

Gushémal Role-
Playing Game

Game Master's

Guide

(Version 0.1 / March 2001)

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Only to be read by game masters!

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TIP 6153 “Game Master's Guide” (GRPG Rulebook); Version 0.1 (March 2001)

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1. Introduction

1.1. What is a Game Master?

We're assuming you have already read the *Player's Handbook*. That is an absolute prerequisite for reading – and understanding – this guidebook. From that information you should have a good idea of how a gaming session runs.

And that means you know that the game master – or GM – is the most important person at the gaming table. Her performance dictates whether the game turns out to be an invigorating experience that the players enjoy immensely, or whether it is just a mild diversion from the daily troubles. (To the great misfortune of players, the same can be said of their performances as well. The GM isn't alone at the table, and without good players who fully participate, her best laid plans and plots inevitably will go awry, too.)

The major task of a GM is to tell a story in which the players take the roles of their characters. It is much like a movie where the players are the actors, but the GM is both the director and the script writer. She alone knows the story whereas the “actors” have to improvise.

To do that, the GM must have done extensive preparations beforehand. She has to know all the major points of the plot, where she would like to lead the player characters (PCs) – and also how to handle more or less unexpected actions of the characters.

1.2. Tasks

Once a party assembles for the first time around the gaming table, a few points have to be considered:

- Everybody must have read the *Player's Handbook* and know its contents relatively well. Without a fault, each player should have a copy of the handbook at the ready at every session.
- One of the participants has to take over the role of GM, in which case she must read the *Game Master's Guide* (incidentally this book). She also needs to have the guidebook with her, so she can check the special rules in here as well as those in the *Player's Handbook*.
- The players must have created characters. The character sheets must have been filled out.
- Players and GM need to have all materials available, e.g. their dice and pencils.

1.2.1. Devise a story

First of all, the GM needs to have a story ready – the so-called “adventure”. (Which also means that the GM must have been chosen long before the actual session begins.) It is the adventure that

the players engage in – without knowing the story. Much like the characters in a movie, they have no idea what is waiting around the next corner, or whether to trust a person they have just encountered.

The adventure needs to be exciting for the players to fully enjoy it. Remember that excitement comes from more than just the thrill of bashing in a monster's head – if you consider the movies that most fire up your imagination, they have far more to offer. There's character interaction, the growth of a character, the exploration of a new world (be it literally a different planet, or a new city, or simply the adult world). That, and so much more is part of an adventure, and a good GM pays at least a little attention to these details.

You should also remember to insert plot twists. Don't follow a straight line to the conclusion of your adventure, put in a few diversions that could sidetrack the players, and at least one surprising revelation. (That revelation must be grounded in previous events; if one of the PCs is revealed to be the heir to a kingdom, there must be previous indications of this special position. Ideally, none of these indications can be understood until the revelation is given – but then the players should slap their foreheads, thinking they should have known right away. Without these revelations, you would be pulling the proverbial rabbit from the hat, as an illusionist does.)

Note: As the GM you can get help in creating a proper adventure for your group. If you use a fully prepared adventure – a so-called “adventure module” – you will find most questions already answered, and a complete plot prepared for you. You are always free to follow the prepared plotline closely, or deviate at your leisure, and often you will find that there are “blank spaces” which are intentionally left for you to create your own portions of the adventure.

Currently, there is one module available for the Gushémal Role-Playing Game (GRPG), *The Courier's Oath*, which is released in early April 2001.

1.2.2. Explaining the world to the players

The players have no script to follow, and they cannot directly see what their characters experience. All of that has to be related to them by the GM: She has to tell a player what his character sees, smells, tastes, etc. One could say that the GM is the interface between the players and the game world.

What is the weather like today? What does the village down the road like? Is it noontime, and are there smells of roast meat wafting ahead to the party?

These are instances that the GM has to describe, to explain the world to the players.

One integral element of that world are the people that the party encounters – characters which aren't portrayed by a player but rather by the GM. (These are called NPCs, for Non-Player Characters.) A NPC might be a peasant tilling his field whom the party asks for directions to the next town, but it would also be the evil wizard whom the party has to vanquish in the course of the adventure.

When describing the world, the GM has to take into account what the PCs *can* notice. If none of the characters understands the dwarven language, the GM cannot have them overhear – and understand – a private conversation between two dwarves.

By the same token, she ought to make sure that she doesn't miss anything a PC knows. If there is something particular about the construction of a house, and one of the characters has learned about house building, she must point out this special feature.

Everything special – or suspicious – must be noted to the players, unless it is hidden and none of the characters possess a relevant skill to recognize this. Remember, the GM is the link of the players to the world their characters inhabit.

