

RPJ Core

The Pen And Paper RPG System For When Pen And Paper Is All You've Got

Picture an awesome illustration here.

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Introduction

Congratulations on your acquisition of RPJ, the tabletop RPG system which requires nothing more than some sort of writing tool (pencils are best), some sort of medium upon which to write (paper is a solid choice), and the dice from your Monopoly, Backgammon, or Yahtzee set¹. On account of this is, as of the time of this writing, mostly a joke, I will continue now with the rules.

Before I do that, however, fourteen pages into this rulebook I find myself thinking of it as a somewhat more serious joke: I have two people who have categorically stated that they will playtest for me, one more who has implicitly expressed interest, and one who has not yet implicitly expressed interest, but should given enough prodding. In addition, I need to think for a little bit about the design of the grapple system and Simple Magic System while still feeling productive: so here I am.

I feel I ought to describe the goals and aims of RPJ as a system a little better, given that this is the introduction to the entire system. I identify (note to self: fill in the number of things here later [note to self: leave this here, as it's funnier that way]) primary aims: first, to be able to say 'ha!' to all of my friends who claimed it would never reach a playable state (it hasn't, yet, but at the time of this clause we march ever forward; at the time of *this* clause, it is in fact quite playable); second, to be nearly infinitely extensible; third, to be a fairly simple game to sit down and play (we'll see how this one goes). Anyway. Onward to the rules!

Be Creative

After a brief aside (or two). 'Be creative' (alternately stated as 'if you can convince the GM', or something along those lines) is something of a catchall phrase I will use within these pages to describe a virtue in users of RPJ.

The rules contained herein and the rules contained in any RPJ-based games do not and will never cover every possible situation. When this inconveniences you, roll with it. Suggest a mechanism for resolving the problem. Add a new skill to whichever setting you are playing in. Players, I exhort you—do not feel limited by a lack of extant rules.

Don't Be An Idiot

The second Rule of RPJ is simply, 'don't be an idiot'. It is likewise a virtue in users of RPJ.

While I encourage creativity, I do not encourage idiocy. Yes, it is true that there is no rule that explicitly states how high you can jump. No, you cannot leap a tall building in a single bound unless you are an extraordinary person, or maybe if the building is only tall to scale. Gamemasters, I exhort you—do not let your players screw with the system too severely.

Using This Rulebook

In PDF format, this rulebook contains a hierarchical, clickable table of contents your PDF reader should be able to interpret. In print formats, the table of contents is not clickable. There is also an index. The index is neither clickable in electronic formats² nor clickable in print³.

¹ Previous versions of this rulebook made a crack about coins and stinginess, a relic of the days when RPJ purported to be playable with coins. It still is, technically, but I've come around to recommending the dice.

² I haven't figured out how to do that yet.

³ I suspect this will present a rather more difficult challenge.

Any time a new word of mechanical interest is introduced, it appears in **bold face**. *Italic text* in the running text ordinarily indicates an exception to a previously laid-out rule.

Indented, italicized text denotes examples.

Many Optional Core Mechanics have a heading called 'For Gamemasters and Module Authors'. Players can safely skip the information contained therein. Its purpose is to provide the named classes of people with guidelines on how to set costs for things or how to improvise them on the fly.

Anyway. Onward to the rules!

Icky Legal Stuff

I lie. There is a little more to go before the rules, relating to how exactly you can modify RPJ.

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...anyway. Onward to the rules!

Core Mechanics

Dice!

Coins: Not Recommended

RPJ's system for generating randomness is based on the common d2, as known in the business, or on the two-sided coin, as known to normal people. Any number will suffice, but ten is ideal. More and your pockets jingle (and you will just have extra coins lying around; useful if you need to decide who pays for the pizza, otherwise not especially helpful), fewer and some tasks will require you to flip more d2s than you actually have. I am completely serious when I say that you will require none of the extra kit that many RPGs require you to lug around; i.e. miniatures, other varieties of dice, graph paper for mapping, complicated rulebooks that are updated (or even published in installments!) solely because Big RPG Publishing doesn't have its hands in your pockets enough *already*, etc. etc.

There are several types of d2, however: there's the classic d2, which reads either 2 or 1 (heads and tails, respectively); there's the d1, which reads either one or zero (heads or tails); and there's the $d\pm 1$, which reads 1 (heads) or -1 (tails) (but with caveats, described in the Rolling Dice Optional Core Mechanic). All three of these are used in RPJ.

In addition to these three officially sanctioned roll types, there are an infinite number of other ways to read the result of a coin flip; to specify any one of these, use the form dn/m where n is the value of heads and m is the value of tails (consider combinations like $d6/3$ and $d8/1$; while combinations like $d4/4$ are technically possible, they are not especially useful when compared to the already-extant integer 4).

The most common $d\pm 1$ roll is the skill or attribute check, which normally involves rolling $10d\pm 1$.

d6en

(Pronounce 'dee-sixen'.) It has come to my attention that flipping ten coins is flipping annoying. It has further come to my attention¹ that a few six-sided dice can be used as a much more convenient replacement, generating a similar bell curve. Any time you see a $10d\pm 1$ roll called for, you may substitute a $4d6$ roll and subtract 14. (Both range from -9 to 9, with the all-heads/sixes and all-tails/ones results representing critical success and critical failure.)

The d6en infiltration has progressed to the point that official RPJ rules assume you aren't actually silly enough to play with coins. So, ignore the section above this one. All following rules are written with the assumption that you're rolling $4d6$ for everything, rather than $10d\pm 1$. When rolling $4d6$, don't subtract 14. If you insist upon using coins, add 14 to the result of your $10d\pm 1$ rules.

You may similarly use a d6 to stand in for a d2 at any time, taking 1-3 to be heads and 4-6 to be tails.

Attributes

In the RPJ system, there are seven **attributes**: Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Charisma, Willpower, Intelligence, and Luck. These may strike experienced consumers of roleplaying games as somewhat familiar. Rest assured this is entirely intentional. In fact, the only major difference is that six of these

¹ Thanks, BattleTech rulebooks and BattleTech RPG.

attributes are grouped as follows: Strength and Constitution fall into the Brawny category; Dexterity and Charisma fall into the Shifty category; Willpower and Intelligence round out this nice even mechanic by falling into the Brainy category. Luck is not a member of any of the groups.

Attributes exist on a 0-10 scale¹. The default level is 0, while an average human adult falls between 3 and 4.

Attributes have a property known as **bonus**. For attributes between level 0 and level 9, this is simply the attribute's value divided by three and rounded down: the bonus for an attribute of level 0-2 is 0, for an attribute of level 3-5 is +1, for an attribute of level 6-8 is +2, and for an attribute of level 9 is +3. An attribute of level 10 confers a +4 bonus².

Following are short descriptions of each of the attributes.

Strength

Well-known in the RPG community as the attribute of choice for large characters wielding weapons of ridiculous magnitude. This is the attribute that determines how much you can carry without collapsing, how hard you can swing a given weapon, so long as it requires no finesse whatsoever, your ability to open locked doors without the use of lockpicks, and generally your ability to unstoppably force immovable objects to yield.

Constitution

A measure of your physical durability and tolerance of pain. Also important for the massive brutes with big weapons.

Dexterity

The illegitimate child of your reaction time, fleetness of foot, and quickness of fingers. Thieving sorts and those who enjoy being sneaky will find this a useful attribute.

Charisma

A measure of the general likability of your character, as well as his ability to influence others to his point of view. Generally included in RPG systems so that gamemasters may demand checks of what is, for 95% of classes, an attribute where the extra points go. Humor generally follows.

Willpower

Mental constitution: your ability to focus on certain things and ignore certain other things. Important for resisting things that other brainy folks try to do to you, and for noticing things.

Intelligence

Put simply, the amount of brainpower which you possess. This is important for things like spellcasting, as well as for a general measure of craftiness and cunning. Players too dull to figure out puzzles without GM assistance may make character intelligence checks for hints; however, the GM may justifiably snark regarding the *player's* intelligence score.

¹ Usually. An attribute might be above ten or below zero, but such an attribute represents such a titanic amount of awesome or pathetic amount of suck as to be almost useless in practice.

² For attribute levels greater than 10, to determine the attribute bonus, halve the attribute level and round down.

Luck

How lucky your character is.

Lucky Breaks

RPJ is a narrative-focused roleplaying system; it isn't the goal of the system to murder player characters on a regular basis¹. As such, it provides **Lucky Breaks**: a mechanism by which players may fix their characters' mistakes.

Every session, each player character receives a number of Lucky Breaks equal to her Luck bonus, with a minimum of one. One Lucky Break may be spent to reroll any throw of the dice which is not a critical failure. After using a Lucky Break, you may not use the original roll, unless you spend another Lucky Break to reroll again.

Optional Core Mechanics and modules may use Lucky Breaks as a sort of currency to avoid very bad outcomes. In such cases, you may be required to permanently spend a Lucky Break, so that you start each session with fewer Lucky Breaks than your Luck bonus. Gamemasters may return such lost Lucky Breaks at their discretion.

Base And Effective Levels

There are two important quantities you must keep track of for any given attribute: your **base** and **effective** levels. The distinction is important: your base level is the level you have in the attribute without any extra modifiers (extra modifiers being defined as anything that changes an attribute besides RPJ Character Points, or anything that does not explicitly state that it changes base level). The cost to raise an attribute is based solely on your base level—modifiers have no effect.

Your effective level is the more important one: it is the value used for everything else, including calculating your attribute bonus and anything else that attributes do in your particular RPJ setting.

Skills

There's not much what to say here. **Skills** are specific, where attributes are broad: skills fall under one of the attributes, which may (or may not, depending on the skill) be rolled as a substitute. A test of a skill is called a **check**. In general, to make a check of a skill, you roll the dice and add your effective skill level, then compare the result to a difficulty called a **Target Number**.

There is no standard set; each setting defines its own, a characteristic which creates much of RPJ's incredible flexibility.

Gamemasters who wish to have players after more than two or three weeks will, of course, include some sort of skill gain mechanic. Possible systems for both rolling skills (using 4d6) and creating and advancing characters are included in the Optional Core Mechanics section.

Base And Effective Levels

Base and effective levels work for skills in much the same way as they do for attributes, base level being the level which determines cost, while effective skill level is the one which faces the world.

The RPJ Skills Optional Core Mechanic explains more about the default RPJ rules for skills, and how

¹ Unless they're *really* asking for it.

to determine base and effective skill levels.

Generating Attributes

In an attempt to make this as painless as possible for those new to the system (as of this writing, it is very difficult to be used to this system, particularly because I am making this up as I go), I will now walk you, dear reader, through generating a character's attributes in each of the two possible ways.

Meet Laeniel Relaiesh. She is (or will be) the scantily-clad seventeen-year-old elvish alter-ego of a cheeto-stained forty-year-old male named Dave, who despite all of his failings has some small talent as a fantasy illustrator—that is, even though his lack of talent is prodigious enough to prevent him from finding work in that field, he does have a very good grasp of how to draw a borderline-pornographic elf.

However, we can't hold the faults of poor Laeniel's creator against the elf herself; through the remainder of this text, Laeniel has agreed to serve as an example. It's the first night of Dave's new gaming group, and he's brought a blank piece of paper for Laeniel's character sheet, to which he has attached a scandalous portrait.

The first method is rolling for attributes. Roll 4d6-9 or 10d±1+5 seven times. Throw out the lowest score and assign the remaining six to your six non-Luck attributes. Attribute values may not be greater than 10 or less than 0. Any values outside that range must either be treated as 0 (for low rolls) or 10 (for high ones) or rerolled, depending on the gamemaster's generosity and/or hostility¹.

After sorting out the more important issue of whose turn it is to pay for the pizza, Dave and his pals get down to character creation. To begin with, they have two options. Dave trusts his dice (coins), and decides to roll 'em. He rolls 4d6-9 (or 10d±1+5) seven times—one for each of the first six attributes (he can choose which rolls go to which attributes, of course), plus one to throw out in case of poor rolling.

Once you assign your roles to your attributes, figure out your **primary attribute category** (from Brainy, Brawny, or Shifty). Sum the levels of the members of each category. The category with the highest total is your primary attribute category.

Dave rolls a 9, a 6, 5 twice, 3 twice, and 1. He discards the 1, and assigns the remaining rolls to attributes. Laeniel has a Dexterity of 9 and a Dexterity bonus of +3, a Charisma of 6 and bonus of +2, an Intelligence of 5/+1, a Willpower of 3/+1, a Constitution of 5/+1 a Strength of 3/+1. Her primary attribute category is Shifty; its attribute levels total 14, against 8 for the other two.

The second method is point buy. If you opt for point buy, you receive 60 **attribute points** to spend on your attributes. You may not save attribute points for later; you must spend them all at character creation.

When using the point buy system, you must select a primary attribute category from Brainy, Brawny, or Shifty.

The cost to raise an attribute to a given level from the immediately preceding level is given in the table at right. For attributes in the primary category, the cost

Level	Primary	Not Primary
1, 2, 3	1	2
4, 5, 6	2	4
7, 8, 9	3	6
10	4	8

¹ Gamemasters, tell your players which rule you're following.

to raise the attribute by one level is the desired level divided by 3, rounded up. For attributes outside the primary category, the cost is doubled. Appendix C, on page 61, contains a table which gives the cost to raise a primary attribute from any level to any higher level.

Fred, the fellow to Dave's left, is an accountant, continually befuddled by the way people dumber than he is seem to get ahead in life, playing this game because it's something he can actually control. He is as such a plodding, planned-the-character-last-night system gamer, and opts instead for the points system for his caveman mage, Ug the Cave-Mage, a walking testament to the power of min-maxing.

Fred desires to build a balanced spellcaster. He picks Brainy as his primary attribute category, and decides to raise all his attributes to 4. For the two attributes inside his primary category, the cost is 5 attribute points each: one point per level for levels 1 to 3, and two points for level 4. He has spent 10 points in total. For the four attributes outside his primary category, the cost is 10 points each: two points per level for levels 1 to 3, and four points for level 4. He has now spent a total of 50 points, leaving him ten more. He raises his Intelligence to level 6 at a cost of four points: two points to level 5 and two points to level 6. Bumping his Willpower to level 5 for two points, he finds he has four points left. He spends them to raise his Constitution from level 4 to level 5 for four points.

Whether you roll your attributes or determine them with point buy, you *must* determine your Luck level by rolling. Roll 4d6-9 or 10d±1+5 once. Reroll any result below 0. The result is your Luck score.

Fred's final attributes and bonuses are: Strength 4/+1, Constitution 5/+1, Intelligence 6/+2, Willpower 5/+1, Dexterity 4/+1, Charisma 4/+1.

Finally, he rolls 4d6-9 for his Luck. The dice read 17, so his Luck is 8.

Dave rolls once more for his Luck, and the final result is 5.

