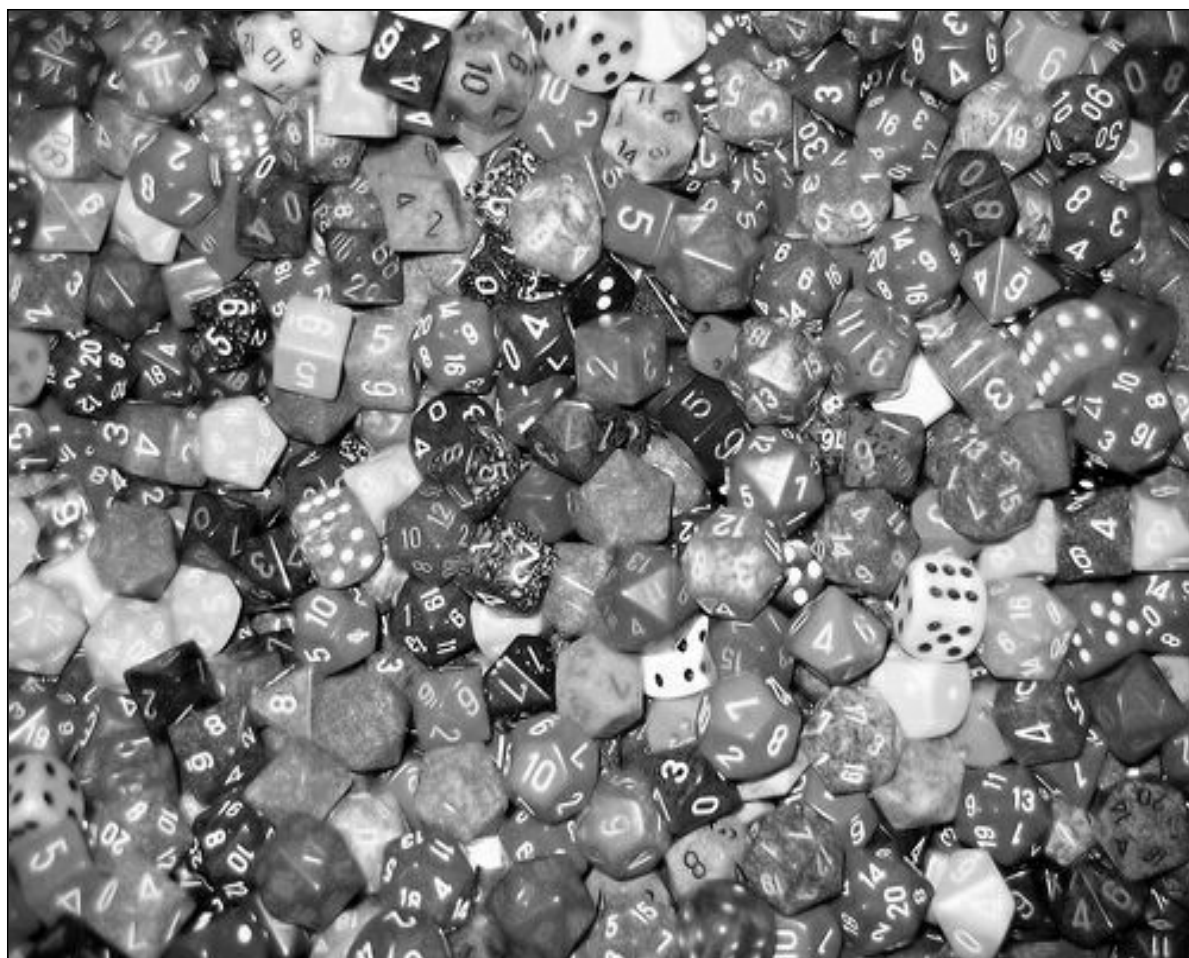


FARSIGHT GAMES ODDS

The Tabletop Roleplaying E-Magazine

Issue 7 – April 2009



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ODDS

Issue 7
April 2009

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Front cover: *Dice! And lots of 'em!*

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EDITORIAL

It's been a heck of a busy month for Farsight Games – not only have I released my unofficial Highlander RPG, I've also started an Open Design Project so that the RPG community can get involved with designing their own science fiction roleplaying game.

'In Glorious 2D!' (IG2D) is a science fiction roleplaying game that has been created with the designer in mind. It has been written so that the bare bones of the rules, the rules presented in this document, can be taken away by anyone and adapted, changed, modified and otherwise restructured. Basically, it's a game that you can help design.

The aim of the project is to get gamers, designers and potential designers involved with the rules design process and create a game ruleset for the kind of science fiction games they play, be it cyberpunk, stellar empires at war, dark sci-fi horror or exploration of the stars. This way, the system can be adapted and

modified to suit playing styles and campaigns for the multitude of gaming groups out there. This will hopefully create a set of generic rules that anyone can use for any style of science fiction game. Get over to www.farsightgames.com for more information.