It is also important for the GM to tell her story. As such there are occasions when she must try her best to make a feature (of a house, for instance) seem unimportant, so the players don't investigate more closely and endanger her plot. Or she can over-emphasize something else, so the players go off on a merry goosechase, while the GM can quietly put her pieces together for the next big move.

1.2.3. The final decision...

... is always the game master's. That is the primary rule of any role-playing game. Whenever there is a disagreement, the game master can finish it by ruling one way or another. Her word is final and cannot be challenged.

It's possible that the GM is wrong, but in the interest of keeping the game going, her decision must stand.

(If the players absolutely don't agree with that decision, they may discuss this after the game, or prior to the next gaming session, but they should refrain from interrupting the current game. Should the GM's decision directly violate the game rules, it should be pointed out to her, preferably quoting directly from the rulebook, but even then the GM may countermand the rules. We certainly don't encourage this, but we believe that there are some occasions when it is necessary.)

1.2.4. Rolling the dice in secret

When reading the *Player's Handbook*, you will have noticed that the GM is encouraged to roll her dice in secret, so that none of the players can see the actual results. This practice is often contested by beginning players (and sometimes by veterans as well), since one would think that the GM can easily cheat on her rolls.

Unfortunately, that is not only possible but sometimes necessary.

Keep in mind that the GM wants to tell her story. Some rolls might prove disastrous – let's just imagine that one of the PCs is a vital part of the adventure (perhaps the heir to a kingdom, again?). And that PC is now in a fight that is going very badly for him – so badly in fact that the game master's character has just delivered a killing blow to the PC. But rather than reveal this result, the GM is now free to make up another result and give the PC another chance to survive this encounter

– only because her rolls are in secret. (Of course if the PC isn't quite that vital to the story, she should just let him face the great beyond.)

It's about telling the story, that is the single most important point to remember here. The GM should stick to the correct results of her dice most of the time, but when the story is threatened she ought to feel free to make up "better" results. The same applies when there is an opportunity to push the story a little further.

Nonetheless, telling a good story also means that the GM mustn't make it too easy on the players – or herself. Sometimes an unexpected roll, an unexpected turn adds just the right spice to turn a decent, solid adventure into a great, rollicking ride.

1.2.5. Supervising the characters' actions

Being the interface to the game world means that the GM also has to keep watch of the actions that the players take.

When a player wants to take a specific action, he has to explain this action to the GM. Sometimes it might be enough to just announce "I'm going through the northern door", but sometimes more in-depth information must be given, such as "I'm opening the northern door with my lockpick, then I walk through it".

For each action, there is a re-action – usually the result of the action which the GM has to describe to the player. In the case of the door above, the player needs to be told whether (a) his attempt to open the door succeeds and (b) whether he inadvertently springs a trap.

Another example: Let's say the party is in a room and decides to search it in-depth. One character announces that he wants to inspect the southern wall. Now the GM has sketched in a secret door in that wall, so there is a chance that the character could find that door. The GM needs to roll (in secret) to find out whether the character discovers something. If he does, the GM tells the player what he has just found, e.g. the secret door.

Supervising the characters' actions also means defining what is possible in a given situation. Some actions are *always* impossible – e.g. an ordinary human trying to bend the steel bars of a cell –, some are only impossible at a given moment. For instance, if a character has lost a lockpick, he won't be able to open a door with it.

Here the GM has a little leeway as to what she deems possible and what impossible. She also has some leeway in deciding whether an action succeeds or not.

There is a guideline – or a rule-of-thumb, if you will – as to what is possible. Each character has a set of *attributes* (cf. *Player's Handbook*, **Chapter 3: Attributes**): Strength, Agility, Constitution, Charisma, Intelligence and Willpower. They are grounded in the human example, i.e. the maximum value in each attribute that a human can reach is 100. (The other races have their own maximum and average values.) Let me reiterate: 100 is the *maximum* for a human, that is the absolute top of each attribute. The average human values are somewhat further down the line.

Nonetheless this is a good guideline for the GM to decide whether someone can accomplish a feat with his or her attributes. (Keep in mind that the absolute values are the same for every species, they are not in relation to the maximum of each race.)

1.3. Why should I bother with all this trouble?

Being a GM is a lot of work, granted. And your troubles will doubtlessly increase when you interact with the players, and the players just don't want to play your way. So there is quite a bunch of unpleasantry ahead of you.

On the other hand, you'll find out that it can be an exhilarating experience to lead a game as a GM. For one thing, you can live out your creative urges and come up with a grand adventure all your own, in a setting that you love. (And a setting that you can create yourself, too!) It's marvelous to have created something, present it to others and find that they enjoy it as much as you do.