From this point on, everything else done at character creation is specific to a given setting, and as such should be laid out in detailed yet elegant prose in that particular setting's documentation. In the following Optional Core Mechanics section, you will find some systems common to RPJ Fantasy and RPJ Sci-Fi for skills, health, and combat. You can use them if you like.

Optional Core Mechanics

RPJ is a system devised to allow for a wild variety of settings, ranging from modern to science fiction to fantasy to whatever else creative minds can come up with. However, to make those who create campaigns do ridiculous amounts of design work for systems that many settings will share would be sadistic of me. As such, RPJ comes with a variety of Optional Core Mechanics that can be included in settings, leaving much of the mind-bending design work (that is to say, making things up) to me.

Each Optional Core Mechanic will note the requirements for using it—some may require adding certain skills to your skill list, while others will require other Optional Core Mechanics to use.

RPJ Dice

The official RPJ Optional Core Mechanic for character skills drops the pretense that playing with coins is practical, and uses the unmodified 4d6 roll for convenience. After this point, if the rulebook says 'roll', assume 4d6; if playing with coins, roll 10d±1+14.

RPJ defines a critical success as all heads or sixes, and a critical failure as all tails or ones.

Appendix B contains several probability tables.

Coins: Still Not Recommended

Before a play session begins, when playing with coins, two 'spoiler coins' must be chosen—either two of a certain type, two that are otherwise visually distinctive, or even two that land in a particular place (for instance, the two leftmost coins) following each roll. In RPJ coin-dice notation, the positive spoiler is $d+2/-1$ and the negative spoiler is $d+1/-2$ ¹. These two coins allow the roll result to be an odd number (an admirable goal, as it doubles the range of possible values without moving the distribution too far from a bell curve).

Decision Tables

RPJ suggests using base 6 for any large decision tables you may require. This table is readily indexed by d6 rolls; even if you're playing with coins, surely you have a Monopoly set or something to pilfer a single d6 from².

1d6, obviously, yields 6 possibilities; 2d6 gives 36, and 3d6 gives 216. If you need somewhere between 36 and 216 possibilities, you can divide by 2, 4, or 8 for 108, 54, and 27 possibilities, respectively³. When rolling multiple dice, read from left to right.

Dave rolls 3d6, which read 3, 1, and 5 from left to right. He reads the table entry next to 315.

Fred rolls 3d6, which read 6, 1, and 4 from left to right. He reads the table entry next to 614⁴.

Some modules may use a deck of playing cards to generate decision table indices instead⁵.

Random Choice

You may sometimes be required to pick a random entry off of a list which does not fit into a decision table. You can use a d6 binary search to do so⁶. Roll a handful of d6es and read them in order. Divide the list in half and look at the first die. On 4-6, move to the top half; on 1-3, move to the bottom half. Use the second die to pick half of the sub-list, and repeat the process until you've narrowed the list to

- 1 It is not necessary to keep track of which is which. If one shows heads and one shows tails, they cancel out; if both show heads, the result is 3, while if both show tails the result is -3.
- 2 A binary-to-heximal-plus-one conversion chart is another possible solution, but is beyond the scope of this rulebook, and indeed any rulebook which does not wish to drive its readers insane. Perhaps for RPJ Lovecraft...
- 3 This division is easier to accomplish by larger ranges in the decision table rather than math at the gaming table. 1 to 14 on 3d6 / 8 is the same as 1-108 on a straight 3d6 roll, and only requires calculation ahead of time.
- 4 The numbering system for d6 decision tables is indeed heximal (as alluded to in an earlier footnote), but uses the glyphs 1-6 to represent the numbers which common base 6 would represent with 0-5. Weird? Heavens yes, but this is RPJ, and weird is our stock in trade.
- 5 This also leaves gamemasters the gratifying option of making their players *pick* what terrible thing will happen to them.
- 6 If you aren't a stickler for dice and dice alone, you can also use a random number generator app on your phone, or point a web browser at www.random.org/integers.

one item.

When halving a list with an odd number of items, always take the extra item.

Dave has a list of the numbers 1-24, and must pick one at random. He rolls 4d6.

The first die reads 5, so Dave divides the list in two and looks at the top half, 13-24.

The second die reads 2, so Dave divides 13-24 in two and looks at the bottom half, 13-18.

The third die reads 1, so Dave divides 13-18 in two and looks at the bottom half, 13-15.

The fourth die reads 6, so Dave divides 13-15 in two. The size of the list (13, 14, 15) is odd, so Dave takes the extra item and the high half of the list: 14-15. One more roll of the die reads 4, so Dave takes 15.

Suggestions for Using Coins

Having, via experimentation, explored some of the practical outcomes of the system above, I offer the below as a short list of ways to make the system play faster or better. Most are obvious.

Most importantly, skip the coins and use 4d6 instead; the system is now written with 4d6 in mind, though it remains compatible with coins. If you insist...

First, do not waste your time flipping each coin individually. Get all ten (or however many) in your hands, shake them, and throw them at some surface (for obvious reasons¹, I would suggest something padded).

Second, use small coins—dimes or pennies are ideal. Larger coins do not turn over as well when shaken. As a corollary, use coins with distinctive sides—I find that shiny pennies or dimes are better than most anything else, due to their size and the easy differentiation between heads and tails (state quarters, by the way, are just about the worst). If you find that you enjoy RPJ enough to play on a serious, regular basis, label your coins with scraps of paper. Alternately, get yourself a set of those miniature d6s and label those (three sides 'heads', three sides 'tails').

Third, do not individually count every coin in a 10d±1 roll. Match up each spoiler heads with two tails(es?) (or spoiler tails with two regular heads(es?), as appropriate), then match up each remaining heads with a tails. Count the remaining coins.

¹ In case you didn't realize, throwing ten coins at a table is really loud.

RPJ Character Points

RPJ Character Points barely deserve their own Optional Core Mechanic. But for the dependence of both Skills and Traits upon it, it would not exist. Suffice it to say that **character points** are a currency which may be spent upon various character improvements. They are distinct from attribute points. Attribute points may not be used as character points, and character points may not be used as attribute points.

For Module Authors

Module authors should provide a method to gain initial character points at character creation, and a method to gain character points over the course of the game.

RPJ Skills

The standard skill roll uses 4d6 without modification as the source of randomness. To make an RPJ skill roll using 10d±1, add 14 to the result of the 10d±1 roll.

Dependencies

The RPJ Skills Optional Core Mechanic depends on the RPJ Dice and RPJ Character Points Optional Core Mechanics.

Skill Levels

RPJ skills, like attributes, operate on a scale from 0 to 10. All skills have an associated attribute referred to as the skill's **linked attribute**.

The cost to raise a skill to a given level from the immediately preceding level is shown in the table to the right. Costs are cumulative: to go from level 0 to level 3 ordinarily costs 6 character points, two points per level raised. In Appendix C on page 61, you can find a table which lists the cost to raise skills of each type from any level to any other level. In the section on RPJ Characters on page 26, you can find examples.

Level	Discount	Normal	Penalty
1, 2, 3	1	2	4
4, 5, 6	2	4	8
7, 8, 9	3	6	12
10	4	8	16

RPJ modules may define some skills to be **discount** or **penalty**, whether based on class, linked attribute, or some other criteria. For discounted or penalized skills, use the appropriate cost column instead.

You have level 0 in every skill on which you haven't spent character points. Some specialist skills cannot be used at level 0; their descriptions will indicate this.

Base and Effective Levels

Your base level in a skill is simply the level you've spent character points to raise it to. Your effective level in a skill is the base level, plus the skill's linked attribute bonus.

Your effective level in a skill whose base level is 0 is simply the skill's linked attribute bonus.

Passive Level

Your **passive level** in a skill is your effective level in that skill minus 1. Passive level is not meaningful for all skills. Your module rulebook will note where or how it is used.

Rolling Skills

Skill checks are made against a **Target Number** (often abbreviated TN). Target Numbers are often given as, for instance, TN14+: the final result of the skill roll must be greater than or equal to 14 to succeed.

In general, the attacker or initiator of the action rolls the dice. For standard, unopposed skill checks, most modifiers apply to the result of the roll.

To roll a skill, add your skill's effective level to the result of a 4d6 roll.

Ug wishes to roll his Club Use skill, which he has trained to level 5, against a Target Number of 18+. Its linked attribute is Strength; Ug's Strength bonus is +1. Ug's effective level, the sum of his base skill level and linked attribute bonus, is 6. Any dice roll of 12 (18 or more, including Ug's effective skill level) or more will succeed.

Critical Successes and Failures

A critical success occurs when all four dice show 6; a critical failure occurs when all four dice show 1. Criticals are much rarer in RPJ than in other roleplaying systems, occurring about once every six hundred rolls. Gamemasters should consider this when assigning results.

Opposed Checks

To make an **opposed** skill check, you roll a skill against an opponent's skill level. To determine the Target Number, add the opponent's effective skill level to a base Target Number of 14+ and roll against it as usual.

The attacker makes a skill roll against this Target Number, succeeding the check if the roll is greater than or equal to the Target Number.

Ug and Laeniel are playing a bracing game of Thinly-Disguised Fantasy Checkers. Ug must make an opposed check of the Games skill against Laeniel.

Ug has Games trained to level 2, and has an Intelligence bonus of +2. Laeniel does not have Games trained above level 0, and has an Intelligence bonus of +1.

To determine the difficulty, Ug starts with the base Target Number of 14+. He adds Laeniel's Intelligence bonus of +1 for a final TN15+.

If Laeniel were rolling against Ug, she would determine her Target Number as follows. Start with the base Target Number of 14+. Add Ug's Intelligence bonus of +2. Add Ug's Games skill level of 2. The final Target Number would be 18+.

Degrees of Success

Skill checks have **degrees of success**. Divide the **margin of success** (the result of the roll minus the Target Number) by two, rounding down to a minimum of one, to get the number of degrees of success. A skill check's **degree of success** is shorthand for 'the number of degrees of success'.

A roll of 15 against TN14+ exceeds the Target Number by 1. Half of the margin of success rounded down is 0, but all successful rolls yield at least one degree of success. The number of degrees of success is therefore 1.

A roll of 16 against TN14+ exceeds the Target Number by 2. Half of the 2 is 1, the degree of success.

A roll of 21 against TN14+ exceeds the Target Number by 7. The degree of success is half of 7 rounded down: 3.

Skills vs. Attributes

In general, players make skill checks rather than attribute checks.

Sometimes, however, an attribute check is more appropriate. "Can I eat this poison?" is an example of a question which is probably better answered by a Constitution check than by a skill check. "How long can I stare at this wall?" might call for a Willpower check.

In addition, gamemasters are encouraged to ask their players to make Luck checks when things go pear-shaped in order to see just how pear-shaped things actually go.

When making an attribute check, add your effective attribute level to 4d6.

Specialties

Some skills may be listed in a general form—Piloting, say, or Crafting—and direct you to **pick a specialty**, an area of focus in that skill, from a list of options. Record the skill on your character sheet with the specialty in parentheses: Piloting (Airships) or Crafting (Wood), for instance. Roll at no bonus or penalty for tasks in your specialty. You may roll for tasks using a different specialty in the same skill at a penalty of -2. Some skills may change the specialty penalty; see your module rulebook.

Otherwise, a skill with one specialty is distinct from the same skill with a different specialty. Piloting (Airships) and Piloting (Submersibles) are not the same skill. You may have both on your sheet; they are entirely independent of one another.

When rolling an untrained skill with a specialty, roll at the -2 penalty (or the skill-specific specialty penalty, if any).

For Gamemasters and Module Authors

RPJ module authors should provide a list of skills and their associated attributes. Appendix A provides lists of common skills for various genres for your inspiration.

More Frequent Criticals

If you want a more critical-friendly game, pick a few other dice events to yield critical success and critical failure. For instance, four-of-a-kind 4, 5, and 6 are critical successes and four-of-a-kind 1, 2, and 3 are critical failures. Four-of-a-kind for a given number has a chance of 0.08%; the suggestion above yields a critical success or critical failure about every two hundred rolls on average.

For an even more critical-friendly game, call all rolls above or below a certain threshold a critical success or failure. For criticals on 4, 5, 23, and 24 (5-/23+), you'll see one every 130 rolls. For criticals up to 6 and down to 22 (6-/22+), you'll see one every forty rolls. Up to 7 and down to 21 (7-/21+) yields one every twenty rolls. For criticals up to 8 and down to 20 (8-/20+), you'll encounter a critical success or failure at a D&D-like rate of roughly once per ten rolls¹.

Choosing Target Numbers

To aid in choosing Target Numbers, the following table provides a list of Target Numbers for various difficulties and effective skill levels, assuming 4d6 rolls. The distribution for 10d±1 is slightly different, but comparable². Each row gives Target Numbers yielding approximate success chances for the given skill level. The Novice row assumes a +1 attribute bonus and a skill level of 3. The Trained

- 1 I think some of RPJ's charm comes from the way characters who ought to succeed at a task at a given difficulty regularly succeed, and characters who ought to fail at a task ordinarily fail. At the same time, critical successes and failures spice up otherwise-impossible or otherwise-routine actions. I find myself preferring 7-/21+ criticals the more I playtest.
- 2 Players using coins and 4d6en should be perfectly capable of playing side-by-side in the same campaign. Both 10d±1+14 and 4d6 center on 14. The former's standard deviation is 3.54, and the latter's is 3.42.

row assumes a +2 attribute bonus and a skill level of 5. The Expert row assumes an attribute bonus of +3 and a skill level of 7. The Base row gives the distribution for an unmodified 4d6 roll.

An easy task, such as shooting targets at a shooting range or bribing a local customs official, should be set in the region of TN13+ to TN14+. Characters with the skill trained to any level will ordinarily succeed at this difficulty.

A moderately difficult task, such as landing an aircraft in a storm or calculating a new, more efficient jump route between two star systems, should be set at roughly TN18+ to TN20+. Characters with only a small investment into a skill will succeed about half the time at this difficulty, while expert characters will usually succeed.

A very difficult task, like assembling a new power armor to a long-lost design or repairing a jump ship's jump engines, should be set in the range TN22+ to TN24+. Even expert characters may struggle at this difficulty.

Tasks of epic difficulty should be set in the range TN25+ and greater. Only characters of legendary skill will have a very good shot of succeeding at this difficulty.

When determining effective skill levels for NPCs against which player characters may have to roll, bear in mind that with identical effective skill levels, the entity rolling has a 55% chance of success (since the roller wins ties).

Full probability charts can be found in Appendix B (page 60).