This month we have an interview with Rob Lang, the author of the excellent free sci-fi RPG 'Icar' www.icar.co.uk, and the man behind the reviews at www.thefreerpgblog.blogspot.com.

Many thanks to Rob for his time. We also have two fantastic guest articles by Richard Williams who discusses taking the game of Chess just that little bit further, and he also gives us a great variation of the game to use in our RPG sessions to help decide the outcome of battles.

Until next month, keep on rollin'

JONATHAN HICKS
Director of Farsight Games



THE ROB LANG INTERVIEW

Creator of the free science fiction roleplaying game *Icar* and the man behind the keyboard at *The Free RPG Blog*, Rob Lang took some time out to answer a few questions for ODDS.

Hi, Rob, and welcome to ODDS ezine. Thanks for taking the time to do this interview. First of all, can I get a bit of a biography? What do you do other than spend time on RPGs?

Thank you for the chance to be interviewed. I'm a raging egomaniac, so this is going to be fun! I am a finance software developer with a PhD in Cybernetics. Based in the UK, I am a volunteer flying instructor with the UK Air Cadets (think boys scouts of the air). I play bass in a covers band but also play guitar and banjo. I enjoy all forms of gaming, PC, Wii and board games. I write The Free RPG Blog and Icar the Free Science Fiction RPG as well as being an administrator for Keeton Harrington's at the free RPG community of One Thousand Monkey, One Thousand Typewriters (1KM1KT) (www.1km1kt.net).

So what got you started in the RPG hobby?

There is a game shop near where I grew up in North London called Leisure Games (www.leisuregames.co.uk), as a young lad my friends and I would buy figures. Not to play games with, just to paint and enjoy. We noticed the shop had a club and we went along. To start with, we played board games but I saw some guys older than I playing some

sort of game that looked fun (I think it was either Star Trek RPG or the Palladium Vietnam one, Recon). I hurriedly put together my own game (that become Icar) and cajoled friends at school into playing. I copied how the other gamers played by watching from afar. I was a GM from the start and didn't actually play for about 3 years.

Do you game much, and what are your favourite games?

I game one night a week. It's an intense four hours after work. I've run a weekly Icar group for 18 years now. Apart from Icar, my favourite games are somewhat non-standard. Of those I've played, SLA Industries (Cubicle7 games) fulfills the dark side, while Paranoia (2nd Ed, I've not tried XP) is good for sheer escapism. I bought the Palladium Fantasy books because they were beautifully written and designed - I never got round to running any.

What's your own personal RPG collection like - huge and room dominating, or small and trim?

Of purchased books, I have a single shelf that stretches as far as my elbow to my fingertips. Having seen other people's collections online, mine is pitiful! For Icar, I probably have about 100kg of folders, drawings, books, old character sheets and other

paraphernalia. I've never thrown any of it away. As it goes out of currency, it goes into the archive. Digitally, I have just over 100MB of other people's work and 3GB of Icar.

ICAR, the free science fiction RPG, has been around for a long time. Tell us more about it; it's history and design. What got that project started?

Necessity is the mother of invention and having seen others playing at the games club, I wanted my own game. I liked Sci Fi so I decided to set it in space. I had no idea what I was doing, so to give myself some credibility I invented a number of utterly imaginary people who designed things with me. I felt that if I could convince my new friends at school that others were already playing the game, they would be more likely to play. It worked at first but I was forced to come clean later on. Looking back, it was a shameful thing to do. Fortunately, they were very forgiving. I called it Star Fleet, it had two statistics - one for agility, one for strength - and most games involved exploring alien worlds and killing mutants with an ever-increasing power of weapons. Arms races were common. After seeing other roleplaying games, I increased the number of statistics to 18 and replaced the dot matrix printed rules with a better word-processed version. Printed on an inkjet at school. The name changed when I got to University, as the conflict with Star Trek was too glaring. I wanted to call it Icarus but there was already a game called that online in 1995, so I shortened it. That sounds terrible when I write it down. Moving to Uni was good because I got to completely revamp the rules and thus the third version was born. The setting pretty much remained unchanged. I taught myself graphics in

my spare time at University and the game grew and grew.

Where did you get your inspiration for ICAR from?

This is a tricky question. One driving force for me was that I wanted Icar to be all mine. A greedy, self-obsessed outlook. I hated it when I had an idea and someone would rightly point out that it had been thought of somewhere else. To satisfy that, you need to be as different as you can from the big Sci-Fis - Star Wars and Star Trek. I didn't read very many books back then, so I would imagine that most of the inspiration comes from my upbringing and surroundings. Now, I've had more than my fair share of education, so I can draw from that. To keep novelty, I draw from things that aren't Sci Fi. For example, my current campaign setting I am running is based on a mix of The Young Ones (British TV sitcom about students), Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas and an image I saw on DeviantArt where there was a young girl cradling a bomb. I've tried to find the picture but it's gone. Art websites are great for inspiration. Just browsing the digital art sections and you come up amongst images that can make whole stories grow.