And dealing with the players and their unexpected decisions has often proved to be far more fun than one might think at first. Players inevitably will screw up your carefully planned plot, come up with unexpected solutions to situations, and you'll have to scramble to salvage as much of your adventure as is possible. But that in itself is magnificent! Sometimes under that pressure you stumble over ideas that are far better than your initial concept.

All in all, the rewards far outweigh the troubles. You're getting to be the director of a marvelous motion picture which is playing in your head and the skulls of your players; you're going to have a great time directing the party through the adventure. It's going to be fun!

2. Experience Points

The inherent goal in any role-playing game is to gather experience points (EP). They represent what a character has learned, how he has improved and grown throughout the adventure – and they also have a direct influence on the character.

In the GRPG, you can improve the characters through experience points. You can buy new skills, you can enhance those you have already acquired, and you can improve nearly all the values that characterize the player's alter ego in the Gushémal fantasy world.

Growth and experience are directly reflected through EP, and the improvements a player can purchase with them.

They are also a magnificent steering mechanism that the GM employs in directing the adventure. It is the game master who decides when to grant EP to the player(s), and how many they are given. Choosing when to award EP gives the players indications how to approach the game, how to play. Ideally the GM can lead the players through EP to a fuller, richer game, and have them fully immerse themselves in their characters and the world.

As you can tell from the preceding paragraph, EP are an integral part of being a GM, and using them right has a large influence on how the game is run.

2.1. For what do I award EP to the player(s)?

In any adventure, there are certain goals that the characters have to achieve – be it the vanquishing of a foe (or a group), the solving of a riddle, or the final resolution (which might be that the party frees a kingdom from a cruel and unjust oppressor). Each of these goals is the most important reason to award EP.

They are the turning points of an adventure. If the characters successfully master them, they deserve to be rewarded richly. EP are the perfect solution in this case, for they also reflect the experience that the characters have just gathered.

Defining these turning points is a tricky affair. Basically, the characters should be awarded for every task they accomplish – including such apparent banalities as routing the band of orcs in the forest yonder -, but the amount of EP they get must vary based on two factors:

- The importance of the event to the entire storyline
- The difficulty level of the accomplishment: destroying two ratpeople, for instance, rates much less EP than vanquishing an evil high-level wizard.

Of course this is far from everything. As mentioned in the introduction, EP are guiding posts for good role-playing, for good adventuring.

The question is, what does good role-playing mean?

Unfortunately, there is no easy answer. One might say that good role-playing occurs whenever a player is so fully immersed in his character that each and every action or reaction of his is exactly what the character would do. No trace of the player's personality remains – unless it is akin to the character's –, and you feel as if you are talking to the PC rather than the player. That is a sign of good role-playing.

(Of course the player should still be fully aware of his true identity. Let's not get mixed up in this pot of troubles. Rather think of a method actor who sheds all traces of himself when the camera starts rolling, but resumes being himself once the director has called, "Cut!", and the scene is over.)

The more individual a character is, the more fun he is in the game. That is a rule of thumb which has prevailed over decades of role-playing.

And that leads directly to another factor in good role-playing. The gaming sessions are about fun, that's the be-all and the end-all of RPGs. It's called a "game" for good reason! The player's goal should be to enhance the fun for everyone, not just himself. Often that comes out of immersing himself fully in the character, but there are also other opportunities – including those when a player falls "out of character" to make fun suggestions, to simply enhance the mood of everyone involved.

But that is a tightrope that one has to walk. Falling out of character way too often makes the others lose sight of the character, and just joking up an evening can destroy a gaming session just as effectively as sulkily playing a boring character.

It's the GM's job to decide what is beneficial to the game, and according to that she can distribute EP to award the right kind of behavior. There's no firm guideline for this; it depends too much on the personalities at the gaming table – and these personalities are as diverse as they come. Experience as a GM will teach you how to handle this, but unfortunately *you* won't get any EP out of this. What you will get is the ultimate joy of leading a great game, and that is worth more than a million EP.

2.2. Class-specific EP awards

The characters in Gushémal belong to specific classes. Each class has its own set of goals, and a PC should receive special EP for accomplishing one of these goals. In the following, we shall list a selection of such goals.

Do *not* treat this list as exclusive. They are merely guidelines which you should follow as a GM. In a game, situations will come up that are completely unexpected, but your own understanding of what the character class means should allow you to ascertain when and how to award a player.

2.2.1. Fighter

- Killing a dangerous enemy. Here it needs to be considered whether the fighter managed to vanquish the foe on his own, or whether he received considerable help from the other
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characters. In the latter case, there are no bonus EP for the fighter, and the “regular” EP are distributed among the party. Another factor to consider is whether said dangerous enemy posed any threat at the moment – if the enemy is drunk or asleep, there is no challenge at all and therefore no reason at all to award any EP. Basically, the bonus EP can run up to 10% of the opponent’s EP value.