	95% success	75% success	50% success	25% success	5% success
Base (0)	9+	12+	14+	17+	20+
Novice (+4)	13+	16+	18+	21+	24+
Trained (+7)	16+	19+	21+	24+	27+
Expert (+10)	19+	22+	24+	27+	30+

RPJ Gifts, Faults, and Quirks

The Gifts, Faults, and Quirks Optional Core Mechanic provides a framework for non-skill character qualities: a bonus which applies to initiative rolls, say, but not generally; or a one-time way to boost an attribute with character points; or a marker that a character has the implanted hardware to operate large mecha controlled by neuro-link. In short, a Gift, Fault, or Quirk (**Trait** is used to cover all three) is any character quality not adequately represented by a skill, or any bonus or penalty to a skill or attribute which should only apply in certain cases.

If it isn't a skill, it's a trait.

Gifts

Gifts are traits which have situational, positive mechanical effects, requiring an expenditure of character points to take. A gift might permit you to roll Persuasion at +1 when negotiating prices, or make ranged attack rolls at +1 when attacking targets in cover.

Faults

Faults are traits which have negative mechanical effects, refunding character points to those who take them. Unlike gifts, faults are not necessarily situational.

Quirks

Quirks either have roughly balanced mechanical effect, or primarily affect roleplay. They may have a small cost or grant a small refund, but given the broad definition and range of possibilities, it is difficult to provide further guidance here.

For Gamemasters and Module Authors

RPJ module authors are responsible for providing a list of traits and their effects.

Trait Costs

Traits should be assigned appropriate costs based on the benefits they provide, ordinarily between about 5 and 10 character points.

Gifts should be less expensive than raising skills to get the same effect, owing to the greater generality of simply raising a skill.

A gift which provides a +2 bonus to Initiative rolls when entering combat might cost 5 character points. (Raising Initiative from 4 to 6 would cost 8 points, assuming the Initiative skill is Normal-cost skill.) Since it only applies in certain situations, it ought to cost less than the associated skill. This gift is therefore useful to gain performance on a budget.

Faults should be priced in a similar fashion to gifts, although they should refund fewer points than comparable gifts cost.

RPJ Health

Laboriously tracking hitpoints is so 20th century. We can do better. We can laboriously track something else.

RPJ Health dispenses with hitpoints entirely. Damage is now a measure of how overwhelmingly powerful an attack is. Entities which would have had health now have a number of **damage saves**, which they roll to defend themselves. Let's look at how they interact with damage.

Dependencies

RPJ Health depends on the RPJ Dice Optional Core Mechanic.

Damage Saves

A **damage saving throw** (almost always called a **damage save**) represents the resilience of a character or a layer of defense. A character might have damage saves for a magical shield, a mundane shield, armor, and his own body. A spacecraft might have damage saves for shields, armor, and hull. Each damage save has an associated Target Number. Lower Target Numbers are better.

Damage

Weapons and other sources of damage have a **damage** value, which is added to the Target Number of the damage save. Damage need not be a positive number: a dagger or a little mouse-gun or a pistol might have a damage of, say, -2.

'-2 damage' *always* means 'the absolute quantity negative-two damage', and never 'a penalty to damage in the amount negative-two'. Whenever an effect grants a bonus or penalty to damage, RPJ rulebooks will always say 'add X damage' or 'subtract X damage', or some variation thereof.

Character Damage Saves

Each RPJ character gets four damage saves by default, referred to as his **base damage saves**: one damage save at 14+ minus his effective Constitution level, two damage saves at 14+ minus his Constitution bonus, and one damage save at 14+.

RPJ modules may modify the rules for character base damage saves. Consult your rulebook.

Ug the Cave-Mage, Fred's character from the character creation section, has the following damage saves: TN9+ (his Constitution level, 5, subtracted from the base TN14+), TN12+ twice (his Constitution bonus, +2, subtracted from the base TN14+), and TN14+.

He notes them on his character sheet from lowest Target Number to highest: 9+/12+/12+/14+.

Other Damage Saves

Characters may wear equipment or possess skills or abilities which add damage saves. Each piece of equipment or skill which adds damage saves is considered a separate **layer of defense**, unless it explicitly adds a base damage save. On your character sheet, note damage saves for different layers of defense on separate lines, or otherwise separated in some obvious fashion.

Some weapons or skills may bypass certain layers of defense. Consult your RPJ module rulebook for

details.

Ug is wearing leather armor, which has three damage saves: TN8+, TN8+, and TN10+. Fred notes these damage saves on the line below Ug's base damage saves: 8+/8+/10+.

Order

Damage saves must be used in order.

Unless otherwise stated, temporary damage saves from special abilities must be used first. Damage saves from equipped shields come next. Damage saves from armor come third; finally, base damage saves come last.

For each layer of defense, damage saves must be used from lowest Target Number to highest.

Multiple special abilities which add temporary damage saves each add a layer of defense. You may choose the order of such layers.

Ug casts Rock Armor on himself, which grants him damage saves of TN6+ and TN8+. He notes them on his sheet; he must use them in that order.

Later, he casts Pebble Armor on himself, granting him one damage save of TN9+. He elects to place the Pebble Armor damage save between Rock Armor and his leather armor.

After the prior three examples, the damage saves section on his character sheet looks like this:

*9+/12+/12+/14+ (his base damage saves)
8+/8+/10+ (his leather armor)
9+ (Pebble Armor)
6+/8+ (Rock Armor)*

When determining which save to use, he looks at the leftmost number on the lowest line.

Making a Damage Save

To make a damage save against a source of damage, add the damage to the damage save's Target Number and roll 4d6 against it.

If the final save Target Number is 4+ or less (that is, if it's an automatic success), do nothing. If the final save roll is a critical success, do nothing.

If the roll succeeds, so does the damage save. On your character sheet, cross out the damage save you just rolled. You may not use it again until you have recovered it. See your RPJ module's rulebook for details on how to recover damage saves.

The following example assumes Rock Armor and Pebble Armor have expired.

A half-orc attacks Ug, but he dodges. Since he took no damage, he is not required to make a damage save.

A half-orc attacks him, hitting him with a dagger with damage -2. He is required to make a damage save. He must first use his leather armor's damage saves, since it is his outermost layer of defense. Adding the weapon's damage (-2) to the Target Number (8+), he comes to a final Target Number of 6+. He rolls a 13, succeeding. He crosses off the first damage

save on the line for his leather armor.

Failing a Damage Save

Failing a damage save for a layer of defense results in the immediate loss of all remaining damage saves for that layer. On your character sheet, cross them all out. Do not apply the damage to the next layer of defense; even on a failed damage save, a layer of defense stops the incoming damage.

A layer of defense whose damage saves have all been crossed out is said to be **broken**. Broken layers of defense no longer provide any benefit. Incoming damage ignores them and hits the next innermost layer of defense.

When your base damage saves are broken, you are defeated. Module and Optional Core Mechanic authors should define what defeat means in their systems.

A full-orc attacks him, hitting him with a triply-enchanted Great-Grand-Axe of Slaying, with damage 20. Adding that to his leather armor's next damage save (its second TN8+), he sees that the Target Number is 28+. Given that 4d6 can roll at maximum 24, he has definitely failed the damage save, barring a critical success, which he does not get. The attack has cloven his leather armor asunder. He crosses out all remaining damage saves for his armor. Future attacks will hit his base damage saves.

A goblin shaman hits him with a lightning bolt with damage 4. His armor gone, he now consults his base damage saves. Adding the damage to his best base damage save of TN9+, he ends up with TN13+. He rolls a 12. Uh-oh. He has been defeated. Fred consults the RPJ Gridless Combat System Optional Core Mechanic rules to discover what this means.

For Module Authors

Module authors must define what 'defeat' means, whether by using additional Optional Core Mechanics or by assigning some meaning to it in their modules.

Damage and Save Success Chances

0 damage dealt against a TN14+ damage save yields a 55% chance of save success. The same damage dealt against a 12+ damage save yields a 75% chance of save success. Against a 9+ damage save, it yields a 95% chance of save success.

RPJ Characters

The RPJ Characters Optional Core Mechanic provides a framework for creating and advancing characters, based on the preceding Optional Core Mechanics. We'll start by making a character sheet (or explaining the one included at the end of this rulebook), then move on to rules.

Dependencies

RPJ Characters depends on the RPJ Dice, RPJ Character Points, RPJ Skills, RPJ Gifts, Faults, and Quirks, and RPJ Health Optional Core Mechanics.

Creating a Character Sheet

First, find a piece of paper to use as your character sheet. (Your module may also provide a character sheet.) You will want places to record a few key aspects. Leave yourself space for any information fundamental (name, portrait, species, gender) or biographical you'd like to record for your own benefit.

Near the top of the page, put down a space for Total Character Points and a space for Available Character Points. RPJ uses Total Character Points to determine a character's overall strength, and a record of character points available to spend is also handy to have near at hand.

Write down the seven attribute names¹, leaving space for the attribute level and attribute bonus next to each one.

Nearby, reserve four to six lines and half a column or so for damage saves. These lines allow you to record your base damage saves, as well as damage saves for armor, shields, and special cases.

You will want a place to record your Gifts, Faults, and Quirks. Be as compact or as wordy as you feel you need to be. A name and a short description is a good middle ground.

Finally, make a skill table. It should contain four columns: name, base level, attribute bonus, and effective level. (You may want a fifth column for other modifiers.) You'll also want a few lines to record your class skill slots and anti-class skill slots. (Read ahead for more on skill slots.)

Character Power

Character power is the number of RPJ Character Points a character has spent in his lifetime. This is germane to character creation: the number of points you at the start of the game determines how powerful your character will be to begin with. The table below provides examples of character point values which correspond to some possible starting points.

¹ Abbreviate them however you like, but STR, CON, DEX, CHA, INT, WIL, and LCK are the usual short forms.

Character Points	Description
40	Novice (2 class skills at 5, 3 non-class skills at 3)
60	Trained (3 class skills at 6, 4 non-class skills at 3)
110	Expert (4 class skills at 7, 5 non-class skills at 4)
160	Godlike (4 class skills at 8, 6 non-class skills at 5)

Character Classes

RPJ Characters uses a lightweight **character class** system to determine certain skill costs and assign certain special abilities to a given class.

Class Skills and Anti-Class Skills

Each character class has a list of **class skills**, as well as four **class skill slots** and four **anti-class skill slots**. Skills in class skill slots use the discount cost column in the RPJ Skills cost table on page 16. Skills in anti-class skill slots use the penalty cost column in the RPJ Skills cost table.

At a cost of 16 RPJ Character Points, you may place a skill from the class skill list into a class skill slot. For a refund of 12 RPJ Character Points, you may place a skill from the class skill list into an anti-class skill slot. Do not add the refund to your Total Character Points.

If a class lists a skill and one or more specialties as a class skill, you may take that skill as a class skill with only the listed specialties. Each skill-specialty combination takes a class skill slot.

Some classes may feature class-specific discount and penalty skills. These skills use the appropriate cost column in the RPJ Skills cost table. You may not use them as class skills or anti-class skills, and they do not count against the four-slot limits.

Class Quirks

Classes may come with special abilities, represented by RPJ Quirks. For instance, in RPJ Sci-Fi, a veteran of the Autokrator's Kataphraktoi has the implants required to wear and control a suit of kataphraktos power armor. In RPJ Fantasy, a luftsmagiker knows how to manipulate the weave of the world to control the wind and weather.

Make a note of any **class quirks** on the Traits portion of your character sheet.

Class Costs

Certain especially desirable or powerful classes may come with an additional cost in character points.

Getting Started

To begin with, generate attributes for your character according to the rules in the Attributes Core Mechanic. Record them on your character sheet. Ask your gamemaster how many character points to start with, and enter that number in both the Total Character Points and Available Character Points fields.

Choose a character class from the list in your RPJ module's rulebook, deducting any character point costs from your Available Character Points.

Fred is creating his character, Ug the Cave-Mage. In an earlier example, he already worked out his attributes: Strength 4, Constitution 5, Dexterity 4, Charisma 4, Intelligence 6, Willpower 5.

The gamemaster decides that this campaign will feature more or less novice characters, and hands out 50 character points to each player. Fred enters '50' in the Total Character Points and Available Character Points fields on his character sheet. He chooses the Cave-Mage class from the RPJ Generic Fantasy Example rulebook, which costs 5 character points. He deducts 5 from his Available Character Points field, for a running total of 45.

Traits

Add any quirks associated with your class to the Traits section of your character sheet.

Select any desired gifts, faults, or quirks from the list provided by your RPJ module. Any traits which have a negative cost *add* to your Available Character Points, but *do not* add to your Total Character Points.

As a Cave-Mage, Ug the Cave-Mage can only speak in guttural grunting sounds. This is represented by the Cave-Mage Class Quirk "Speaks in Grunts". Fred makes a note on his character sheet, and decides to go even further. The "Somatic Spellcasting" Gift costs 5 character points. Fred takes it, along with the "Totally Mute" Fault at a cost of -8 character points. Deducting 5 character points from his Available total and adding 8, he ends up at a running total of 48. His Total Character Points value remains at 50.

Skills

Before purchasing skills, decide how you would like to fill your class skill slots and anti-class skill slots. You may not fill skill slots after character creation. Recall that some classes may also provide for discount cost and penalty cost skills outside of skill slots. Each skill or skill-specialty combination takes one skill slot.

Each skill placed in a class skill slot costs 16 character points, while each skill placed in an anti-class skill slot refunds 12 character points. Character points refunded in this way do not count toward Total Character Points.

Filling class skill slots means that your character will start more slowly but develop over the course of the campaign more quickly. Filling anti-class skill slots means that your character will start stronger, but will also be effectively locked out of certain skills.

See the RPJ Skills Optional Core Mechanic skill cost table on page 16 for skill costs (or the full chart in Appendix C on page 61). When raising a skill, deduct the appropriate number of character points from the Available Character Points section of your character sheet.

Fred has 48 character points to spend on skills. The Cave-Mage class description in the RPJ Generic Fantasy Example rulebook says that Primitive Magic is a discount skill for Cave-Magi, while Refined Magic is a penalty skill. Additionally, he has two class skill slots and two anti-class skill slots to work with. From the Cave-Mage class skill list, Fred picks Club Use and Pelt-Wearing at a cost of 32 character points, leaving him with 16. To claw a few points back, he places Crafting (Wood) and Negotiation in his anti-class skill slots, gaining 24 character points back, bringing his available character points to 40.

Now he must raise skills. He first considers his three discount skills: Primitive Magic, Club Use, and Pelt-Wearing. He spends 12 character points to raise Primitive Magic to 7 and 14 character points to raise Club Use and Pelt-Wearing to 5, leaving him with 14 character points.

He decides to round out Ug's skillset a bit. He raises Refined Magic from 0 to 1 at a cost of 4 character points—useful if the party ends up in a city where Primitive Magic is banned. He raises it no further: Refined Magic is a penalty cost skill, and very expensive to be improving at this stage in Ug's career. He has 10 character points left, and uses six to raise Lock-Bashing from level 0 to level 3, at a cost of two character points per level. He has four remaining, which he reserves for future use.