To create something new, write down your core idea and then write down your first thoughts about it. Then leave it, go back two days later and turn those thoughts on their head or think of something else. For example, take a bus ride into town as your core idea. What's the worst that can happen? You might immediately write down "Bomb on bus" or "Bus crashes". If you write those down immediately, then chances are they are too obvious. What about the bus being driven by a crazy joy rider or someone on the bus vomits acid? That would be unexpected. For me, this is the same for graphics,

settings and everything in Icar. The first draft never really gets very far.

The quality of the game is such that it would look great as a printed for-sale game, and would easily sit next to all the other professionally produced games on the shelves of stores and collectors alike. Have you ever considered going for a full printed release?

I have, seriously and often. When designing a game, you need to know why you're doing it. Is it for the fame? The fortune? Beer money? Everyone has their own reasons. For me, it's the thrill of getting something out of my head and down onto paper. It's a joy to see other people have fun around the table. Most of it generated by them, admittedly, but I still provided the fuse for them to ignite. There's an enormous thrill out of getting an email from someone who downloaded it and wanted to say thanks. You can't buy that fuzzy feeling of philanthropy. Icar will never be a commercial RPG but there is the next step...

What do you see happening with ICAR in the future?

Version 4 is the next step in Icar. Still a free PDF download but it will also have a printed Lulu version for those who don't have the facility to print it. Icar is currently in three (or four) separate PDF books and they need to be amalgamated into one. That will be Version 4. I'm tweaking the system, replacing some of the more esoteric mechanics with simpler ones based around arm waving explanations (not literally). All the graphics will be reformed to print quality. It's a big job but I have had a good run up. With Version 4 will be new equipment, spacecraft and vehicle sheets (which won't become a book because the

equipment is designed to be print-as-you-need-it) and a new website. I am also writing a novel based in the Icar world. Being a Sci Fi writer is something of a dream job for me.

The Free RPG Blog reviews many other free RPGs on the internet. How did that come about?

When you design RPG games, you often do so in a void. It is very difficult to get feedback. The Icar site has about 2000 visitors each month, with 200 downloads of the core rules alone. I have my own forum and contact detail information everywhere but I rarely hear from anyone. Golgotha Kinslayer kindly did a review of Icar in 2005 (www.gamewyrd.com/review/545) and that felt really good. I'm constantly checking other free RPGs to make sure Icar is on par with the best and the more you look, the more there are. They just keep coming out the woodwork. Back in 1995, a free RPG meant a page or two of HTML but now they are these beautiful PDFs, bursting with ideas and graphics. Sadly, most are ignored and forgotten because they do not have the marketing drive of a big corporation or an indie press. They are a labour of love, often ignored. I thought that was a terrible shame. I was inspired by the blogs of Zach Houghton (www.rpgblog2.com/) and Jeff Rients (www.jrients.blogspot.com/), so posted up on the RPG Site (www.therpgsite.com) on whether people thought it was a good idea, there was a resounding Yes! Since then, all the bloggers and visitors around the web have been very supportive. I hope I can give other free RPG authors the lift I got from Kinslayer and hope that the blog and 1KM1KT might become a place of pilgrimage for philanthropists.

As a designer, what do you look for in RPGs? Long and detailed, short and trim, image intensive or narrative driven?

Firstly, a game needs to fill its promise. If it says it's fast and easy (like Sketch) then it needs to do just that. Secondly, it needs to be complete enough to play. No free RPG is ever finished: the joy of PDF downloads is that you can update as often as you wish. Thirdly, you need to be able to print it so that anyone can take it to their gaming table. If you satisfy those requirements, chances are you'll get a review. Things I want to see are good spelling and grammar, a playtested game and novelty. Graphics and a pretty layout are nice to have but not essential. I'd also think about reducing fluff - after all some one's going to print it.

The RPG industry has had its ups and downs but from what I gather it's maintaining a certain level of popularity right now. What do you see happening to tabletop RPGs in the future? Will they still be popular, or do you think other mediums such as online RPGs and console games will dominate?