- If the character has behaved particularly honorably (especially if the character has subscribed to an honor code), bonus EP can be awarded to him.

2.2.2. Priest

- Representing his god well. A priest has subscribed his soul to a specific god, and his goal in life must be to do deeds that please his god (or goddess). These deeds may be expected of him – such as a Darawk priest gathering and spreading knowledge -, but they may also go beyond the “line of duty”, so to speak. What you need to remember as a GM is that the clerical class is somewhat limited: Other classes can do pretty much as they please, whereas a priest *must* follow the rules of his god. Following these well constitutes good role-playing (even when it might go against the spirit of an adventure or the general mood of the party), and it should be awarded. These bonus points should range from 50 – 250 EP per event; since they are relatively common, that range should easily satisfy the player’s desire for experience points. In special cases, the range can be exceeded, but there ought to be a very good reason for it.
- Converting “unbelievers” or recruiting new candidates for the clerical office: Both actions constitute major services to the god and therefore must be rewarded accordingly.

2.2.3. Wizard

- Should a wizard create a new spell, he receives bonus EP. For each spell level, he receives 100 EP.
- The sensible use of spells in an adventure also warrants EP. The word sensible means here more than just using a spell in its intended sense: When a spell is used just to inflict damage, that may make sense, but it should not receive any particular attention. If the same spell, though, is used to save another character from certain death, now that is a worthwhile and sensible use.

2.2.4. Thief

- Succeeding in their particular field should be a source of EP for thieves; e.g. finding and disarming a trap, or the successful heist of an item (which is important to the adventure).
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2.3. Docking EP

As mentioned before, good role-playing deserves being rewarded. By the same token, though, bad role-playing deserves punishment. Characters acting against their stated personalities should receive demerits – or more precisely, EP must be withdrawn from their account. (Should the player have already spent his EP, then the character will not receive any fresh EP until his punishment is used up.)

When does this happen?

An example is when a priest acts against the precepts of his god, such as a Darawk priest burning books – destroying knowledge, whereas his single goal should be to gather and preserve knowledge.

In general, most characters in a party can be considered noble and heroic, so all “evil” acts go against the nature of these characters. For instance, no character should be permitted to kill or torture innocent people just to get some information.

(*Note:* There are exceptions. Occasionally, players can assume characters who are clearly evil, but that is not the rule.)

Another big example of bad role-playing is when a player carries personal grudges (or preferences) from real life into the game. They have no place in the game, since the character does not bear any animosity against another player's character simply because of who that player is. Such behavior must be punished as well.

Of course, in an ideal world, there are only friends at the gaming table who would never bear grudges against their fellows. In the real world, though, friends do have disagreements, but those should be solved aside from the gaming table.

2.4. Distributing EP

The EP are not distributed for each event individually. Rather the game master notes all the EP that accumulate during an adventure, and at the end she awards the total sum to the players.

Here you have to distinguish between the party EP and the personal EP. The personal EP are the bonus points that a player/character is awarded specifically for achievements only he has accomplished, whereas the party EP are those that have been achieved by the entire group.

The party EP are added up on a separate list. At the end of the adventure, they are divided by the number of characters, and the result is awarded to each player.

In addition the personal EP are added to each player's character.

2.5. Using EP

At the end of an adventure, a player may use 10% of his EP to increase the character values. There is no requirement to do so, these 10% may just as freely be spent on different purchases or kept for future acquisitions.

Please note that they may only increase pre-existing values, preferably those that have been used during the adventure, e.g. attack values or skills.

The remaining EP (90%) can be spent on training – i.e. acquiring new skills, class abilities and the like. To do this, the character needs a teacher. It's not possible to acquire a new skill – e.g. a new language – on your own; where would the knowledge come from, after all?

Now where might one find a teacher? That can be any person who already possesses the desired skills, so that e.g. another character in the group might fulfill that function. Generally though the teacher will be a NPC controlled by the game master; someone who tags along with the group, or whom the character encounters in a town (or under any other circumstances).

It is noteworthy that it takes time to learn something new. As a rule of thumb, for each 1,000 EP spent, the character needs to devote a week to his training. Which also means that during this time the character cannot possibly take part in adventuring, he is too busy.

In other words, the party should plan in a considerable rest period at the end of an adventure so that they can properly invest their EP.