Improvement Over Time

RPJ Characters do not have levels, as discussed earlier. Characters improve by gaining character points. Characters gain character points by feats of daring adventure. Put another way, gamemasters should have in mind how quickly they want the inevitable power creep to happen, and hand out character points at a matching rate. These character points are added both to Total Character Points and Available Character Points.

After character creation, players may spend character points on skills, within reason. If a character spent the entire session in a desert, the gamemaster may rule Scuba Diving off-limits. Players may bank character points to spend at a more opportune time.

At the gamemaster's sole discretion, players may also spend character points on traits.

Attributes cannot be raised by character points in ordinary circumstances. Gamemasters should make allowances, however, to allow players to adventure for attribute improvements. Only when sufficient roleplaying has occurred to justify raising an attribute may players spend character points to improve an attribute. Improvements occur one point at a time. For attributes in your primary attribute category, use the penalty skill cost table. For attributes outside your primary attribute category, double the cost given by the penalty skill cost table.

Fred has been guiding Ug on adventures for five sessions, receiving a total of 20 character points. His Total Character Points value is now 70, and his Available Character Points total is 20. Ug has had to negotiate by means of sign language, and recently requested after the Codex Influentia, a manual on winning friends. He gets his gamemaster's permission to raise his Charisma from level 4 to level 5. Charisma is a Shifty attribute, and is therefore outside his primary attribute category. The cost is 16 points, double the listed cost to go from level 4 to level 5 in the penalty skill cost table. (If he had been raising Intelligence or Willpower, the cost would be 8 points: the listed cost in the penalty skill cost table.)

He has 4 points remaining to spend. He uses one point to add the Underwater Basket Weaving skill. Underwater Basket Weaving is neither a discount cost skill nor a penalty cost skill, so it uses the Normal column in the skill cost table. He advances the skill from level 0 to level 1 at a cost of 2 points. He has one point remaining, and decides not to spend it for now.

RPJ Gridless Combat

Integrated into RPJ is a flexible combat framework that requires an investment of similar size to the rest—that is to say, pocket change and the nominal cost of pens and/or pencils and paper—called the **Gridless Combat System (GCS)**.

The main purpose of a gridded combat system is to provide a system by which ranges can be decided and advanced movement, such as moving behind creatures, can be accomplished. In practice, however, all fights end up as big mobs in the middle of the map, with the ranged combatants further back. GCS emulates this.

Instead of allowing side-to-side movement, GCS reduces the space complexity of combat from $O(n^2)$ to a mere $O(n)$. Put another way, the battlefield is one-dimensional, allowing motion only toward and away from the opponents¹. Combat takes place on a battlefield with six (usually) regions, numbered from one to six (or more, if the battlefield is particularly large, or fewer, if the battlefield is particularly small).

GCS includes only rules for non-magical melee and ranged damage. Further Optional Core Mechanics are included further on in this rulebook for more complex situations, such as grappling and modern ranged combat, the latter including cover and suppressive fire.

Dependencies

The Gridless Combat System requires the RPJ Dice Optional Core Mechanic, as well as RPJ Skills and RPJ Health. Your setting will also require weapons, weapon skills, armors, and defensive skills.

Definitions

- **Entity**: something engaged in combat, be it player character or non-player character. To simplify the language, these rules will often use 'you' to mean a combat entity; non-player characters follow the same rules as player characters in those places.
- **Player** or **Character**: used interchangeably to mean an entity which is a player character, or the person rolling the dice at the table. See also how the average tabletop gamer uses 'I' as a third-person pronoun. Character may also mean non-player character.
- **Region**: a Gridless Combat System Region, one of the approximately six areas in the battlefield where entities can be located.
 - **Adjacency Group**: a region contains adjacency groups, which are collections of entities close enough together for melee combat.
- **Distance**: the distance between two Gridless Combat System entities.

GCS Implementation Details

Modules which implement the Gridless Combat System often modify the rules somewhat. Look for the section in the module rulebook entitled 'GCS Implementation Details' for the details.

¹ This is not strictly, necessarily true. Some battlefields may have a branching structure. The point is, it isn't a grid.

Actions

You receive two GCS **actions** to start with. If your Dexterity is 5 or more, gain a third action. If your Dexterity is 10 or more, gain a fourth action. Each action may be used as a **Move** or an **Attack**¹.

Move Actions

One Move action permits you to move to an adjacent region. Upon entering the new region, you may join an adjacency group of your choice.

Attack Actions

One Attack action permits you to make one melee or ranged attack.

Switching Equipment

Sheathing or holstering a weapon, then drawing a new one, takes one action to complete. On your turn, you may sheath a weapon *or* draw a weapon for free.

Regions

A Gridless Combat System **region** is an area (whose shape is not important) about 30 yards across (heavy emphasis on the 'about'; I urge gamemasters to take no guff from rules lawyers trying to argue some minute difference in distance based on the usual size of a range).

When combat begins, consider the size of the area in which the fight is taking place and pick a number of ranges appropriate to the size of the battlefield. The prototypical GCS combat is 6 regions, for a total of about 180 yards from end to end. Larger combats are possible, but generally uninteresting². Smaller combats are much more common: fighting in areas smaller than 180 yards is very common in built-up areas. In particular, fighting in all but the largest of buildings will often occur inside a single Gridless Combat System region.

Regions need not be arranged in a linear fashion. A GCS battlefield may comprise, for instance, four regions along a main street, and two regions representing side streets which can't be seen from the main street³. Use common sense when determining if a ranged attack from one region can hit a different region.

Settings may, of course, fiddle with the definition of a GCS region. Look to the module rulebook for details.

Adjacency

Two entities in the same region are not necessarily close together. Regions, being some 30 yards across, leave plenty of room for ranged combat.

The Gridless Combat System therefore uses the concept of **adjacency** to determine if two entities are more or less close enough to touch. Entities in a region must belong to an **adjacency group**, or more

- 1 Some Optional Core Mechanics may define other kinds of actions, or sub-types of Move or Attack actions. See GCS Fire and Movement (page 44) for an example.
- 2 Five rounds of running toward your opponents isn't all that exciting. RPJ Fantasy, one of the official RPJ settings, takes place in a world where magiker are often used to cut an army down to a more manageable size. Since, under the RPJ Fantasy rules, most magic can be used on anything a magiker can see, larger combats may be more useful or common in that setting than in many others.
- 3 In general, if the battlefield doesn't impose constraints on visibility, gamemasters should avoid nonlinear GCS battlefields.

prosaically, a clump: a group of entities, all of which are adjacent to one another. When arranging your miniatures, counters, or markers on a tabletop, place them so that entities in the same adjacency group are clumped together and distinctly separated from other adjacency groups.

As a Move action, instead of moving between regions, you may join an adjacency group in your current region, or leave your current adjacency group to form a new adjacency group in your current region.

When entering combat, you may elect to begin in the same adjacency group as any entity in your starting region.

Melee attacks may only be made against targets in the same adjacency group.

After using an Attack action, you may not leave your current adjacency group until your next turn.

The maximum size of an adjacency group is 10. If you wish to move into an adjacency group of size 10, you may select one entity in that group with a Strength strictly less than or equal to your own and replace it, moving the replaced entity to a new adjacency group of size one, even if the entity you replace has already attacked this round. If the group contains no entity with a Strength level less than or equal to your own, you may not enter it. There is no special dispensation for swapping places with your allies.

Our old friends Laeniel Relaiesh and cheeto-stained Dave return for this example. Laeniel and Ug were ambushed by nine bandits with Strength scores of 2. They all move adjacent to Ug.

Laeniel would like to attack one of the enemies in melee, but cannot do so: she is not adjacent to any of them. Her Strength score is 3, so she moves one bandit out of the adjacency group and takes his place.

If the bandits all had Strengths of 4, Laeniel would have been out of luck; no entity in the group would have a Strength score less than or equal to her own. She would have had to figure out some other way to contribute to Ug's continuing survival.

If Ug defeated one of the bandits, Laeniel could join the group without checking her Strength against the enemies'.

Laeniel is not allowed to switch places with Ug; her Strength score is not greater than or equal to his. If Ug were outside the adjacency group and Laeniel were inside, Ug could take her place, as Ug's Strength score is higher.

Distances

The **distance** from one region to an adjacent region is 1, and the distance from the first region to more distant regions counts up as you would expect. The distance between two non-adjacent entities in one region is 0.

Two entities in the same adjacency group are separated by a distance of *. For the purposes of ranged weapons, * is less than 0. Many ranged weapons have a minimum range of 0, and may not be used against adjacent targets.

On non-linear battlefields, the distance between one region and another is the number of regions along the shortest path between the two, or whatever the gamemaster says it is should the preceding rule seem wrong in her judgment.

Rounds

A Gridless Combat System **round** has elapsed once each entity has taken a **turn**. A round represents about a minute's worth of real time, and all of the turns that take place therein happen more or less simultaneously—the combat order is simply a useful abstraction. The actions that your characters take during a turn do not occupy all of the time in said turn: you may think of the two attacks you made during your turn as the two times where the ebb and flow of combat gave you an opening you could work with.

Settings may change the time a round represents (possibly as part of a larger change to the combat rules). Look for GCS Implementation Details to find out.

The Combat Process

Congratulations, gamemaster! You've conned your players into engaging a vastly superior mob of monsters. This is admirable, and shows great cunning on your part. The following section describes, from beginning to end, how combat is supposed to go. Aiding us in this example will be our friends Laeniel Relaiesh and Ug the Cave-Mage, and their players Dave and Fred.

Rolling For Initiative

All entities involved in a combat make an **initiative roll**. The initiative roll is either a Dexterity bonus roll, or a setting-specific initiative skill roll.

Arrange the list of entities by initiative roll in descending order. In case of ties, players go before non-player characters; players choose who goes first when they tie with one another. This is the **combat order**.

Any entity may choose to move itself down the combat order before combat begins (perhaps to consolidate turns, or to arrange the combat order in a synergistic way). Any such move lasts through the whole of the combat.

When a group or party is caught unawares but generally ready for combat, reduce their initiative rolls by 2. For ambushes where the group or party is *not* prepared for combat, the gamemaster determines the modifier.

If the party is well and truly gobsmacked by the attack, the gamemaster may arrange turns by fiat (presumably to put all the monsters first).

Laeniel and Ug, separated from their party one dark night, come across a pair of orcish guards standing watch along a forest path. One is clearly an older, more experienced orc, judging by his greater size and much nastier-looking axe. As a creature of the forest and an Elven Archer, skilled at silent movement, Laeniel catches the orcs unawares, which means that the orcs roll initiative at -2 on account of being surprised. Laeniel takes her Dexterity bonus (3) and Initiative skill (7), rolls 16 on a 4d6 roll, and wins the initiative roll with a final score of 26. She moves first. Ug, with a Dexterity bonus of 1 and an Initiative skill level of 4, rolls 14 on a 4d6 roll. His total of 19 is less than the gamemaster's rolls for the two orcs. Ug moves last, and the two orcs move in between the two player characters.

Setting Up

The prototypical GCS battle occurs on a field made up of six regions arranged in a line and numbered from 1 to 6. Players are placed at Region 1 on the GCS battlefield, and their opponents are placed at

Region 6.

In case of smaller battlefields or extenuating circumstances, the gamemaster should determine the size and shape of the battlefield and place the players and their opponents appropriately. Regions need not occur in a line; some battlefields may require more complicated structures. If the battlefield is nonlinear, the map should clearly indicate which regions are adjacent to one another.

In case of a battlefield of only one region, the player characters and their opponents should not begin in the same adjacency group, unless circumstances (a camp under attack, say) require it.

Combat begins, and the grid is set: Laeniel and Ug are in region 1, and the orcs in region 6. Ug chooses to begin in the same adjacency group as Laeniel.

The Turn

After setup, each entity takes a turn in initiative order. At the start of its turn, an entity receives a number of actions equal to his Dexterity bonus plus one.

It's Laeniel's turn to start with. Her Dexterity score is 9, so she has four actions to work with (her two base actions, plus two extra actions for her Dexterity score of 9). She has a longbow with a maximum range of 4, which means she'll need to move at least one region closer. Dave elects to move her two regions closer to the enemies, to reduce the penalty for long-range shooting.

Moving

On your turn, you may move one region per Move action spent. (When moving into a new region, you may join an adjacency group of your choice¹, or form a new adjacency group.) You may also spend a Move action to join an Adjacency Group or to form a new Adjacency Group without moving to a different Range.

After using an Attack action, you may not spend any further Move actions.

Dave spends two of Laeniel's actions to move her from GCS Region 1 to GCS Region 3.

Defending

When defending against an attack, entities do not roll. Rather, they have a **defense value**, which serves as the Target Number for the attack roll. Your defense value may be determined in one of two ways². You may pick which method to use when you are attacked.

If the you wish to **dodge**, moving out of the path of an attack altogether, add your module-specific dodge base skill level and Dexterity bonus to the base Target Number of 14+. Heavy armors may reduce the effectiveness of dodging.

An orc wishes to dodge one of Laeniel's arrows. The base Target Number is 14+. The orc's Dodge skill level is 4 and his Dexterity bonus is 1. Adding both to the Target Number, the final attack roll Target Number is 19+.

If you wish to **absorb**, taking a blow on your armor so that it deals no damage, add your module-specific armor use base skill level and your Constitution bonus to the base Target Number of 14+. Light armors may reduce the effectiveness of absorbing.

- 1 Following the rules for joining adjacency groups, of course. It must be of size less than 10, or you must have a greater Strength score than one of its members.
- 2 Your character sheet should have a place to write down precalculated values.

An orc wishes to absorb one of Laeniel's arrows. The base Target Number is 14+. The orc's Armor Use skill level is 7 and his Constitution bonus is 2. Adding the total modifier of 9 to the TN, the end result is 23+.

Attacking

To make an attack, you must make an attack roll against your target's defense value.

Add your weapon's linked skill to your weapon's linked attribute bonus. This number is your **base attack modifier**. For ranged weapons, apply any range modifiers from your weapon. For all weapons, apply any other weapon-based bonuses or penalties to your roll. The sum of these bonuses is your **effective attack modifier**.

Add 4d6 to your effective attack modifier to obtain your attack roll result. If it matches or exceeds your target's defense value, you hit.

Laeniel has a longbow and an Elvish sword, both Dexterity-linked weapons. When making skill rolls for attacks, she adds her base skill level in Archery and Swordsselfship, the weapons' linked attribute bonuses (both Dexterity), and any bonuses or penalties for range or weapon quality to determine her attack modifier.

The longbow attacks at a -2 penalty to the roll at range 4, a -1 penalty at range 3, and no bonus or penalties at ranges 0 through 2. At a range of 0 to 2, her attack modifier is 10: her Archery skill (7) plus her Dexterity bonus (+3).

Her Elvish sword is enchanted, and always applies a +1 bonus to melee attacks rolls. Her attack modifier is 9: her Swordsselfship skill (5), her Dexterity bonus (+3), and the innate +1 from her sword.