My mother tells a story about their first TV. Everyone thought people would not read books anymore. It seems ridiculous now but at the inception, it appeared that the flickering device in the corner of the living room would provide the family story telling desires, replacing the book. To a certain extent it has but books trigger imaginative parts of the brain that TV does not. I think computer games are to pencil and paper RPGs what TVs are to books. They provide a different sort of fun. Most of my fun had around the gaming table is human interaction - laughter, running jokes, fear, panic, scrambling

for dice, ideas blooming, sideways glances, sighing, slumped shoulders, concealed laughter and an infinite number of interactions compressed into four hours. Interaction through technology can't provide us with the social experience. Not for some time to come. The other distinct difference is that RPGs do not need to be bound by game mechanics; you can go off piste if it is fun and then the limits are only the imaginations of the roleplayers. Some computer games are sandboxes but the effort of creation is huge, it's not a simple thought and spoken word.

For the future? The doomsayers always said that the Internet and online gaming was going to kill RPGs. I think it's spawned choice beyond anything anyone could have imagined. With a few free resources, you can create your own RPG, upload it onto Lulu.com and get a printed book in your hand. That would have been unheard of in 1995. The power has been taken from the corporations and placed back into the hands of hobbyists. More conventions are run in the UK than ever before because mobilising gamers is that much easier. You place a piece of technology in the way of roleplayers and they're just going to pick it up and use it. I thought that my generation (now 30-something) would be the last generation but the local University Games and Roleplay Society (www.garps.org/) still thrives. Roleplayers are being born every minute.

What else has Rob Lang got planned for his gaming future?

I'm going to keep ploughing on through the enormous field of free RPGs, I think I've made a positive impact and I want to continue to do that. I want to try a 24-hour RPG and I was thinking of running a competition on the blog and at 1KM1KT to that

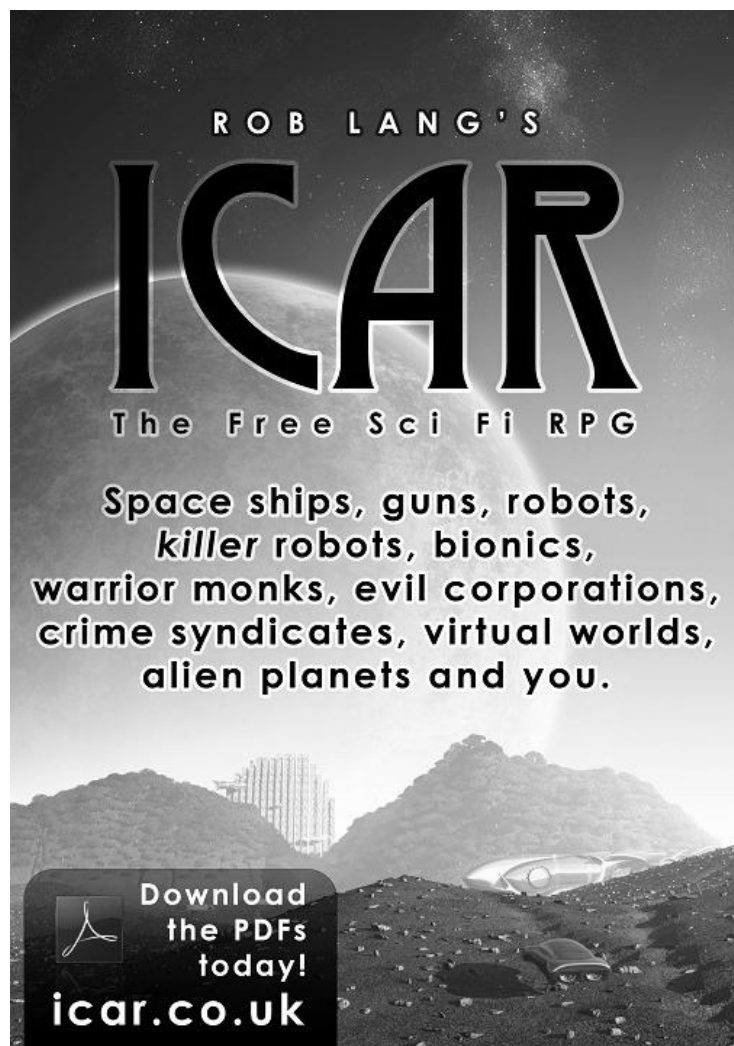
end. Why go it alone when I can drag a load of other people through 24 sleepless hours of creation. I also like the idea of podcasting, because I love the sound of my own voice (I am a GM, after all) but I would need some sort of a partner to bounce off. I've no idea how that might turn out. I have had a desire to take the mechanics of Icar and create a Steampunk setting but that's more a pipe dream than anything based in reality. Perhaps the largest challenge is to keep playing weekly, players my age with time in the evenings are in short supply.

Thanks for taking the time to do this interview, Rob. It's very much appreciated.

You're very welcome. Good luck with the ODDS magazine and many thanks from the wider RPG community for your continued philanthropy.

