attributes d12, Mana 40, Focus 20, Evocation d10, Dragon d12 (include with Flight, Wound Tolerance, casting rolls, breath attack and damage); Wound Tolerance 15, Threat 10; Fire Breath 3d10 (Proc: Burning/Mark II) *or* Bite 4d1.

Megapede: Attributes d8, Melee d6 (Grapple +d6); Wound Tolerance 6, Threat 6; Crush 2d10 (Proc: Armor Broken/Mark IV).

Minotaur: Body d10, Grace d6, Mind d6, Spirit d8; Melee d10 (Axe +d10); Wound Tolerance 7, Threat 4; Axe +2 2d12

Necromancer: Body d4, Grace d8, Mind d12, Spirit d10, Magery d8; Mana 12, Focus 7; Evocation d8, Necromancy d10; Wound Tolerance 5, Threat 8; Knife +2 1d6.

Orcs: Attributes d8, Melee d10 (Axe +d6); Wound Tolerance 6, Threat 6; Axe 2d12.

Skeleton: Attributes d4; Melee (Sword) d6; Wound Tolerance 2, Threat 2; Cheap Rusting Sword 1d6.

Zombie: Attributes d6; Brawl d8; Wound Tolerance 4, Threat 4; Bite 2d6.

DESIGN NOTES

The ideas I threw into this game:

1. What if the inhabitants of your typical fantasy world knew they were in a RPG – with classes, attributes, skills, feats, et multiple cetera? (Inspiration: An old never-printed game, called *FRUP*.)
2. What if rules lawyering – the on-the-fly reinterpretation and rejustification of rules that is inevitable to playing an RPG – was not treated as a necessary evil towards playing games; but in fact was encouraged? (Inspiration: the abstract board games *Nomic* and *Blank White Cards*. Add in a touch of Red Mage from *8-Bit Theater*, Parson Gotti from *Erfworld*, and everyone from *The Gamers*.)
3. What if all those funny dice could be used all the time? (Inspiration: Always futzing about with my dice at the game table.)
4. What if using several pools of points instead of one single pool of points would allow for the flexibility of point-buy without the analysis paralysis of having to trade off *everything* vs. *everything*? (Inspiration: *Ironclaw*’s separation of attribute ranking and build pools, and an old set of homebrew rules I made to

build *Trinity* characters using *Shadowrun 3e* area ranking.)

5. What if initiative wasn’t the result of being super fast, but the result of a contest of skills?

With the above, I already had put down a lot of heavy ideas. For that reason, when it came to the *setting*, I choose the genre that’s a known that everyone works in: dungeon fantasy. Save the princess, save the world; hack & slash; shoot & loot. Putting experimental ideas in a conflict- and intrigue-heavy known world archetype takes the stress off of learning the world, leaving the system the only thing that players have to worry about. Don’t call it a fantasy heartbreaker (even if it is). Call it a design testbed.

Maybe next year I’ll finally break the 24-page barrier...

Shanya Almafeta, 25-26 Sep 2015

Done for the 2015 24-Hour RPG contest on RPGGeek