Laeniel, at this juncture, has two GCS Actions remaining. Each of these actions may be used to make an attack. Dave chooses to have her attack the smaller, less ugly orc first, which the gamemaster confirms is an orcish headhunter, with her sword.

The orcish headhunter is a mook, a concept which will be described in detail later. For now, it suffices to say that the headhunter has a single defense value and receives no bonuses or penalties.

The orcish headhunter has a defense value of 18, which means the Target Number is 18+.

Dave rolls 4d6 and gets an 8. He the attack modifier of 9 for Laeniel's sword for a 17. Miss.

Fortunately, Laeniel has a second attack. Her attack modifier remains the same.

Dave rolls 9, scarcely better. Adding the bonus of 9, the result is 18. Since the Target Number is 18+, however, it's a hit!

Resolving Damage

For convenience, this section sums up the relevant rules from RPJ Health. The original rules are located on page 22.

When an attack hits you, consult the list of damage saves for your outermost layer of defense. Take the save with the lowest Target Number, then add the attack's damage to determine the final Target Number.

If the save roll's final Target Number is less than 4+ or if the save roll is a critical success, do nothing and continue with combat.

If the save roll is successful, cross out the save and continue with combat.

If the save roll is unsuccessful, cross out all saves for the layer of defense under consideration and continue with combat.

If, after resolving damage, no damage saves remain for a layer of defense, that layer of defense is broken. Broken defenses no longer have any positive effect. Future hits will require a roll on the next innermost layer of defense.

If none of an entity's base damage saves remain after resolving damage, the entity is incapacitated.

An orc warrior is wearing Heavy Orcish Armor. Its damage saves are 8+, 10+, 12+, and 14+. Laeniel hits it with a longbow attack. The bow fires arrows with a damage of 1. The orc must roll his lowest save first, so the Target Number is 9+: the orc's lowest save, plus the weapon's damage. The gamemaster rolls, and the result is 7. Unluckily, the arrow penetrates the orc's armor. The gamemaster crosses out all of the Heavy Orcish Armor's damage saves. When taking hits from future attacks, the orc warrior will have to roll on his base damage save list.

Turn End

After moving, then making and resolving any attacks, an entity's turn is over. (Entities are not required to spend all their actions each turn. Actions not spent are lost.)

Laeniel has spent all her actions and resolved all their consequences. She yields to the orcs.

Incapacitation

When an entity has no base damage saves remaining, that entity is **incapacitated**. Incapacitated entities may neither attack nor move.

Some time later, Ug the Cave-Mage casts Teleport at the cost of one action. He moves for free to Region 6, and per Teleport's description, places himself in the adjacency group of his choice.

Fred elects to put Ug next to the orc warrior. He hits the orc warrior with his Club of Greater Smacking, which does a damage of 2. The orc's first base damage save is at 10+, for a final TN of 12+. The hapless orc rolls a 10, and is incapacitated.

When incapacitated, you are bleeding out. Every minute (or on your turn every combat round), roll 4d6 against TN18+. On success, you are **stabilized**. You remain unconscious, but are at no risk of dying. If you fail five times in a row, however, you die.

Nonlethal Damage

Some weapons may deal **nonlethal** damage.

If you are incapacitated by nonlethal damage, you are knocked unconscious for five minutes. After five minutes have passed, roll your effective Constitution against TN24+ to wake up. Roll again every five minutes, reducing the difficulty by 1 for each failed roll.

Coups de Grace

In lieu of using any Attack actions on your turn, you may attempt a **coup de grace** on an adjacent incapacitated entity. Roll 4d6 against TN14+ plus the incapacitated entity's Constitution bonus. On a successful roll, the incapacitated entity is killed. Only one coup de grace may be attempted per turn, at the cost of one action. You may not attack on the same turn as a coup de grace attempt.

At region 3, Dave notes that it will take three moves for Laeniel to reach the adjacency group containing Ug and the incapacitated orc warrior, plus one action to execute the coup de grace.

She can just manage it this turn. The orc warrior's Constitution bonus of 2 sets the coup de grace difficulty at TN16+. Dave rolls 18, and Laeniel plunges her sword through the orc's heart.

Helping Hands

In lieu of using any Attack actions on your turn, you may lend a **helping hand** to an adjacent incapacitated entity. Make a medical skill check at TN20+. (Your module's rulebook will indicate which skill to use.) Appropriate equipment may reduce the difficulty. The incapacitated entity is no longer incapacitated, but, until he receives medical attention, may take only one action per turn, has only one damage save at 14+, and attacks at -2.

Medical Attention

Out of combat, with appropriate equipment, you may take two hours and make a medical skill check (your module rulebook will tell you what equipment is required and which skill to use) against TN20+ to lend medical attention to a stabilized, unconscious, or recently-incapacitated entity suffering from incapacitation penalties.

On success, the target is no longer unconscious, and any incapacitation penalties are removed: he regains his base damage saves and actions, and no longer attacks at a penalty.

Free Attacks

In some cases, combat actions may provoke **free attacks**.

When you leave an adjacency group, other entities in the adjacency group with Dexterity greater than or equal to your Dexterity may attempt free attacks against you. If you are removed from an adjacency group against your will (for instance, if you are displaced by another entity joining the adjacency group), other entities in the adjacency group do not receive free attacks.

When you make a ranged attack, all entities adjacent to you may attempt a free attack against you at no penalty.

When you attempt a coup de grace, all entities adjacent to you may attempt a free attack against you at a +2 bonus.

You may make at most one free attack per round.

Ug is in an adjacency group with nine enemies. All have a Strength of 2, so Laeniel can replace any of them. Seven have a Dexterity of 3, one has a Dexterity of 4, and one has a Dexterity of 5.

Laeniel wants to join the adjacency group. It is already at its maximum size of 10, so she

must displace an enemy. She displaces one enemy whose Dexterity Score is 3. Although Ug has a higher Dexterity score than the enemy (4 vs. 3), the enemy left the adjacency group against his will, and does not trigger free attacks.

If Laeniel wished to leave the adjacency group, she would be subject to no free attacks: her Dexterity score of 9 is greater than every other Dexterity score in the adjacency group. If Laeniel wished to make a ranged attack, however, all eight enemies in the adjacency group would be entitled to make a free attack against her.

If Ug wished to leave the adjacency group, he would be subject to one free attack each from the enemies with Dexterity 4 and 5; 4 and 5 are greater than or equal to his Dexterity of 4.

Mooks

Part of the joy of combat in settings designed around RPJ is that, even at relatively low character power levels, the player characters are still true heroes, standing head and shoulders above the crowd.

Mooks, collectively, are the crowd which the players are better than. They are the endless stream of goblins flooding forth from the dark fortress, the mafia boss's thugs, or the stormtroopers of the evil empire.

To simplify combat against large groups of wimpy enemies, RPJ uses some special rules for mooks. They have very simple sheets: a name, an attack modifier and damage value, and a defense value.

A mook making an attack roll simply rolls 4d6 plus his attack modifier.

Mooks do not roll for initiative. All mooks move after player characters and ordinary enemies. Mooks move once and attack once per turn, and may not lend helping hands.

Any attack which hits a mook kills it.

Gamemasters are encouraged to use mook swarms rather than swarms of regular enemies to give combat an epic feel. Mooks simplify combat resolution in their standard form. To further simplify things when mooks are attacking, gamemasters are encouraged to make fewer 4d6 rolls than there are mooks, and simply cycle among the results as attacks are resolved.

Grappling

"Oh no," I hear you say. "A grappling system. We're doomed."

Ordinarily, you would be correct, but the Gridless Combat System has no time for overcomplicated, underutilized systems. GCS Grappling is dead simple.

Grappling is a GCS interaction including exactly two entities. You may attempt to grapple another entity on your turn, provided that you have not used any Attack actions. To establish a grapple, you must be adjacent to your target, and you must pass a **touch check**. Starting with a base Target Number of 16+, add the target's Dexterity score (*not* his bonus) to determine the final Target Number. Make a Dexterity roll against it. If the roll succeeds, you have established a grapple. Your turn is over.

Any melee attacks made against entities in a grapple receive a +2 bonus to the attack roll¹. Any ranged attacks made against entities in a grapple receive a -2 penalty to the attack roll².

¹ "You hold him, I'll punch!"

² "I can't get a clear shot!"

Entities engaged in a grapple may not move. This includes both moving between regions and changing adjacency groups. Nor may entities engaged in a grapple make standard attacks. On his turns, an entity engaged in a grapple must make a **grapple check**.

A grapple roll is an opposed roll between the grapplers' Strength bonuses, or a setting-specific grappling or unarmed combat skill, if present. (See your module rulebook for details.) If, on your turn, you win the grapple roll, you have two options. You may either **break** the grapple, spending all but one of your actions (but at least one action; if you only have one action, you lose it), or you may **do damage**, spending all of your actions.

To do damage, flip a coin. On heads, hit the enemy's base damage saves with a damage of -4, ignoring all other layers of defense.

Wrestling is a time-honored tradition in the Academy of Cave-Magi, and Ug has developed some skill in that field since character creation. He wants to wrestle an orc.

Ug's Dexterity score is 4. The orc's Dexterity score is 2. Ug's Grappling skill is 5, and the orc's Grappling skill is 3. Grappling is a Strength-linked skill, and Ug's Strength score is 4, while the orc's Strength score is 6.

To initiate a grapple, Ug must succeed at a touch check. He takes the base Target Number of 16+. The orc's Dexterity score is 2. The final Target Number is 18+. Fred rolls a 15 and adds his Dexterity score of 4. A final roll of 19 beats TN18+, so Ug successfully establishes a grapple.

At this point, Ug's turn is over. Melee attacks against either Ug or the orc receive a +2 bonus; ranged attacks receive a -2 penalty.

The orc comes up in the turn order. Being involved in a grapple, he is required to make an opposed Grappling check. Starting with the base opposed Target Number of 14+, the gamemaster adds Ug's effective Grappling skill level (a base level of 5 and a +1 Strength bonus) to get a Target Number of 20+. Making a Grappling roll for the orc (an effective level of 5, from a base Grappling of 3 and a Strength bonus of +2), the gamemaster ends up with 17. Insufficient.

It's Ug's turn again. Fred adds the orc's effective Grappling level to the base Target Number to get 19+. After rolling his Grappling, he ends up with 24.

He elects to do damage. Flipping a coin, he gets heads, so he resolves a damage of -4 against the orc's base damage saves.

The orc survives. On his next turn, the gamemaster rolls him a 22, sufficient to win the grapple roll. The orc elects to leave the grapple, making a normal melee attack against Ug with his remaining action.

Unarmed Attacks

Unarmed attacks require an unarmed combat skill. Unarmed attacks are rolled in the same manner as ordinary, armed attacks, using the unarmed combat skill and its linked attribute bonus. Unarmed attacks deal -4 nonlethal damage.

Weapons and Armor

Fortunate as you are that I am designing a combat system for you, you are not fortunate enough to make me design you weapons and armor, too. However, I will make it easy on you.

Weapons can be either one-hand, main hand, or two-hand. Main hand weapons may not be wielded with another weapon, but a non-weapon off-hand item may be wielded (say a sword and a shield). One-hand weapons may be dual-wielded at a penalty of -2 to all rolls involving use of either weapon¹. Weapons further have a damage value. 0 is an average damage value. Damage values should generally range from about -4 to 4.

Armor simply has a list of damage saves. It may reduce the damage value of attacks which hit it prior to the damage saving throw. It may add a bonus or penalty to one or both defense values. A character may wear and benefit from only one set of armor at once, treating it as a layer of defense above his base damage saves.

For Module Authors

You have a fair bit of work to do to integrate the Gridless Combat System into your module. You will need, at a minimum:

- **Weapon skills**, either unitary ("Martial Weapons") or divided by weapon category ("Swords") according to your preferences.
- **Defensive skills**, to include a Dodge skill and an Armor Use skill (or separate skills for different types of armor).
- **Equipment** designed in accordance with the Weapons and Armor section above.

You may also want:

- A **Grappling** skill, for use in grappling.
- An **Unarmed Combat** skill, to enable unarmed attacks.
- A selection of combat-related **Traits**. Some examples: an Unarmed Mastery gift to remove the damage penalty for unarmed attacks against armor, a Swordsman gift to allow characters to make a free riposte attack after defending against a melee attack, or a Combat Agility gift to add to an entity's effective Dexterity when leaving an adjacency group, reducing the chance of enemy free attacks.

¹ This rule is commonly changed by modules. Be sure to see if yours does.

RPJ Immobilization

The motivation for this additional Optional Core Mechanic as opposed to a set of rules native to GCS itself is simply this—I had written some 40 pages of RPJ Fantasy before I realized that I had forgotten some system for preventing a target from taking action in the time-honored tradition of stuns, freezes, knockdowns, and other incapacitation effects.

Since this reason makes me look bad, the reason I will give officially is that splitting up the mechanics makes it easier for you, the end user, to modify the rules if you find them wanting.

Surprisingly, they have no dependencies.

How It Works

RPJ Immobilization defines three types of incapacitation effects, given in ascending order of severity: immobilization, partial paralysis, and full paralysis, each with its own set of restrictions.

Immobilization is a simple inability to move to a new location (for example, a character who nearly dodged a tangle grenade, or who has had his feet frozen to the ground by magic). An immobilized character cannot move from region to region or within his current region, but in all other ways he is still mobile—he may move his arms, and perhaps to a limited extent his legs.

Paralysis is an inability to move at all—a character tightly bound with rope or otherwise prevented from moving his arms and legs. A paralyzed character may not move, attack, or defend against attacks, but he is still aware of his surroundings and able to speak.

Unconsciousness is the worst of the three. An unconscious character may not move or speak, may not defend against attacks, and is not aware of his surroundings. A sleeping character, or one who has been knocked out, is unconscious.

Escaping

In case of physical restraints, make an effective Strength or Dexterity check against TN20+, or an appropriate Target Number for stronger or shoddier restraints. In combat, doing so takes a full turn.

For mental or magical restraints, use the same mechanism, substituting the higher of the victim's Charisma or Willpower. Again, doing so in combat takes a full turn.

Gamemasters are permitted to use their discretion here: a Lockpicking skill check against an appropriate Target Number is a much more sensible way to escape shackles and handcuffs than a Dexterity bonus check against TN20+.

Unconscious characters may not attempt to escape, given that they are entirely unaware.

Ug the Cave-Mage is tied to a chair. In RPJ Immobilization terms, he is partially paralyzed. Since his restraints are physical, he rolls the higher of his Strength and Dexterity bonuses against 20+. His Strength and Dexterity are the same, 5. Adding 5 to his 4d6 roll of 15, he ends up with 20, and frees himself.