If a character wishes to learn a new class ability, there are a few prerequisites to consider for each of the classes:

- Wizards need to find another wizard to teach them the new class ability. Such a wizard may demand a payment in coins, but he might just as easily accept payment in magical appliances or new spells developed by the player character.
 - Priests must go to a temple to learn a new class ability. That temple does *not* have to be one of their own god; class abilities are the same for each kind of cleric. (It should be noted that there are certain animosities between the gods which might make it more difficult for a cleric to find acceptance at a temple. For instance, a priest of Mannannan is unlikely to be welcomed at a temple dedicated to Olmawi.) Education/training is free at a temple of the priest's own god, but at another deity's temple, payment must be brought in the form of either money or specific tasks at the temple.
 - There are no such particulars for fighters or thieves, since they are not bound by any specific order or the profession of wizardry. They can learn their class abilities anywhere – and usually do so –, but they require a teacher as well.
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3. Money and Equipment

There is a lot under this heading that a GM should consider. It's not as easy an affair as just having the characters spend the money they have earned the hard way (by work) or the easy way (i.e. loot).

3.1. Motivation

Money has always been a motivation for people, both in real life and in the game world. But it should never be the sole incentive. For one thing, it reduces the PCs to money-grabbing simpletons – always predictable, never quite enjoyable –, for another, it takes away much of the sense of adventure and nobility that fuels a good story.

Do you care to watch a movie where every single person is out for money and lets nothing else interfere? Oh, yes, you can probably point to a few that have been very enjoyable, but they are the exception and usually get away with it because of incredible effects and showstoppers that are more memorable than the characters (or any potentially existing storyline).

Most movies rely on more noble goals, such as the rescue of a hostage, for instance. And should the characters go into an adventure purportedly for money only, there are always character incentives. A male member of the group wants to impress a female, and that motivation is likely to override his greed. Or the classic hidden agenda; a character has a secret reason for taking part in a mission.

It just takes away from the characters and the adventure, if the PCs always consider financial rewards and little else. A priest who is asked to do a service for his god shouldn't ask what's in it for himself. A noble knight shouldn't ask for the exact reward before riding out to rescue the princess from the evil dragon.

3.2. Managing the finances

The GM should keep an eye on the finances of the characters. They shouldn't run out of money, or resupplies become terribly difficult. (Let's remember that we're dealing with noble characters most of the time who can't just steal what they need. Unless they are thieves, and even then the thieves' companions will question the origins of the goods.) Of course spending money is the sole province of the players, and if the players like to waste their money every chance they get – well, then a good game master should let them suffer for their wanton spending.

On the other hand, there are several ways how a GM can control the party's income. She might introduce the players to adventures where there is no or little money to be won; that way, the main

focus is on the adventure at hand. The players can enjoy being the noble heroes who do not require any payment from the poor peasants who hire them. (Yes, if any players should be reading this, I can hear your teeth gnashing and your gold-happy fingers itching. But, then again, you shouldn't be reading this *Game Master's Guide* in the first place, now should you?)

Other adventures provide more in the way of income. The adventure might be a regular treasure hunt, with a great, financial reward at the end. (The reward doesn't have to be financial itself, but it could be gemstones or works of art that can easily be sold at good profit.) Especially dungeons and lost ruins are splendid locations for this, and are available to beginning players. Later on, when the characters have sufficiently advanced that the old ruin down the corner is a boring waste of time which only yields a couple of thousand gold coins (a fortune for the beginner, and pretty much anyone else on Gushémal!), then the GM can choose to unpack the bigger guns: lost dwarven kingdoms, leading a rebellion that will open the national treasure, and so on.

3.3. Investing the money – and establishing a home base

Sometimes it can happen that the players accumulate money – but have no idea on how to spend it. Their equipment list is complete, their weapons are at peak efficiency, and there seems to be no need to purchase anything else.

That is the point when the GM should suggest to the players to save up for a bigger investment. For instance, they might buy a house as a home base for themselves. There are numerous advantages to having a home base:

- There is always a place to store the goods safely. (The players should also invest in some sort of protection while they're away on an adventure. That might be magical wards, or it might be a squad of henchmen who guard the house.)
 - The house can serve as a meeting place when the players split up during an adventure.
 - It also serves as a place where other people can come to in order to place requests on the characters – and thus introduce them to new adventures.
 - Enhancing the home base – i.e. the house – with new furniture, embellishing it can actually become a worthwhile experience for the players. It gives them a sense of achievement to come home to a veritable palace. (Remember the game *Civilization II*? One option of the game was to see the “throne room” which was enhanced whenever the player had achieved a certain point; and the development from the bare-bones cave to a palatial, luxurious room did give the player a great thrill.)
 - The home base also allows the players to establish firm connections to NPCs, to ensconce themselves in the society of their chosen home. This offers countless opportunities for new adventures, but it also offers the chance to do some serious role-playing and to explore more mundane – but nonetheless fascinating – sides of their characters.
-

Particularly with advanced players, this will doubtlessly become a point of attraction, and you as the GM should guide them towards it, no matter how strange it might seem at first.