Rob Lang's free Icar sci-fi roleplaying game can be found at www.icar.co.uk, and his Free RPG Blog www.thefreerpgblog.blogspot.com

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8 GAME ETIQUETTE TIPS

Simple things to remember so that your games run smoother.

Everyone relies on the GM to provide a solid, enjoyable adventure with memorable NPCs and fantastic settings. What can players and GMs do to make the game better? What responsibilities can a GM and player have other than simply sitting at the table and playing that game?

The tips below are for GMs and players to identify potential problems and nip them in the bud. With all the new-fangled technology, silicon chips and such, a roleplayer's problems can only get bigger. Of course, not all these tips apply to every group, but there are always exceptions and if you game with a lot of people in a lot of groups then the chances of coming across these incidents are higher.

(All the tips are references to personal incidents that were probably some of the worst times I ever had as a GM or player during my long tenure as a roleplayer. I've included some of the worst ones I remember in italics. Names have been omitted to protect the innocent. Just call me Jonathan "axe to grind" Hicks).

1. Punctuality Is Politeness And Consideration In One

The GM may have a limited amount of time to play the game or have a set sequence of events he/she wants to play out before the night is over. To aid this, be punctual. If the GM says 7:00, then try your best to get there for 7:00. Arriving an hour late can be awkward for the GM and the other players, as time will be wasted with greetings and filling in the latecomer with game details and plot events.

It's understandable that certain occurrences may cause you to be late, and these incidents are well out of your control, but if there is no other reason to be late then try your best. There's more than one person at that gaming table to keep happy.

Case: I once ran a game in which the night's scenario was going to be the finale of the Warhammer campaign before friends returned to university. Only one player had the knowledge of how to progress and he was an hour and a half late getting there for no other reason than he was watching a film he had bought that day, which left me only an hour and a half to finish a Summer campaign. Hmmm...

2. Turn Off Phones And Pagers

I don't know how many games I've run where I got to the plot-bursting, emotionally dazzling finale and then someone's mobile phone or pager went off. Precious moments, even minutes, are wasted when a player is distracted by a call, and then the atmosphere is lost and cannot be reclaimed.

Switch off those mobiles unless there's a good reason why they should be on!

Case: Halfway through an intense MechWarrior game, just at the point when the bullets were flying and enemy 'Mechs were advancing on our position, the GM's

mobile went off. He was gone for nearly half an hour. Frustrating or what? To compound the problem, when the GM came back and the game resumed, a player's mobile went off. It wouldn't have been so bad if it had been anything other than a social call.

3. The Items In The Room Are Not Always Part Of The Game

So, we got to a turning point in the game. Do the players turn north to the Eaglenest Range or do they head east to the Skaven Breeding Halls. What do they care? There's a PlayStation/Gameboy/PC in the room and they're having an ace time!

It may be up to the GM to remove or make unavailable anything in the room that may provide a distraction, but this is not always the case. A little self-control would be handy.

Case: Whilst running an enjoyable game set in the world of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, we realised that two of the players, who had left the room for a secret discussion, had been gone for quite a while. Upon investigation, we found said players in the other room playing Metal Gear Solid on the Playstation which, whilst an enjoyable game, had absolutely nothing to do with the scenario.

4. Paying Attention Is The Core Of A Game

Well it isn't it? How can you expect to progress if you've hardly listened to anything the players or the GM has said?

Let's say the last five minutes has seen the PCs decide on their tactics and strategy and declare their intentions, then they go flying into the demon's cave with swords high and plan ready. You're not going to be much use if you spent those five important minutes with your nose in a magazine, are you?

What if the GM has explained a vital clue or piece of information? What use is that to you or the group if you didn't give due attention? Prick up your ears when the GM is speaking to you and/or the group.

Case: Whilst running a Twilight 2000 game I spent a good while explaining in-character the PCs' covert requirements. Their mission was to meet the corrupt President of Sunken Madagascar, find out why he has increased his military output, and try to support a coup that had been growing. Upon arrival at the President's, two of the four players asked, "So, what are we doing here?" Much shaking of heads ensued.

5. Being Funny Is One Thing, Being Annoying Is Quite Another

We've all had those moments in games where something has happened that just had us rolling on the floor. There's always comments and events which illicit a laugh or a chuckle from the players and GM alike. These are good moments, especially during a non-serious game, and can be great fun. But let's not overdo it, eh?

Continuous jokes and remarks, especially during a serious game, can be a little annoying. Repeating the same joke over and over again to get the same laugh...can you imagine such a thing? Jokes and having fun are part of the game, but there is a time and a place for such things and, depending on what the game is being played for, players and GMs alike should realise their limits.

Case: A long time ago, in a Star Wars game far, far away, there were five players and a GM. One of the players would wait until a critical part of the game, pretend to drop his pencil, and then re-emerge from under the table with the wraparound sticker off a large Coca-Cola bottle over his face and declare "Coca-Cola Man has come to save the day!" Every week, on cue. No, really, I'm not making this stuff up.