Laeniel has been locked in place by a dark mage's spell, but can still move her arms. She is, in RPJ Immobilization terms, simply immobilized. Since her restraints are magical, she rolls the higher of her Charisma and Willpower. The spell is particularly strong, so the gamemaster sets the base Target Number at 22+. Laeniel, a beautiful and charismatic elf,

has a Charisma of 6. Adding that to her 4d6 roll of 15, she unfortunately does not beat the Target Number, and remains immobilized.

For Module Authors

There isn't much to say here. You may wish to define some special attacks or actions which have a chance of inflicting RPJ Immobilization statuses, however.

GCS Damage Scales

The Gridless Combat System can be easily modified to support vehicular and spacecraft combat (see RPJ Sci-Fi for more). In doing that modification, I realized it would be nice to allow interaction between different sorts of entities: unaugmented humans with power armor, small spacecraft with large spacecraft, and the like.

That presented me with a problem: the weapons mounted on power armor are simply more powerful than the weapons carried by unaugmented humans. A power armor-mounted plasma cannon should just about vaporize a guy in a flak vest, and Mr. Flak Vest's rifle should do very little to the power armor in return. Enter **damage scales**.

Dependencies

GCS Damage Scales depends upon RPJ Gridless Combat.

Damage Scales

Damage comes in three flavors, with three corresponding categories of damage saves.

First, **normal damage**. This is the damage done by regular, everyday handheld weapons: swords, assault rifles, electrified whips, and so on. It corresponds to **normal damage saves**.

Second, **mega-damage**. Mega-damage is the damage done by anti-vehicle weapons and vehicle armaments, by small spacecraft, and perhaps by powerful magic. It corresponds to **mega-damage saves**.

Finally, **giga-damage**. Giga-damage is the damage done by large spacecraft, atomic weapons, and titanic magical energies. It corresponds to **giga-damage saves**.

Each category of damage, when applied against its own category of damage save, is resolved according to the rules in the Gridless Combat System Optional Core Mechanic on page 33. For other cases (a lower category of damage attacking a higher category of damage saves, or a higher category of damage attacking a lower category of damage saves), read on.

Dave and Fred roll up some RPJ Sci-Fi characters to aid in the next few examples.

Dave's character, Andrastos Proto-Paradeigma¹, is a soldier retired from the Imperial Army. He has normal damage saves and weapons which ordinarily do normal damage; he also has access to an armored personnel carrier which has mega-damage saves and a missile launcher which does mega-damage.

Fred's character, Basilus Deutero-Paradeigma², is an amplified psion: a human with inborn psionic talent and a psi amplification device. The latter enables him to make psionic attacks which do mega-damage, but Basilus is otherwise an ordinary human with normal damage saves.

Doing Damage Upward

Weapons doing normal damage may attack mega-damage saves, and weapons doing mega-damage

¹ Mr. A. First-Example.

² Mr. B. Second-Example.

may attack giga-damage saves. When an attack doing one damage category hits a defense layer with damage saves one category higher, reduce the weapon's damage by 4.

If the save succeeds, ignore the damage. If the save fails, cross off only the rolled damage save.

Damage cannot stretch two categories higher: normal damage has no effect against giga-damage saves.

Andrastos' plasma rifle has a damage value of 2. He fires at a rogue suit of kataphraktos power armor, which has mega-damage saves. He hits the suit and must resolve damage.

He begins by reducing his rifle's damage by 4, for a new value of -2. The rogue kataphraktos' first damage save is TN8+. Adding the modified damage yields TN6+. The power armor rolls 13. Nothing further happens.

Andrastos fires again next round, hitting again. Once again, the kataphraktos rolls its first damage save plus Andrastos' reduced damage; the Target Number is once again 6+. This time, though, the kataphraktos armor rolls a 5. The gamemaster crosses the TN8+ save off of the kataphraktos' damage save list.

Doing Damage Downward

Weapons doing giga-damage do not automatically defeat mega-damage saves, and mega-damage does not automatically defeat normal damage saves. When an attack doing a damage category hits a defense layer with damage saves one category lower, increase the weapon's damage by 2.

If the save succeeds, cross off all damage saves for the layer of defense which took the hit, but do nothing else.

If the save fails, cross off all damage saves for the layer of defense which took the hit. Reduce the damage by 2, then apply it to the next innermost layer of defense.

Repeat the process described here, reducing the damage by 2 for each defeated layer of defense, until a layer of defense passes a damage save, or until the target entity is incapacitated by running out of damage saves.

Giga-damage, if applied against a layer of defense with normal damage saves, automatically and immediately defeats all layers of defense with normal damage saves.

A rebel soldier with a rocket launcher doing a damage of 4 is fighting Basilus. The rocket launcher can do mega-damage. Basilus has a psionic shield as his outermost layer of defense with normal damage saves of TN10+ and TN10+. He is also wearing a suit of nanomesh armor, which has a first damage save of TN6+, and has personal damage saves starting at TN13+.

The rebel scum hits Basilus with a rocket. Basilus' psionic shield is first up, and its first save is TN10+. Adding the rocket launcher's damage (4) and the penalty for taking damage from a higher category (+2), the final Target Number is 16+. Basilus rolls a 14.

He crosses off all damage saves for his psionic shield, rendering it useless. Since he failed the save, he must apply the damage to his next layer of defense. His nanomesh armor's first damage save is TN6+. He adds the rocket launcher's damage (4) and the penalty for taking damage from a higher category (+2). He then adds the bonus for damage saves against damage which has already penetrated a defense (-2). His final Target Number for this roll is therefore TN11+. He rolls a 10, failing again.

He crosses off all damage saves for his nanomesh armor, and is down to his personal damage saves. Once again, he must add 6 to his first damage save, from the rocket launcher's damage and the higher-category damage penalty. This time, his defense penetration bonus is -4, since this attack has penetrated two layers of defense (his psionic shield and his nanomesh armor). Added to his base Target Number of 13+, the final Target Number is 15+.

This time he succeeds! Unfortunately, since he is defending against damage from a higher category, he must cross off all his personal damage saves even on a successful roll. Doing so means he has no personal damage saves remaining. He is incapacitated.

Surviving Giga-Damage

If you are a kind and understanding gamemaster, you will not subject your players to the threat of giga-damage very often. It is, after all, effectively a death sentence.

Sometimes, however, what must happen must happen, and your players will get themselves into a situation in which they cannot avoid taking a good solid hit from a capital ship's lance batteries. In this instance, players may permanently trade a Lucky Break for survival, provided they have at least one Lucky Break per session. (Even if they've spent it already in the current session, they may trade it for survival.)

This is a permanent trade: note it on their sheet.

Andrastos refused to move when an NPC informed him that an orbital bombardment would soon commence. He was struck by a missile fired from a battleship's strike bay, which does giga-damage.

He has one Lucky Break per session; although he already spent it, he may permanently lose it in exchange for surviving the attack. Dave gladly does so. Later, Andrastos is discovered in the rubble, somehow still breathing.

Other Random Rules Interactions

Two characters with different damage save categories may not grapple with one another.

GCS Fire and Movement

The basic Gridless Combat System ranged combat rules are plenty functional for fantasy settings, but leave a little to be desired in campaigns in a modern or science fiction setting. In those genres, characters might want to take cover behind a burned-out car or a concrete wall, and bullets are generally speaking very hard to dodge.

GCS Fire and Movement attempts to rectify this failing. It is a drop-in replacement for the Gridless Combat System ranged combat rules, and should be consulted in their stead whenever ranged attacks are made.

Dependencies

GCS Fire and Movement depends on the Gridless Combat System and RPJ Skills. Furthermore, a Dexterity-based skill named Reaction must be present; it is used for ranged combat defenses.

Ammunition

Some ranged weapons may require **ammunition**. Ammunition should be tracked based on the number of standard attacks which can be made per magazine. When a weapon runs out of ammunition, it must be reloaded.

Reloading

Reloading a weapon costs one action.

Andrastos' plasma rifle has a listed magazine capacity of 6: it can make six attacks before reloading is required. Andrastos finds himself in a heavy firefight, and after three rounds of two attacks per round, he finds his rifle is empty.

He spends an action to drop the power cell and slam a new one home. With his second action, he attacks.

Carrying Ammo

In the absence of special preparations, characters are assumed to have four reloads for all weapons they carry. Characters prepared for combat have ten reloads for all weapons they carry. Characters carrying more ammunition must justify it to the gamemaster.

Basilus landed on Nicomedia Proti for a diplomatic mission, carrying his laser pistol but otherwise not specially prepared for combat. Rebels attack the governor's palace, and after reloading four times, Basilus finds himself out of ammunition.

Andrastos comes to the rescue, landing in the palace gardens with a shuttle from the jump ship high overhead. He knew he would be going into a fight, and is carrying ten power cells for his plasma rifle. Even better, he put on an assault pack before the drop, and used it to bring a few extra power cells for Basilus.

Ranged Defense Value

Start with the base Target Number of 14+. Take your Reaction skill and divide it by 1.5, rounding up, to determine your reaction modifier. (See the table at right.) Add your reaction modifier to your

Dexterity bonus to get your **ranged defense modifier**. Add your ranged defense modifier to the base TN14+ to determine your **ranged defense value**.

Your other Gridless Combat System defense values (see page 32) are your **melee defense values**. You may use either one when defending against melee attacks, but must use your ranged defense value when defending against any ranged attack.

Base Reaction	Reaction Modifier	Base Reaction	Reaction Modifier
1	+1	6	+4
2	+2	7	+5
3	+2	8	+6
4	+3	9	+6
5	+4	10	+7

Attack Modifiers

Attack modifiers function as in the Gridless Combat System. To determine your base attack modifier, add your base level in the weapon's linked skill and your bonus in the weapon's linked attribute. Add any inherent weapon bonuses or penalties and any range bonuses or penalties to find your effective attack modifier.

Attack Rolls

The attacker rolls 4d6 plus his attack modifier against the defender's ranged defense value. On success, he hits. The attack roll, Target Number, and effects of a hit may be further modified by cover, advanced attacks, and cautious movement. Read on for more detail.

Basilus and Andrastos are escorting the governor of Nicomedia Proti to the shuttleport, hoping to escape the rebel uprising. They encounter a pair of treacherous guards, who surprise them and move first in the ensuing combat.

The first guard shoots at Basilus. The guard's attack modifier totals 5, between his base weapon skill level and his weapon's linked attribute bonus. Basilus has a Reaction skill of 4 and a Dexterity bonus of 2.

Consulting the table, Fred sees that a Reaction skill level of 4 corresponds to a reaction modifier of +3, and adds his Dexterity bonus of +2. Adding those to the base Target Number of 14+, his ranged defense value is 19+.

The guard's dice show 12; adding his attack modifier of 5, he ends up with 17. Basilus dives out of the way.

The second guard shoots at the governor, a fat and ponderous man who has never had to dive out of the way of anything in his life.

The governor's Reaction skill is 0, and his Dexterity bonus is only 1. He adds his Dexterity bonus to TN14+ to determine his ranged defense value; the guard's attack roll of 15 is just sufficient. He shoots the governor in the chest.

Cover

Cover in GCS Fire and Movement is simple. It is a feature on the GCS battlefield which has an associated adjacency group¹. Any entities in the cover's associated adjacency group are said to be **in cover**. Cover adds a large penalty to any attack rolls made against entities in cover.

¹ Cover may be large enough to fit more than one adjacency group, too; the simplification in the text is for ease of writing and reading.

When playing with the GCS Damage Scales Optional Core Mechanic, entities with mega-damage or giga-damage saves may not use cover.

After dispatching the traitorous guards, Andrastos and Basilus drag the unconscious governor out of the palace and to the front garden. There, they encounter three rebel soldiers watching the gate from the building across the street. Andrastos and Basilus head for cover, the governor bouncing along the dirt behind them.

Unconscious or immobilized entities, when behind good cover¹, may defend against attacks at no penalty.

Quality

Cover quality is expressed as a positive number, which is added to the ranged defense value of entities in cover. Bigger numbers are better. Cover always provides a bonus of at least +1, and should ordinarily go no higher than about +6.

There are two aspects to consider in assigning quality to cover: coverage and hardness. Coverage expresses the amount of room for hunkering down. Cover which requires contortion to hide behind, such as a low wall or the engine block of an automobile, should receive a lower quality score than cover behind which a character can stand.

Hardness expresses the toughness of the cover. A steel-reinforced blockhouse should have a higher quality than an opaque plate glass window.

A character taking cover behind a bush, masked only from sight and not from weapons fire, should therefore receive the minimum cover quality of +1. A character hiding in a well-constructed bunker should most likely receive the ordinary maximum of +6.

Andrastos pulls the governor behind a sturdy concrete fountain's chest-high base. The fountain is solid and fully disguises his outline. The gamemaster assigns it a cover quality of +4.

Basilus ducks behind the trunk of an ancient Homeworld oak. It hides his outline, but won't stop a great deal of enemy fire. The gamemaster assigns it a cover quality of +2.

The rebel soldiers attack both our heroes. Andrastos' ranged defense is only 17 (a Dexterity bonus of +1 and +2 reaction modifier from his Reaction skill level of 3, plus the base TN14+), but his cover is good. Adding his cover quality of +4, the Target Number is 21+. The attacker fails the check.

A second soldier shoots at Basilus. His ranged defense value is 19+ (base TN14+, plus his reaction modifier of +3 and his Dexterity bonus of +2) and his cover quality is +2, for a Target Number of 21+. The attacker fails the check.

Flanking

Cover is not perfect. It is usually possible to dislodge an entity from cover by making a flanking maneuver. Since the Gridless Combat System has no strong conception of sideways movement, we must fudge it.

All cover has a **flanking distance**. At distances greater than the flanking distance, the cover provides

¹ Any cover with a quality of +3 or greater is most likely good enough. Poorer cover, if it is sufficient to conceal the unconscious entity, may also suffice.

its full benefit. At a distance equal to its flanking distance, the cover provides half its benefit. At distances less than its flanking distance, it provides no benefit.

Cover with a flanking distance of 0 provides half protection from enemies in the same GCS Region, rounded down. Cover with a flanking distance of * provides half protection, rounded down, even against adjacent enemies.

This is the palace of the planetary governor, and so the fountain Andrastos is hiding behind is suitably impressive. It stretches ten cubits in either direction, very difficult to get around. The gamemaster assigns it a flanking distance of 0.

Basilus' cover, by contrast, is only a tree trunk. The gamemaster charitably assigns it a flanking distance of 1, though 2 would also be appropriate.

A rebel soldier moves from the building across the street (in Region 3) to a parked car on this side of the street (in Region 2). The parked car grants a cover bonus of +2 with a flanking distance of 1. He is now at a distance of 1 from our heroes.

Another rebel soldier moves from the building across the street to open ground in the same region as our heroes, Region 1. He is now at a distance of 0 from our heroes.

The rebel soldier in the building across the street at distance 2 still must overcome both Andrastos' and Basilus' full cover bonuses, being at a distance greater than the flanking distances associated with our heroes' cover (0 and 1, respectively). The Target Numbers for the two remain 21+.