For more ideas on how to use a home base, refer to the adventure module B1 "The Courier's Oath" which suggests using the locale of Clearspring in the Wild Coast as a home base.

Other things to save up for are special magical items; or they might use the money to hire henchmen to do their bidding. Acquiring a small army of henchmen can surely make things easier for the characters – and allow you as the GM to throw them into far more dangerous situations than before. It opens up entirely new venues to explore in your stories.

Please, don't try to push your players into that direction after only a few adventures. The time of a beginner should be savored – for remembering the humble times of starting out will make the grand times of the future all the more rewarding.

3.4. Slush Funds

Encourage the players to establish a shared purse for the entire party. With these slush funds they can pay for shared purchases, such as food and drink at an inn (or the rooms for the night). These can also be used for paying a priest to heal a character, or to acquire special equipment for the group. The slush funds can also be used for special purchases, such as the house mentioned in the section above.

They are a good way of keeping your party operational, and they also allow the GM to run some extravagant adventures.

For the slush funds, remember that every character maintains his own fortune. From the money he earns (or "acquires" in some other fashion), he can freely choose what to deposit into the slush funds. If a player hesitates about doing so, remind them gently that it is for her own good, since she will want to access the party funds as well.

3.5. Keeping watch over the party's equipment

It's very important that the party be well and aptly equipped for an adventure. You as the GM obviously know best what will be needed, whereas the characters have to guess at their needs.

Sometimes it is quite obvious what the requirements are: If the adventure consists of crawling through a dungeon, torches or lanterns are a must-have. Sources of light are necessary in dark places, after all. In those cases, the players should know by themselves what is needed. But in other cases you ought to think ahead and drop a few hints at what is necessary. If you are about to send the party into an area where blade weapons are forbidden, you ought to mention that quarterstaves (for instance) can be pretty good weapons sometimes.

Never be too obvious about this. It takes away from the players' enjoyment of the game if all the solutions are presented to them ready-made, and the players don't need to think for themselves.

Nonetheless your involvement is often needed.

It is important that you give the characters the opportunity to resupply. Some equipment can – and will – be used up during an adventure, such as the good old daily rations or the arrows of a bow. For things like this, you ought to insert places where the characters can renew their equipment.

On the other hand, not all equipment should be available at all places. Think about it for a moment here: Mundane items like arrows or knives are things that most people use, and therefore they are probably available at every hamlet the characters come to. Torches, ropes, and the like are also items that can be bought pretty much everywhere. (And some of these items can be made by the characters themselves as well, provided they have acquired the necessary skills.)

Special or magical items, though, are things that require particular knowledge and experience to fashion – your average peasant quite certainly won't be able to brew a healing potion. Accordingly, those items will only be available at some places.

Don't forget that the more advanced weapons certainly belong to this category! Your average blacksmith knows how to forge a new horseshoe, but fashioning a well balanced long sword is quite probably out of his league. By that token, a character who prefers exotic weapons should have quite a few troubles when he loses his weapons – finding a new one will prove very difficult indeed.

You also need to keep the needs of your party in mind. Let's say that some of the characters have been seriously injured, but the party does not have a cleric who could heal them. Unfortunately, none of the villages around has a temple, and neither can a priest be found to heal the characters directly nor can a healing potion be bought anywhere. (There can be very good reasons for designing an environment like this.)

But you as the GM know that there are some very serious challenges ahead, and the characters need to regain some of their efficiency. Therefore you ought to introduce some method of acquiring healing potions, probably at a much higher price than usual. The party might meet a peddler who hawks his wares – including the desired potions – and, knowing the scarcity of these items, demands extraordinary prices.

4. Combat

4.1. Making combat interesting

Engaging an enemy should be exciting, it should thrill the players – no matter who the foe is. Even a pack of ratpeople can prove a challenge to the characters, and it must be played out as such.

Nothing can kill excitement as easily as a dull description of combat. “There are orcs ahead of you. Roll your attacks.” Uh-huh, I’ve got a chill down my spine. Yeah, right. Or how about, “Hit scored, long sword, right arm, 12 points of damage – next attack.” How quickly do you think your players will long for a nice movie, or a computer game?

So try to put a little more excitement into your descriptions. If you lack imagination, prepare yourself by reading some good adventure books. They always have decent combat descriptions, and you might help yourself to some of the juicy bits. (And other than the authors of these books, you won’t have to worry about copyrights. I doubt there’ll be a representative of the publisher at your table. And if so... uh-oh... You never read this, this passage doesn’t exist, and we will deny any knowledge thereof. And, by the way, this book will self-destruct in five seconds.)