6. Being Loud Does Not Mean You're Right

We've all got something to add to a game such as ideas, tactics, revelations, and character stuff. It's a sign of a good roleplayer when they can put forward their own opinions and thoughts, and deal with any arguments "in character", PC-to-PC instead of player-to-player.

Some gamers find it necessary to raise their voices however, talking over the other people at the table so that their opinions are heard and acted upon. With players it's annoying because it's as if the one viewpoint is the be-all and end-all of group decisions. With GMs it's annoying because constant interruptions and opinions can disrupt good roleplaying and make the game feel linear.

The answer is simple: don't do it! Have a little patience. The players haven't gathered about the table just for your benefit.

Case: During a game of Rolemaster, an excitable GM decided that the players were not going in the direction he wanted them to go, so he decided to usher them onto the right path. He'd talk over every decision made, raising his voice if the players decided on a certain course of action with phrases such as "Why do you want to do that?" and "Oh, that's a stupid idea". When asked to allow a little latitude he would simply talk over the players until they followed his pointers. Strangely, nobody turned up for his next game. I won't even tell you about the time we tried to kill an evil wizard by setting fire to his doorless tower, only to find we'd failed because he was 'out shopping'.

7. The Rules May Be Guidelines, But They're Still Rules

Roleplaying games have a set of rules to adjudicate actions and abilities and these are reflected, in most cases, in the use of dice. So why do some roleplayers feel it necessary to cheat? The idea of a high adventure game is to inject a little of the chance and danger inherent in such things. If a bad roll is made, it does not reflect badly on the player, it's just the way things turned out and it's a sign of good roleplaying to take the rough with the smooth.

There are five general types of cheaters:

- 1) The **"Pooper Scooper"** who will roll their dice and pick them up straight away before anyone else has a chance to see the result and claim they succeeded.
- 2) The **"Ready-To-Rumble Roller"** who will claim they succeeded with the dice that are already lying on decent numbers on the table, which were not actually rolled.
- 3) The **"Bombardier"** who will roll their dice one at a time, and every time a low dice comes up they will slam their next roll into the previous dice in the hope of knocking it onto a better number.
- 4) The **"Houdini Skills"** players who suddenly acquire a skill or increased ability to help them escape out of a bad or tricky situation, usually added to the character sheet secretly during play.
- 5) The **"Phantom Equipment"** player who will suddenly have an item or tool appear on their character sheet, again added secretly during play.

There is no sure way to guard against these cheaters, especially in large group games where there is a lot to be aware of. There are some precautions you can take, however. Make sure that, before play starts, the group is aware that all rolls are to be made in the open and watched by others. (The GM may be exempt from this, depending on their use of GM screens and wanting to have the chance to have more control over the game). Then the player/GM has no choice but to make the roll. Also, rolls must be made with all the required dice thrown at the same time. This way, the group is aware that rolls are being monitored and pre-warning them means that players don't feel picked on.

Don't worry too much about weighted dice. These little monsters are easy to spot as they don't roll naturally and have a tendency to spin when landing on their set number. You can check most of the dice before play, anyway. Have photocopies of the PC character sheets to hand to the GM, and make sure as a player that you've had a good look over other player's sheets (group style/policy permitting). This way you'll have an idea what each player is capable of and what they own, and have an insight into the possibility of cheating.

Case: During a strange game of Call of Cthulhu, the group was skulking about a sunken church in the Black Forest of the Rhine when they were suddenly attacked by ghouls. Single handed, one of the weakest characters in the group managed to hold off the ghouls with a machete and pistol while the others grabbed artefacts and made a run for it. He was hailed the hero of the encounter... until it was realised that no-one had actually seen any of the rolls made, and that the items "pistol" and "machete" were not actually on the player's character sheet equipment list.

8. Arguments May Be Healthy, But Stress Is A Killer

There can be many discussions during a game regarding the interpretation or application of rules, and this is a good thing in many respects. It clearly defines capabilities and limitations of PC and NPC alike, and it can result in well-conceived House Rules.

Unfortunately, there are situations that arise when disagreements on rules and capabilities grow from discussion to heated debate to full-blown shouting matches.

Both players and GMs alike have their own idea how certain things should be utilised from the rulebook and how things should be played out.

The answer is simple: chill out! When playing a game remember two things:

- 1) It's a game.
- 2) The idea of the game is to socialise and have fun.


If you can't agree on an aspect then defer to the GM after making your point. After all, the GM's word should be final. If an honest mistake has been made, then make a note of the problem and carry on, backtrack if necessary then continue. Always be ready to have an opinion, but don't think that arguing the point will make it any better. Discuss the problem, come to a compromise, then make a note on the problem and how it can be solved.