The rebel soldier behind the parked car is a distance of 1 away from Andrastos and Basilus, greater than Andrastos' flanking distance but equal to Basilus' flanking distance. Andrastos' cover is fully effective, so the Target Number to hit him is still 21+.

The rebel is, however, at a distance equal to the flanking distance of Basilus' cover; Basilus' cover is therefore only half as effective. He chooses to attack Basilus. Basilus adds his ranged defense modifier of +5 to TN14+ and halves his cover bonus to get +1 for a final TN20+. The attack fails.

The rebel soldier on open ground at distance 0 is within Basilus' flanking distance 1, and ignores Basilus' cover altogether, for a final TN19+ (the sum of the base TN14+ and Basilus' ranged defense modifier of +5).

He is at exactly the flanking distance of Andrastos' cover, and so Andrastos' cover is only half effective. He can attack Andrastos at TN19+ (the sum of the base TN14+, Andrastos' ranged defense modifier of +3, and Andrastos' halved cover bonus of +2).

Reorientation

An entity behind cover may **reorient** as a Move action on his turn once per turn. By reorienting, he inverts the definition of flanking distance. A reoriented entity receives full protection from cover against enemies at distances *less than* the cover's flanking distance, half protection from enemies at his cover's flanking distance, and no protection from enemies at distances *greater than* the cover's flanking distance.

An entity who is already reoriented may use the reorient action again to return to an un-reoriented state; his cover will once again protect him at long range but not at short range.

Basilus' turn comes up, and he chooses to reorient. This has the following effects: the rebel soldier on open ground at distance 0, less than Basilus' flanking distance, now must overcome the full cover bonus of +2, added to Basilus' ranged defense modifier of +5. His new Target Number is 21+.

The rebel soldier behind the car at distance 1, equal to Basilus' flanking distance, still must only overcome half of Basilus' cover bonus. His Target Number remains 20+ (the sum of the base TN14+, Basilus' ranged defense modifier of +5, and Basilus' halved cover bonus of +1).

The rebel soldier across the street at distance 2, greater than Basilus' flanking distance, now ignores Basilus' cover, and must only overcome Basilus' ranged defense value. His Target Number is 19+.

If, on Basilus' next turn, he reorients again, his cover will once again fully shield him from the rebel soldier across the street, but provide no protection against the soldier on open ground at distance 0.

Cowering

An entity which does nothing on its turn receives double protection from cover.

The governor remains unconscious, and by definition can take no actions on his turn. If the enemy soldier across the street wishes to attack him, he receives a cover bonus of +8, twice the cover quality of +4.

Destroying Cover

When playing with the GCS Damage Scales Optional Core Mechanic, mega-damage and giga-damage may destroy cover. Giga-damage succeeds on a 4d6 roll of 12 or greater, fully removing the cover from the battlefield.

To attack cover with mega-damage, make an attack roll against a Target Number of 18+. The cover's quality is reduced by 1 on successful attacks.

Andrastoss throws a mega-damage grenade at the parked car behind which the rebel soldier is hiding. He adds his Throwing skill (2) and his grenade's linked attribute bonus (Strength, +2) to his roll of 16, against the Target Number of 16+. He succeeds. The grenade goes off, reducing the parked car's cover quality from +2 to +1.

Advanced Attacks

In the GCS Fire and Movement system, characters may spend additional actions on attacks, or accept various constraints on their behavior, for special bonuses applied to those attacks.

Aimed Fire

To make an **Aimed Fire attack**, spend two actions on an attack to add a bonus of +1 to your attack roll.

Basilus elects to make an Aimed Fire attack against the rebel behind the parked car. His laser pistol has an inherent +1 bonus to attack rolls, and uses the Pistols skill (Basilus' level is 2) and is Dexterity-linked (Basilus' Dexterity bonus is 2). Basilus spends his entire

turn on an Aimed Fire attack, adding a further +1 bonus to the Target Number. His attack modifier this turn is therefore +7.

The rebel's ranged defense value is 18+. He is behind cover with a quality of +1 and a flanking distance of 1. Basilus is at distance 1, exactly equal to the flanking distance, so he must only overcome half the cover bonus; half of one is zero, so he receives no cover bonus.

Basilus rolls 14, adds his modifier of +6, and gets 20. His attack hits, and the rebel is incapacitated.

Suppressive Fire

Spend two actions on an attack to make a **Suppressive Fire attack**.

For weapons with ammunition, making a Suppressive Fire attack costs two attacks' worth of ammunition. For weapons with two or fewer attacks of ammunition loaded, making a Suppressive Fire attack consumes all the remaining loaded ammunition.

A Suppressive Fire attack ignores cover, but does no damage if it hits. Instead, it **suppresses** the target. When making attacks, a suppressed entity halves his base attack modifier and may not make Aimed Fire attacks. (Suppressed mooks halve their attack value.)

The first time a suppressed entity moves on his turn, either between regions or within a region, all entities which made successful Suppressive Fire attacks against him since the end of his last turn are entitled to use their free attacks to make ranged attacks against him; he receives no cover bonus.

A suppressed entity remains suppressed until the end of his next turn.

The rebel across the street seems to think Basilus is the bigger threat, and decides to make a Suppressive Fire attack against him.

The Suppressive Fire attack empties the rebel's plasma rifle, but ignores Basilus' cover. Basilus' ranged defense of 19+ is not enough to protect him, and he is suppressed.

While suppressed, he attacks the rebel on open ground at the same range. His base attack modifier is 4 (his Pistols skill level of 2 plus his Dexterity bonus of +2). Half of that is 2, and he may not make an Aimed Fire attack; otherwise, his bonuses are the same as above, for a final attack modifier of +3.

The rebel's ranged defense is the same, 18+. Basilus' attack roll ends up at 19, sufficient to dispatch the perfidious guard.

Basilus remains stationary this turn. Were he to move, the rebel in the building across the street would be entitled to a free attack.

Overwatch

On your turn, you may spend an action to establish an **overwatch**. You may not move after doing so. Target one region. Whenever an entity enters that region, you may choose to make an extra free attack at no penalty against that entity; the target receives no cover bonus. Once you have made an overwatch free attack, your overwatch ends.

The overwatch free attack *does not* consume your ordinary free attack. If you have established an overwatch and suppressed a target, for instance, you may make one overwatch attack (ending your

overwatch) and one suppressive fire free attack (which consumes your ordinary free attack).

Cautious Movement

You may spend your whole turn to **move cautiously**, moving at most one region. Cautious movement confers four benefits.

First, if you do not end your turn in cover, you are treated as though you ended your turn in cover with a quality of +1 and a flanking distance of 0.

Second, if you are currently suppressed, other entities making free attacks against you halve their weapon skill levels, rounding down. (Suppressed mooks halve their attack value.) If an entity who is herself suppressed makes a free attack against a cautious move, she need not halve her weapon skill level twice; apply the penalty once only.

Third, cautious movement does not trigger overwatch free attacks.

Fourth, cautious movement does not trigger free attacks when leaving an adjacency group.

When moving cautiously, you *do not* receive the benefit of any cover you are moving into (whether actual cover, or the free +1 cover for moving cautiously) when defending against suppressive fire free attacks.

Basilus and Andrastos are attempting to escape down the street. Basilus is still suppressed, so to maximize his chances, he decides to move cautiously.

When he moves, the rebel gets a free attack. The rebel has a weapon skill of 3 and a weapon linked attribute bonus of +2 for a base attack modifier of +5. He must halve his base attack modifier, rounding down, for a final +2. Basilus receives no protection from his cover, but his ranged defense of +5 is sufficient for a difficult final TN19+. The defender misses.

Attacks against Basilus after suppressive fire free attacks are resolved must now be made against TN20+: his no-cover ranged defense value of TN19+, plus a +1 cover quality bonus from cautious movement.

Basilus and Andrastos eventually escape and manage to resuscitate the governor.

GCS Mass Combat

Any combat above ten to fifteen participants is likely to go very slowly. Such is the nature of roleplaying games. It is also in the nature of roleplaying games¹ to provide mass combat systems² to aid in resolving fights between larger groups.

RPJ in particular all but requires a mass combat system. Otherwise, when mooks encounter one another, the result is foreordained, and the better mooks win with zero casualties.

This system goes rather nicely with the RPJ ethos that simplicity is best³.

Setting Up

Take ten **markers**. These represent the strength of the more powerful force. To determine which force is more powerful, consider numbers and equipment only. Commanders, terrain, and player character aid are considered separately.

Next, set aside a number of markers to represent the less powerful force proportional to the strength of the more powerful force, rounding up if necessary⁴.

During the reconquest, Andrastos and Basilus, along with a platoon of 40 Imperial soldiers, come across 60 rebel troopers. They are roughly evenly matched in terms of equipment.

That leaves numbers as the deciding factor. The gamemaster assigns 10 tokens to the rebel troopers, and 7 (two-thirds, rounded up) to the Imperial soldiers.

The Combat Process

In GCS Mass Combat, each side makes a check against a Target Number determined by several factors. The degree of success they roll against the Target Number yields the number of tokens the enemy loses.

Determining Mass Combat Target Number

A side's **Mass Combat Target Number** starts at 14+, and depends upon four things: numerical advantage, command quality, terrain and defenses, and player character contributions.

Numerical Advantage

Take the number of markers possessed by the opponent minus the number of markers possessed by your side. This is the **numerical advantage** modifier. Add the result to the Mass Combat Target Number.

Andrastos and Basilus have 7 tokens, and the enemy has 10. 10 minus 7 is 3. Our heroes must add 3 to the Mass Combat Target Number, which is now 17+.

For the rebels, the calculation is flipped: our heroes' 7 tokens minus their own 10, yielding -3. Adding this to their Mass Combat Target Number, the rebels move onward with an 11+.

¹ For example, Savage Worlds. No, there's no particular reason why I chose to name that one.

² Savage Worlds has a very nice one.

³ Of course it does, because I developed it myself. Never let it be said that I'm the sort to steal from other games. Like, say, Savage Worlds.

⁴ Within reason, anyway. If you are finding it difficult to justify assigning the smaller force even one token, you may wish to consider either a surrender or demanding a surrender, depending on which side you are on.

Command Quality

A character or NPC on your side may make a command skill check against a Target Number of 16+. If the opponent has more markers than he does, he adds the numerical advantage modifier to the Target Number. If he has more than twice as many tokens as the enemy, he subtracts the numerical advantage modifier from the Target Number.

If a character succeeds on a command check, his side receives a -2 bonus to the Mass Combat Target Number.

Andrastos has ranks in Command, and decides to make a command roll. His forces are outnumbered, so he must add the numerical advantage modifier to the base Target Number of 16+ for a result of 19+. His Command skill level is 3, and its linked attribute is Charisma. Andrastos' Charisma bonus is +1, for an effective skill level of 4. He rolls 4d6 and gets a final result of 22.

This is a success, and adds a -2 bonus to our heroes' Mass Combat Target Number, which is now 15+.

The rebels have no command; their Mass Combat Target Number remains at 11+.

Terrain and Defense

If you are attacking fortifications, add a penalty to your Target Number. The fortifications penalty should range from between +1 for makeshift defenses and +6 for the most heavily-prepared permanent positions.

If you are defending fortifications, subtract a bonus from your Target Number of half the penalty imposed upon the attacker.

The rebels have erected some hasty fortifications, adding a penalty of +1 to our heroes' Mass Combat Target Number, which is now 16+.

Half of the penalty rounded down is 0, so the rebels receive no bonus for defending their position. Their Mass Combat Target Number is still 11+.

Player Character Contributions

In small mass combats, players should contribute by simply playing out their turns and defeating mooks.

In large mass combats, where the above method is unlikely to tip the balance, players may make **Mass Combat Contribution checks**, which provide a modifier to the mass combat roll rather than directly killing mooks.

To make a Mass Combat Contribution roll, make a check of a combat skill you can justify to your gamemaster against a basic Target Number of 18+. Add the numerical advantage modifier to the Target Number.

On a success, add a -1 bonus to your side's Mass Combat Target Number per degree of success, or add a +1 penalty to your opponent's Mass Combat Target Number per degree of success. You may not mix and match.

On a failure, cross out one damage save from your outermost layer of defense.

In both cases, if you're using a weapon that requires ammunition, use two attacks' worth.

Andrastos and Basilus both decide to make Player Character Contribution checks. Their numerical advantage modifier is +3, so the base Target Number of 18+ becomes TN21+.

Basilus chooses to roll his Psi Attack skill. He has it at level 10, and has a bonus of +3 in Intelligence, its linked attribute. He adds the result of a 4d6 roll to 13, his effective skill level, and gets a 27, which exceeds the Target Number by 6 for 3 degrees of success. He elects to penalize the rebels, adding +3 to their Mass Combat Target Number.

After Basilus' contribution, the target numbers stand at 16+ for our heroes, and 14+ for their enemies.

Andrastos rolls his Hand Weapons skill, with an effective level of 7, using two attacks of ammunition from his plasma rifle's power cell. The final result of the skill roll is 23, exceeding the Target Number by 2 for 1 degree of success. He elects to aid his allies, adding -1 to their Mass Combat Target Number.

After Andrastos' contribution, the target numbers stand at 15+ for our heroes, and 14+ for the rebels.

Mass Combat Rolls

For each side, take the final Mass Combat Target Number and roll 4d6 against it. For each degree of success, remove one marker from the opposing side.

The rebels roll 9, below their Target Number, and remove no markers from the Imperial forces. Our heroes roll 16, exceeding the Target Number by 1 for 1 degree of success. They remove one marker from the rebel side.

Next round, the rebels' numerical advantage will only be 2.

Morale

After losing a marker, a side must make a **morale** check. Starting with a Target Number of 9+, add the number of markers lost since the start of the battle. On failure, the side routs (see below).

The rebels lost a marker; the only one they've lost in the battle so far. They add 1 to the Target Number of 9+ for a total of 10+ and roll an 8. They rout.

Leaving Combat

In the event that one side loses all its markers, the remaining side is obviously the victor. In the event that both sides lose all their markers, both sides lose. Sides may leave combat by two other means.

Retreating

Instead of making a Mass Combat roll, a side may elect to **retreat** from battle. After taking casualties, the side leaves combat without making a morale check.

Routing

If a side fails a morale check, it loses one extra marker and **routs**, immediately leaving combat.

The rebels lose a second marker because they routed, then flee the field. They lose two markers total.

Wounded and Damaged

Some lost markers may be recovered as **wounded** men or **damaged** equipment following a mass combat. For each lost marker, roll against a Target Number of 15+ for a victorious side, 16+ for a retreated side, or 17+ for a routed side. On successful rolls, the men and material represented by the token are wounded. On failed rolls, they are lost.

You may obtain the number of men and/or pieces of material represented by each marker by dividing the side's starting strength by the number of markers it began with.