4.1.1. Introducing combat

Think about why combat ensues from a chance encounter. Of course your characters might run into an ambush, when there isn’t much time for any great speeches or the like. Even then, you can do some work to prepare the encounter. Make some off-hand remarks about odd noises (i.e. the foes pursuing the party), enhancing tension. And when the ambush occurs, make sure to give a gripping description of the enemies that fall upon your party.

Some combat situations are more interesting. Think of the good old bar brawl. It doesn’t come out of nowhere; there usually is some verbal disagreement which leads to it. There might be a tavern bully who does his best to taunt the characters (and you can have a lot of fun exploiting physical faults of the characters, or making racist remarks about elves and the like); or one NPC in the bar could be just so obnoxious – without targeting the party – that the characters decide to shut him up once and for all.

Another example: The party encounters a band of orcs. Although neither attacks right away, they trade insults for a bit. The orc leader might generously explain what he will do to the dead bodies of the party, heightening the player’s interest in seeing the orc splattered all over the ground. (You need not go into the violent bit, there are quite enough other, more tame ways to handle this.)

4.1.2. During combat

Always make sure that you mention the reactions of both the party and their opponents. (Describing the party gets a bit difficult, for the players will reserve themselves the right to decide their own actions. On the other hand, you can use lines like “You are stunned to see the orc opposite you shake off the wound with a grin”.) How does an opponent react to an attack? If it succeeds, does he scream in agony? Or does he ignore the pain and relentlessly fights on? Or, consider the shame when one of the characters slashes vigorously at an opponent – say, an elf –, and his blade cuts only air. Won't the elf be likely to chuckle viciously and comment on how inferior the character's fighting style is? “Humans! You will *never* learn how to hold a blade!”

See how this is getting more interesting? Taunts are an especially good way to keep the players interested in the combat – if a player finds herself insulted, her own attacks get more vigorous, and she'll have a pleased smile painted all over her face once she takes out the offending foe.

4.2. Called attacks

Combat in GRPG is very much dependent on random factors – i.e. the falling of the dice. Of course they are influenced by the attack values; the higher they are, the better are the chances of hitting your opponent. But then, for instance, it becomes a matter of the dice *where* you hit your opponent.

As a reminder, there are various hit zones on the body of any character. You can hit either the head, the torso or either of the limbs; each having their own number of hit points.

On the other hand, there is the possibility of making a called attack on a specific hit zone. A character could announce that he is aiming for the head, e.g. “to cut that smile off his face!” Other reasons for making called attacks are to hit an injured part again, or to knock an opponent out (cf.

4.3. Unconsciousness).

A called shot is more difficult than the ordinary attack where the character will exploit a random opening in the foe's defense (assuming a successful attack) and strike whatever he can.

Attacking a specific hit zone means that the character cannot exploit any random opening, but will attack that very body part, no matter what the defenses are. There are some limits you need to consider when one of the characters makes a called attack:

- Even though the character may have purchased the class ability to execute more than one attack per round, he can make only one attack when he calls for a specific hit zone
 - The opponent will quickly become aware of the character's intent and concentrate on defending that body part. (For instance, a character might decide to strike at an already wounded body part, and the opponent will naturally protect his injury.)
-

Of course the regular defenses, like armor or magical protection apply in this case as well. But, as a result of the limits stated above, the attack value is decreased. For that you need to consider the percentage of hit points in the specific hit zone:

Percentage:	Deduct from Attack Value:
5%	-50
10%	-40
15%	-35
20%	-30
25%	-25
30%	-20
35%	-15
40%	-10
>40%	-5

An example: The head has a percentage share of 10% of the overall hit points. Therefore the attack value is decreased by 40 points. If the character's normal attack value is 78, it gets now lowered to 38 – and must still pierce the defenses of the opponent.

4.3. Unconsciousness

There aren't many ways to take someone prisoner if the opponent isn't cooperative and surrenders. Unfortunately, many adventures depend on the characters being taken prisoner and having to free themselves. Even less fortunate, some players tend towards defending themselves to the death and never consider surrender as a viable option.

Of course there can be very good reasons for this. Sometimes being taken prisoner can lead to a terrible fate. Let's say there is an evil priestess waiting at the altar with an unpleasantly sharp dagger who wants to present a sacrifice to her god (quite probably Shenaumac), and the soul of the character might be in peril (not just his life). In that case, dying at the hands of the priestess's disciples is certainly a preferable fate to being sacrificed.

On the other hand, the characters might want to take an opponent prisoner, e.g. to question him. (Questioning a dead opponent is rarely effective, unless there is a priest in the group who can talk to the deceased spirit. Since the latter is a high-level ability, this option usually isn't readily available.)

