

# \* \* \* \* \* RACK & RUNE \* \* \* \* \*

## RACK & RUNE #3: SPRAYING SCREAMING DEATH FROM BLOODY STUMPS Copyright © 10/91 Peter Maranci / (617) 397-7958 / Washington St., #2 Malden MA 02148

It's been a slow month for gaming...or maybe it's just me. In the time-honored tradition of semi-blocked writers throughout history, I have plagiarized myself. Enclosed is some more old Runequest material (never before seen in this region), errata for last issue's RQ material, assorted ranting and ravings, and to start it off, the first ever



### COMMENTS: GIVING THE RACK A TURN

*Swanson* re Hard Times. I have noticed that many people have trouble admitting that this is in fact a Depression. Though unemployment is technically not as bad as in 1929, I suspect that far more of today's "employed" are not making enough to survive.

As far as hard times in gaming go, I wonder if the old "the world is doomed...unless the PCs can save it" cliché qualifies as such. The majority of campaigns seem to eventually arrive at that level, and while that is not necessarily a bad thing, what kind of a world is constantly teetering on the brink of destruction? (-)

Actually, that does suggest an interesting idea: Marxist roleplaying. I wonder what roleplaying, if any, has been done in the (ex) Soviet Union? A campaign based on the precepts of Marxism could be interesting...or maybe not. After all, the course of events would be inevitable. And I defy any gamemaster to portray Marx's "species being" without massive SAN loss by the players.

*Phillies* Glad to see that someone besides myself appreciates PC-WRITE 2.5. I called Quicksoft recently, and discovered that a new, registered copy of the latest version (I forget what number) is \$129!!! This is shareware? Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I am not spending that kind of money on a program when the old one works just fine. I'd rather buy books and game materials.

By the way, I thought Hastur was Unspeakable?

*Ruggles* Interesting writeup.

Actually, GM handling of NPCs has always interested me. One GM I know was a brilliant strategist; in his hands, even an old man with a mule could easily slaughter a party of demigods. On the other hand, I've known GMs who couldn't manage to kill a novice group with Tiamat and six Death Stars. Fortunately, the intelligent GM did try to operate the NPCs at their own intelligence level.

Unfortunately, he often overestimated the PCs' intelligence level, and so slaughtered us anyway.

The tactics you describe seem rather deadly; I can see that the presence of such forces in a campaign would very strongly encourage *diplomatic* roleplaying. A Nice Idea. But how would you handle those players who will not accept that there are "normals" who can and will kill them?

*Earlandsen* Glad to see a fellow newcomer, particularly one from the Badger's home state! I'm sure Madison is a safer place now that the Badger is back to beat the tar out of jaywalkers, smartmouthed kids *and anyone else he feels like!* Hmmm. Hope you've heard of the Badger.



As far as a "good" player also being a GM goes, you're quite right; it's not necessary. In fact, I've known good players who've been lousy GMs and vice versa. I suspect that gamers GM for different reasons than they game. Most people *play* primarily as a social form of escapism, from what I've observed. The prime attribute of *gamemastering*, however, is **power**. There is probably no other voluntary social activity in the world which offers one person the sheer power and control of a gamemaster. That power seems to be addictive for some, though they refuse to admit it. (-)

### RQIII FIXES

Like many players, I find it nearly impossible to resist tinkering with game systems to make them more playable and reasonable. In my case the system of choice is Runequest III. Here are some "fixes" for the system that I and others have found very useful over the years:

**Dodge:** The standard RQIII Dodge skill is an all-or-nothing proposition. The Dodger makes his skill roll as the attacker makes his (or its) roll; a normal success Dodges a normal successful attack. However, if the attacker makes a special or critical attack, the Dodger must have rolled an equivalent special or critical Dodge. If he succeeds normally but not specially/critically, he is struck by the full effect of the blow. The Dodge, though successful, has no effect. This makes reliance on the Dodge skill a highly questionable approach: the odds are very good that when the enemy criticals or specials, the Dodger will be struck by full force of a devastating blow. This danger is exacerbated by the fact that since Dodge is

reduced by armor, the Dodger will have little protection! The other defense option, Parrying, suffers no such penalty. The result is that Runequest characters tend to be heavily armored and to Parry with shields.

This is fine, if that’s what you’re looking for. However, if the unclothed barbarian, quick-footed foilmaster, or other non-tanklike character is desired, the following rules change makes Dodging far less of a suicidal prospect: Let each level of Dodge success reduce the effectiveness of the opposing attack by one category. A normal Dodge success will reduce a critical attack to a special attack effect, a special to a normal success, or a normal attack success to a failure. A special Dodge success negates a special or normal attack roll, and reduces a critical to a normal hit. A critical Dodge avoids any melee attack. The Dodge option remains risky...but at least some people can reasonably survive its repeated use.

**Stealth:** Under the current rules for calculating the Stealth modifier, the average person has a modifier of -3%, and thus a mere 7% chance to Sneak or Hide successfully. From personal experience, I just don’t buy this. It seems far more reasonable to calculate the Stealth bonus as follows: DEX primary, INT primary, SIZ negative, and POW secondary negative—which is to say, every two full points that POW is above 10 decreases the Stealth modifier by 1. If high POW were really as hampering in Stealth skills as large SIZ, high POW people would have to glow by the light of their own souls. This is not reasonable.