Failing that, the GM's word is final, if that's the only way to stop it. And don't take the disagreement out of the confines of the game. Getting cranky afterwards or during other activities because of the argument is pointless because, as in the concept of the game, it has nothing to do with real life at all. Ask yourself the question is it really worth it? Raised voices make for raised blood pressure - not good.


Case: A player in a game of Cyberpunk decided to steal a car after a firefight at the local casino, but his hotwiring skill wasn't good enough. There was a long drawn out argument about the technicalities of stealing a car, but the GM basically said that regardless of what the player knew, the PC couldn't do it. After the argument (which got a little out of hand) the player sulked, made stupid comments, and generally disrupted the game. Towards the end of the night, the GM took the player's character sheet, crumpled it up and popped it in the bin. "What was that?" asked the player. "Random psycho sniper in a church tower just took you out", said the GM. "Don't I get to roll?" asked the player. The GM just smiled. "He's a really good shot." The player got the point.

I hope these tips have given you some ideas and a few things to think about. Most of these are intended to help you deal with those incidents that crop up during the actual act of gaming and will hopefully help you to have a smoother, happier experience.

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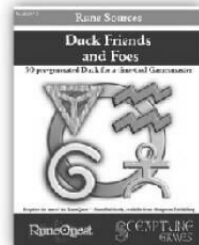
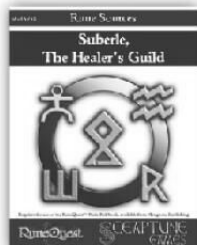
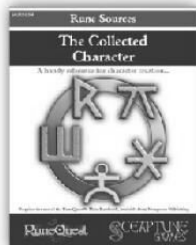
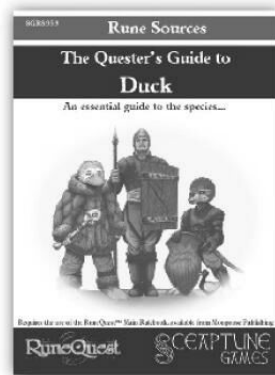
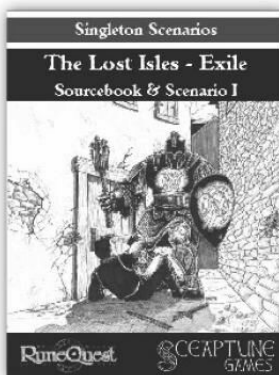


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A GAME OF KINGS

(If you want to be)

Another look at Chess

by

Richard Williams

It seems that roleplayers today are often looking for the next great game to compliment their usual gaming evenings. While some scour the shops and second-hand stores, others trawl the internet looking for anything that might fill an evening or two or, who knows, maybe even become the regular game. Many others have made the technological leap from pen and paper to computers, gaming online, often with people they've never even met.

Personally this is not for me. As the saying goes I like to see the fear in my opponent's eyes. And while I too have looked far and wide for any kind of game that would be a new experience (for me at least) I found it was not a leap forward that brought fresh reward, but rather a leap back.

Chess is an incredibly familiar game, obviously, despite having its origins in 15th century Europe, but this very familiarity might also be a curse for the game. They say that familiarity breeds contempt and sure enough I am hard pressed to find a gamer who will happily sit down and play one of Europe's oldest games, despite the fact that Chess is where so many gamers started.

But many gamers fail to realise just how versatile a game of chess can be. The game can be completely changed with just a minor amount of modifications and even experienced players suddenly find themselves on unsure footing. While at university I

had the opportunity to test this with my flatmates. They would play chess near constantly, at least a good few games every day, and would do so drunk or sober, tired or alert, fully dressed or semi-naked (they were good mates, OK?). Basically my point is that they loved the game and played it often, read books on improving their game and one of them would even watch chess matches on the internet. Needless to say they knew a thing or two about how to play and win. But with one simple move I caused pandemonium.

Casually I suggested making the game interesting. Before people could complain about not having any money I stepped forward and swapped the knights and the bishops starting squares. How much harm could this cause? Well a lot, it seems, as suddenly all the tried and tested manoeuvres went out of the window. Both my flatmates agreed that it felt like a completely different game and even said it seemed weird.

But swapping chess pieces is the very least that can be done with the game (although I highly recommend it). In fact I would say that there are almost as many different ways to play Chess as there are different moves in a standard game.

For example, try setting up the pieces in the first two rows any way you like. Have the knights both on the left, the bishops both on the right and your king cowering behind a wall of rooks and

pawns if you think that would produce a better strategy. This has the bonus of giving you more freedom, not just as a God-like mover of troops, but also in the role of a general. Would Wellington or Napoleon have stood for being told how they could set up their troops? Or worse, that they had to arrange them identically?