For each marker lost, the rebels roll against 17+. They roll a 13 and a 17, losing one marker's worth of forces for good and recovering one marker's worth of wounded men or damaged equipment.

Given the rebels' starting force of 60 men and their starting marker count of 10, each marker represents six men. Six men are killed in combat, and six retreat wounded.

Integrating Mass Combat and Normal Combat

As alluded to earlier in this chapter, Mass Combat may occur concurrently with ordinary combat, or as an independent event.

Gamemasters are encouraged to use the Mass Combat system for large-scale battles, of course, battles too large for players to impact combat by ordinary means. Gamemasters are encouraged *not* to use the Mass Combat system for small-to-medium combats when one side has no mooks, or when both sides have a good mix of mooks and full GCS entities. The Mass Combat system should also be used in small-to-medium combats where both sides have mooks, but only one side has full GCS entities.

In the latter case, the full entities take their turns as normal and do not make Player Character Contribution rolls. The mooks take no action on their own. Mass Combat resolution occurs at the end of each round. When a side loses tokens, remove a corresponding number of mooks from the battlefield, chosen at random. If the side with entities loses all its mooks, Mass Combat ends. Set aside the markers representing wounded men and damaged equipment, then finish the combat per the ordinary Gridless Combat System rules.

In general, though the Mass Combat rules are simple to use, they are nevertheless to be avoided when possible: if used in their independent form, they risk bringing players out of the spotlight, and if used in their combat-integrated form, they slow things down and complicate matters considerably. As a rule, only use the Mass Combat system if there is a need for mooks to fight mooks. If mooks can fight full Gridless Combat System entities, be they friend or foe, and if there aren't enough enemies to dramatically slow down combat, skip Mass Combat.

RPJ Cinematic Combat

Besides the Gridless Combat System, RPJ also provides a system for **cinematic combat**—that is, less rule-based combat which allows for a greater degree of player improvisation. It may be employed in games using the Gridless Combat System to provide for entertaining combat against legendary foes¹, or even in place of the Gridless Combat System altogether².

Dependencies

The Cinematic Combat system depends on some aspects of the Gridless Combat System and RPJ Health, and depends fully on RPJ Skills.

Character Qualities

Though the Cinematic Combat system simplifies the combat rules, much of the bookkeeping carries over from the Gridless Combat System. Characters track several pieces of information: their damage saves, including those from armor; the damage their weapons and special attacks do; the number of actions they receive; and their initiative modifier.

Setting Up

The gamemaster should provide a proper map of the combat area. There is no need to divide it into GCS Regions. Draw a 30-yard scale on the map.

Characters roll for initiative according to the Gridless Combat System rules on page 31. Make a note of the turn order.

Place markers for each entity involved in combat on the map³.

Laeniel and Ug join us once again! They have encountered a massive War-Oliphant. The gamemaster decides that the War-Oliphant, with its heavy armor and magical resistance, is a foe too powerful for ordinary combat.

He draws a map of the area: a steep-sided valley fifty feet deep, five hundred yards long. Laeniel and Ug start on the rim of the valley, while the War-Oliphant starts below.

Rolling for initiative, they set the turn order: Laeniel, the Oliphant, and finally, Ug.

Health, Death, and Dying

For players and ordinary enemies, follow the rules in the Gridless Combat System for applying damage on page 33, and the rules for incapacitation, coups de grace, and helping hands starting on page 34.

The gamemaster may decide to give certain large or **legendary** enemies unlimited damage saves, or a large amount of damage saves on a higher damage scale. These enemies may be defeated by dealing critical damage—that is, making attacks to weaken or cripple such a foe, then delivering the final blow when the foe is staggered⁴.

- 1 In this circumstance, ordinary combat is a lot like standing in a circle around a dragon, bashing its toes until it dies.
- 2 Recommended only for gamemasters with a good sense for Target Numbers, comfortable with setting difficulties on the fly. Even if you aren't using the Gridless Combat System, I encourage you to crib from it.
- 3 Putting them, at the risk of sounding trite, where they are.
- 4 You may have noticed that these terms (critical damage, weakened, crippled, staggered) do not appear in bold text. As such, they have no precise mechanical meaning. They merely provide a narrative structure for cinematic combats against legendary foes. The players are outclassed at first; they must use their skills to bring the enemy down a few pegs to

The Round

Each round, players have the option to take their turn in its ordinary place, or move down the turn order. Any time two or more players have subsequent turns, they may take a **cooperative turn** instead.

Laeniel defers her turn to happen after the Oliphaunt's and before Ug's.

Movement

Characters may move 30 yards per action. (Precise measurement is not required, just keep it reasonable.) Exciting acrobatics are encouraged, although they may take extra skill rolls.

The Oliphaunt moves first. It has one action only; it moves 30 yards down the valley.

Attacks

Characters may make one attack per action. Gamemasters can reference the Gridless Combat System for a way to generate approximately fair Target Numbers for attacks.

The Oliphaunt may only have one action, but the mooks atop it have more. They fire a hail of arrows at Ug and Laeniel, which all miss.

Cooperative Turns

On a cooperative turn, the players involved may interleave their actions in any way they like to aid one another. There are no strict limits on how this may be done; cooperative turns provide players the most improvisational opportunity in the Cinematic Combat system, and gamemasters should give them wide latitude to do awesome things.

Dave and Fred elect to take a cooperative turn. In this combat, Ug has three actions and Laeniel has five; both have one extra action over their base number thanks to the Potion of Speed the author determined they should drink for the purposes of this example.

Ug kicks things off by using his Landslide spell, at the cost of one action, to move Laeniel and Ug. The spell's effect allows one adjacency group to move as though each member had spent two actions. Laeniel and Ug move 60 yards up the valley and down the valley wall, to put them next to the Oliphaunt.

Next, Laeniel takes two actions, making an attack against the Oliphaunt's front leg to cut a tendon (TN18+; she succeeds), and quickly climbing the ancient arrows embedded in the Oliphaunt's flank (Acrobatics at TN20+; again, she succeeds). The beast roars in pain.

Ug takes his final action, casting Cave-In to collapse the valley walls ahead and block the Oliphaunt's retreat.

Laeniel takes her last two actions to cut the ropes securing the Oliphaunt's war-tower to its back. It topples off and breaks apart as it hits the ground.

reveal vulnerabilities. After they do, they may attack those weak spots to defeat the foe.

Appendix A: Example Skills

This list of skills is provided primarily for inspiration. Consult your RPJ module rulebook for actual information on the skills system.

General Skills

- **Athleticism** (Strength, Constitution, or Dexterity): how fast a character can run, how high he can jump, how far he can throw things, and in general his capacity for athletic feats. Choose a linked attribute at character creation, or when adding the skill for the first time.
- **Command** (Charisma): a character's ability to command forces in battle.
- **Concealment** (Intelligence): a character's ability to hide, and to take actions without being seen.
- **Diplomacy** (Charisma): how reliably a character can talk others into agreement with himself, or how well he can lie.
- **Dodge** (Dexterity): a character's skill at eluding attacks.
- **Games** (Intelligence): how well a character plays board games and games of chance.
- **Heavy Armor Use** (Constitution): skill at defending against attacks with heavy armor.
- **Inspire** (Charisma): a character's ability to aid others and spur them to greater heights of achievement. Roll against the Target Number of a task being attempted by another character. For each degree of success, reduce the other character's Target Number by 1.
- **Intimidate** (Strength or Constitution): a character's physical presence and ability to leverage said presence into forcing others to do things.
- **Knowledge** (Intelligence): how much a character knows about the world. Pick a focus topic as a specialty, receiving a -2 bonus to Target Number on rolls concerning that topic; all other topics are rolled at no bonus or penalty.
- **Light Armor Use** (Dexterity): skill at defending against attacks with light armor.
- **Open Lock** (Dexterity or Intelligence): a character's ability to open locks without the required key. It may take different forms in different genre; Intelligence is more apt for science fiction and Dexterity is more apt for fantasy.
- **Perception** (Willpower): a character's ability to notice things in and about the world around them, and to conduct investigations into them.
- **Reaction** (Dexterity): a character's quickness on the draw. Use for ranged defense in GCS Movement and Fire, and also as the initiative skill in the ordinary Gridless Combat System.
- **Read Person** (Charisma): how well a character can glean information about a person from interacting with them.
- **Survival** (Willpower): a character's talent for surviving in a wide variety of situations without supplies or other outside aid.
- **Trade** (Charisma): a character's ability to haggle prices downward, or to assess prices in a large

region to buy and sell profitably.

Fantasy Skills

- **Alchemy** (Intelligence): skill at brewing useful potions, tinctures, and poultices. And also booze.
- **Archery** (Dexterity): a character's talent with bow and arrow.
- **Armorkrafting** (Strength): how well a character can manufacture and repair armor.
- **Blunt Weapons** (Strength): a character's talent with blunt weapons of all sizes.
- **Crafting** (Dexterity): skill at one of many sorts of decorative or practical crafting not covered by Armorkrafting and Weaponsmithing, such as woodworking, stonecarving, soapmaking, and masonry. Pick one field and note it on your character sheet alongside Crafting. You may take several Crafting skill with different fields.
- **Horsemanship** (Dexterity for actual skill, Charisma for horse-whispering): a character's ability to control a horse. Not required to simply ride, but precise control of direction, speed, and maneuver may require extra skill. Choose an attribute when adding the skill to your sheet.
- **Large Blades** (Strength): a character's talent with longswords and two-handed bladed weapons.
- **Small Blades** (Dexterity): a character's skill with small bladed weapons: daggers, hatches, short swords, and the like.
- **Weaponcrafting** (Dexterity): how well a character can manufacture and repair weapons.

Science Fiction Skills

- **Anti-Vehicle Weapons** (Strength): how well a character can use rocket launchers, recoilless rifles, heavy plasma guns, and other anti-vehicle weapons.
- **Vehicle Gunnery** (Dexterity): a character's skill at using weapons, whether fixed or turreted.
- **Hand Weapons** (Dexterity): a character's ability with rifles, pistols, machine guns, and other ordinary infantry arms.
- **Logistics** (Intelligence): a character's ability to organize and efficiently move men and material.
- **Melee Weapons** (Strength): how well a character can fight with weapons of various sorts.
- **Power Armor Use** (Strength): how well a character can operate and fight powered armor .
- **Combat Maneuvering** (Intelligence): a character's talent for maneuvering vehicles in combat.
- **Jury-Rig** (Intelligence): a character's skill at creating temporary or prototype devices to achieve a certain desired effect.
- **Manipulate Technology** (Willpower): how well a character can use both familiar and unfamiliar technology to achieve a desired effect.
- **Medicine** (Intelligence): a character's ability to diagnose and treat medical conditions.
- **Develop Technology** (Intelligence): a character's ability at both understanding the operating

principles of unfamiliar devices, and at creating new technology based on known principles.

- **Navigation** (Intelligence): a character's navigational ability.
- **Pilot** (Dexterity): a character's piloting ability.
- **Repair** (Willpower): how well a character can repair technology.

Appendix B: Dice Tables

4d6

Result	Percent	At Least	At Most
4	0.08%	100.00%	0.08%
5	0.31%	99.92%	0.39%
6	0.77%	99.61%	1.16%
7	1.54%	98.84%	2.70%
8	2.70%	97.30%	5.40%
9	4.32%	94.60%	9.72%
10	6.17%	90.28%	15.90%
11	8.02%	84.10%	23.92%
12	9.65%	76.08%	33.56%
13	10.80%	66.44%	44.37%
14	11.27%	55.63%	55.63%
15	10.80%	44.37%	66.44%
16	9.65%	33.56%	76.08%
17	8.02%	23.92%	84.10%
18	6.17%	15.90%	90.28%
19	4.32%	9.72%	94.60%
20	2.70%	5.40%	97.30%
21	1.54%	2.70%	98.84%
22	0.77%	1.16%	99.61%
23	0.31%	0.39%	99.92%
24	0.08%	0.08%	100.00%

10d±1

Result	Percent	At Least	At Most
-11	0.10%	100.00%	0.10%
-9	0.78%	99.90%	0.88%
-8	0.20%	99.12%	1.07%
-7	2.73%	98.93%	3.81%
-6	1.56%	96.19%	5.37%
-5	5.57%	94.63%	10.94%
-4	5.47%	89.06%	16.41%
-3	7.62%	83.59%	24.02%
-2	10.94%	75.98%	34.96%
-1	8.20%	65.04%	43.16%
0	13.67%	56.84%	56.84%
1	8.20%	43.16%	65.04%
2	10.94%	34.96%	75.98%
3	7.62%	24.02%	83.59%
4	5.47%	16.41%	89.06%
5	5.57%	10.94%	94.63%
6	1.56%	5.37%	96.19%
7	2.73%	3.81%	98.93%
8	0.20%	1.07%	99.12%
9	0.78%	0.88%	99.90%
11	0.10%	0.10%	100.00%

Appendix C: Skill and Attribute Cost Tables

These tables provide the cost to raise attributes and skills from a given level to a given level. Read the current level down the left side of the chart, and move right to the column corresponding to the desired level. The cost to raise the attribute or skill in attribute points (for attributes, used during character creation only) or character points is at the intersection.

Primary Attributes

The costs given here are for attributes in the primary category. Double the listed cost for attributes outside the primary category.

From/To	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0	1	2	3	5	7	9	12	15	18	22
1	—	1	2	4	6	8	11	14	17	21
2	—	—	1	3	5	7	10	13	16	20
3	—	—	—	2	4	6	9	12	15	19
4	—	—	—	—	2	4	7	10	13	17
5	—	—	—	—	—	2	5	8	11	15
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	9	13
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	10
8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	7
9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4

Discount Skills

From/To	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0	1	2	3	5	7	9	12	15	18	22
1	—	1	2	4	6	8	11	14	17	21
2	—	—	1	3	5	7	10	13	16	20
3	—	—	—	2	4	6	9	12	15	19
4	—	—	—	—	2	4	7	10	13	17
5	—	—	—	—	—	2	5	8	11	15
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	9	13
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	10
8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	7
9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4

Normal Skills

From/To	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0	2	4	6	10	14	18	24	30	36	44
1	—	2	4	8	12	16	22	28	34	42
2	—	—	2	6	10	14	20	26	32	40
3	—	—	—	4	8	12	18	24	30	38
4	—	—	—	—	4	8	14	20	26	34
5	—	—	—	—	—	4	10	16	22	30
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	12	18	26
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	12	20
8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	14
9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8

Penalty Skills

From/To	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0	4	8	12	20	28	36	48	60	72	88
1	—	4	8	16	24	32	44	56	68	84
2	—	—	4	12	20	28	40	52	64	80
3	—	—	—	8	16	24	36	48	60	76
4	—	—	—	—	8	16	28	40	52	68
5	—	—	—	—	—	8	20	32	44	60
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	9	13
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	10
8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	7
9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4

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