### RQIII CHARACTER DESIGN

One area that Runequest unfortunately lags behind other systems in is that of character design. Random dice roll PC generation is painfully outmoded. The following system has proved useful for the design of RQIII characters.

All human characters start with a base score of ten in each attribute. Additions must be paid for with Character Building Points as set forth in the table below:

<u>Attribute</u>	<u>Cost/point</u>
INT, DEX .....	10
STR, POW .....	7
CON .....	5
SIZ.....	3
APP .....	1

Characteristics above 18 must be approved by the GM; each point beyond 18 costs double.

Skill percentages may also be increased with Character Building Points. The rate is one point per % point increase (the GM may wish to discount certain skills, and limit others).

For real PC flexibility, this system may be used with the GURPS advantages/Disadvantages design system, on a point-per-point system. Though not entirely compatible, many GURPS Ads/Disads may be easily converted into Runequest terms. High Pain Threshold, for example, means that the character will never go into shock from injury, and may go “Heroic” automatically.

Starting points should range anywhere from 150 - 1000 points, depending on the power level desired. Any points not used at the character’s creation are, of course, lost!

### FIRST DEATH

Those who follow comic books may have noted the passing of what was arguably the best of the independent publishers: First Comics. Their line, including Grimjack, Nexus, The Badger, and Dreadstar was quite outstanding—both more intelligent and more unconventional than most other books in the field. When First announced the progressive” new policy of changing monthly titles into three-issues-a-year specials, some of us saw the writing on the wall. Sure enough, the pea-brained business executive types decided to kill off the lot of them only a few months later, concentrating instead on the intensely boring “Classics Illustrated”. Guess they decided that producing that kid stuff was just too embarrassing.

Pea-brained executive types. They rule the world. Shows, don’t it?

### MST3K

On the bright side...

If you get the chance, watch the incredibly, unbelievably funny Mystery Science Theater 3000 on the Comedy Central Channel (or whatever it’s called today). A maintenance tech and two robot pals sit in front of a screen (in silhouette) watch ludicrously bad old movies (monster, biker, beach-party etc.) and comment on the action. The first time I saw this, I literally had to crawl out of the room, and then got a friend to tape them all for me (as I didn’t receive them at the time). WARNING: DON’T TRY TO EAT OR DRINK WHILE WATCHING. They’ll get you.

### DRAGONEWT ERRATA

1) I perhaps did not emphasize enough that I believe



that humor is the one most vital trait for a player portraying a dragonewt to possess.

2) Effects Table: The Sorcery Backfire Table mentioned in #15 is my own. It will appear in an upcoming issue, after editing.

3) Gaining a new Effect: An automatic roll once a week may be too frequent. Once a season might be better, or perhaps alternatively at the GM's whim. The latter might be close to being an experience point system, however; something I have never felt comfortable with.



**RUNEQUEST III MAGIC POINT REGENERATION RATE TABLE**

POW	Hours	Minutes
1	24	
2	12	
3	8	
4	6	
5	4	48
6	4	
7	3	25+
8	3	
9	2	40
10	2	24
11	2	10+
12	2	
13	1	50+
14	1	42+
15	1	36
16	1	30
17	1	24+
18	1	20
19	1	15+
20	1	12
21	1	8+

**RQIII IMPALE/SLASH/CRUSH ALTERNATE METHODS**

**Impale** (20% of skill or less): Weapon does maximum possible weapon damage plus rolled weapon damage plus strength bonus (if any) plus magic bonus (if any). Attacker must roll under impale chance times 2 (40% of skill) to withdraw; otherwise, it is stuck in armor. Any movement of the weapon while it is still inserted in the target will cause 1/2 normal rolled weapon damage (strength does not

apply, but magic does). To remove a weapon without doing further damage, a roll must be made under first aid.

**Critical** (05%): Damage ignores all armor.

**Critical Impale** (05% + 20% on second roll): As Impale, but ignores all armor.

**Slash** (20%): Roll weapon damage twice & add results to normal strength and magic bonuses (if any). Attacker must roll under slash chance times 3 (60% of skill) to withdraw weapon; otherwise, it is stuck in armor. Any movement of the weapon while it is still inserted in the target will cause 1/2 normal rolled weapon damage (strength does not apply, but magic does). To remove a weapon without doing further damage, a roll must be made under first aid.

**Crushing Weapons**

**Crush** (20%): Add maximum Strength bonus damage to normal rolled weapon damage + STR bonus + magic (if any).



**RQIII CHARACTER SHEET**

The following page is a copy of the RQIII standard character sheet which I and others have refined for years. It is in part based on a sheet which I believe appeared in the RuneMasters book for RQII. The linear track for limb and total hit points is, I think more convenient than the human shape provided with the game. If anyone has any comments or suggestions, please let me know—I'd really appreciate it.

**NEXT ISSUE:**

The Nereyon campaign writeup (finally), more Runequest material, and...uh...other stuff. --->PM