But again, just changing pieces around is only the beginning. There is so much more that can be done and so much more that can be changed and altered to make the game more appealing to role-players. I myself came up with new rules to make the game both more challenging, fun and (slightly) more realistic. I called it Battle Chess.

Basically I felt for a long time that it didn't seem right that a Pawn could kill a Rook. That is effectively saying a peasant destroyed a castle. Likely? No.

The pieces all started in their usual places (although they don't have to!) and they all moved in the same way as usual. The changes were made principally in combat. Suddenly the pieces all had stats and there were dice involved. My game of chess became more like a modern-day table top war game. Each piece had an Attack value and a Defence value and players had to declare whom they were attacking before each rolling 1D6 and adding the value to their score. Suddenly the king is a great warrior that you are no longer forever keeping hidden from the enemy. In fact it's a good idea to get the king out there front and centre

since he can now deal a lot of damage (though still only move one square at a time).

A nice feature of the game, however, is the fact that any piece can still kill another. So a Rook (with a Defence value of 5) could still be killed by a Pawn (with an Attack value of 1).

As you can see, there are many new ways to play the old game. In fact, just about any number of variations you can think of. If it works, then why not?

There are, in fact, many ways to play chess that have already been dreamed up and a very comprehensive list of these games can be found on Wikipedia. There is Andernach Chess, where a piece making a capture changes colour. Or maybe you would prefer Circe Chess where captured pieces are reborn on their starting square? You could devise scenarios where you only use a certain number of pieces. Maybe a wealthy Bishop is passing through a rough area and is protected by two Knights and a handful of Pawns when they are ambushed from the sides and must reach the end of the board. And these are just ideas off the top of my head as I type.

So maybe next time your gaming group is looking for something new, or maybe a player can't make it and you don't fancy continuing the quest without them, you won't have to look far to find a new game. Dig out that old board, blow the dust away, and just imagine what you can do with it.

BATTLE CHESS

Rules by Richard Williams

*Need a quick tactical resolution to a battle in your RPG session?
Do you know how to play Chess?*

Chess has been around for a long time and it cannot be doubted that it is one of the greatest games of all time. However, there is one area where it falls down. Namely, it does not take into account the likely abilities of the characters represented by the pieces. A Pawn is just as deadly as a Knight, the only difference being how they move. I have therefore devised these rules so that pieces have characteristics of their own, hopefully making for a more involving and tasking game, as all the old tricks go out of the window.

What you need:

A board, the pieces and two six-sided dice (D6)

Setting Up:

Set the pieces up as normal. If, to make things even more interesting, you want to set things up differently then feel free, just so long as both players agree that it's OK.

Objective:

Players can choose to play the game as normal, each out for the other's king, but there are many other ways to play. Players can be out to kill another piece (maybe a Bishop is poisoning the mind of the king and your rebel army is merely trying to rid the king of his evil influence), or maybe it's a capture the flag style game where the player must get his king to a certain square. It's player's choice really.

Movement:

Players move their pieces as normal. There is no change to the way pieces either move or attack (Pawns must still attack diagonally, etc).

Combat:

This is where the changes have been made to make Battle Chess unique.

To attack you first declare which piece you will be attacking (assuming your own piece is in a position to do so). Then before moving either piece you resolve combat by rolling 1D6 each and then adding the score modifiers relevant to the models in use. There are two modifiers for each type of piece, one for Attack (A) and one for Defence (D)(see table below). The highest score then wins.

If the attack is successful then remove the losing piece and put your own on their square as normal. If the attack fails then it has been successfully repelled and neither piece moves. If you want to speed up the game then you can play it differently, instead taking off any piece that loses its attack. This is ideal for a quick 'skirmish'.

In the event of a tie then it is considered a defensive victory and neither piece is moved.

Special Rules:

The Kings have two wounds (They have to lose two battles to die)

Should a Pawn reach the enemy's side of the board the instantly become Knights to represent a reward for valour (Which I feel makes a lot more sense than a Pawn becoming a Queen, as in normal Chess).

Check is ignored due to the high probability of the King surviving a fight.

Knights have a special 'cavalry charge'. If a Knight's attack score is double the defence score, or greater, then they have successfully mown down the enemy and are granted another move from the square of the defeated piece. However this cannot be used to move into another attack.

Table of modifiers:

Below is the table listing the stats for each piece. A= Attack and D= Defence.

In battle you simply add the correct number to the roll of 1D6.

	A	D
King	4	4
Queen	3	3
Bishop	2	2
Knight	3	2
Rook	1	5
Pawn	1	1

You will instantly see that some pieces are considerably more likely to succeed in a battle than others, however it is still possible for any piece to kill another, it is just more likely that your battle hardened warrior King will slay the lowly peasant Pawn.

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