But there is always the option of knocking an opponent out by hitting him over the head.

Here we have to ways to attack an opponent in this way:

- Making a called attack to the head: As indicated in the previous section, this is rather difficult during normal combat and brings a penalty of -40 to the attack. It is possible, though, and sometimes very suitable in combat. (Of course there is a certain danger
-

involved if the attacker is rather strong. He might wind up bashing the opponent's head in, and then the party is faced once again with the problem of talking to dead spirits.) *Please note* that the deduction doesn't apply if a regular hit is scored on the head randomly. In that case, of course, the character has *not* made a called attack.

- Surprising the opponent – and then making a called attack during the surprise round. (Cf. **4.4. Surprising opponents**) In this case, the character can use his full attack value for a called shot, and the opponent doesn't have a chance to parry. An attack of this kind has a 95% probability of knocking out the opponent. The GM rolls in secret for this probability. (This method is best used by thieves: They can employ the class abilities of *hiding* to escape notice by the foe, or they can sneak up to him by *moving silently*.)

Also note that the opponent might be wearing a helmet. The full 95% probability stated above only apply if the foe has no helmet. If he does, then the damage points are of interest: For each damage point, there is a 2% chance of knocking the opponent unconscious. For instance, if a character scores 9 hit points worth of damage on his opponent, there is an 18% probability of knocking him unconscious.

4.4. Surprising opponents

Managing to sneak up to an opponent and surprise him is a great advantage, as any can readily imagine. The problem is that the same can be done to a character as well. The latter is important to remember for the GM: Surprising your party with a sneak attack is a nice way to spice up the adventure – and remind the characters that they are far from invincible.

Think up a proper situation how you want to shock your party. To see whether the party is successfully surprised, roll a 1d10 and check the table below. We have prepared a number of basic situations from which you can pick the one closest to the one you have thought of.

1d10 result	Party Reaction
1 – 5	The characters are strongly distracted, e.g. by a discussion or fight
1 – 4	Something unexpected happens, e.g. a wall falls in and attackers emerge
1 – 3	Characters aren't distracted, but they don't expect any attack
1 – 3	Enemy approaches from darkness, or emerge from hiding
1 – 2	Characters are surprised
1	Characters are armed and expect an attack

Remember, this table is *not* mutually exclusive. Each row is for a *separate* situation. So, if you have a surprise ambush planned, select the second row: If your 1d10 roll results in 1 – 4, then the party is surprised, otherwise combat begins according to the normal rules.

Should a character be surprised, he cannot react during this round. The surprise lasts only for the current round; afterwards normal combat resumes as described in the *Player's Handbook*.

Note: If the party decides to surprise someone else, e.g. to silently take out a guard, simply reverse the process. Then the 1d10 roll aims at the opponents that the party wishes to surprise.

4.5. Initiative

Basically this describes the sequence when attacks are executed. Mostly this is defined by the *range factor* (cf. **Chapter 7.3. Weapons** in the *Player's Handbook*). That means that the weapon with the furthest reach will be the first to attack, i.e. take the initiative. After all, a longbow certainly can attack an opponent much earlier than a shortsword.

If two weapons (and characters) have the same range factor, the players of these characters (which may include the GM) roll 1d10 each. The one with the lowest number has the initiative.

The initiative is irrelevant when parrying an attack. Whenever an attack succeeds, the character may parry, no matter what his position in the sequence of attack is.

4.5.1. Magic

The wielders of magic are also dependent on the sequence of attack. But theirs is a slightly different matter: Normally a wizard or priest can execute one spell or blessing per round. (Exceptions are noted in the relevant rules.)

Each spell or blessing is also assigned a range factor, so they can be easily fit into the sequence of the “regular” attacks. (*Note:* Since the magic system isn't finished as of March 2001 when this book was finished, none of these range factors or the spells are available yet. We will release a special add-on as soon as the magic system is ready for use.)

If a wizard or cleric is attacked while casting a spell, he needs to roll a check whether his spell was finished prior to the attack or interrupted: For this the player of the character rolls 1d10 and adds the spell level of the current spell (or blessing level). The attacker also has to roll a 1d10. If the attack is non-magical, there is of course no spell level to add to the result.

The die with the lowest number takes the initiative. (As you can see, this puts an advantage to the good old regular weapons. Without a spell level added to the result of the roll, they naturally tend to be lower than the wizard/cleric's roll.)

This is very important since an injury affects whether a spell or blessing can be executed. A wizard's spell is automatically interrupted, while a cleric can roll a willpower check to see whether she can execute the blessing.

4.6. Hit Zones

In combat, a successful attack doesn't score equal damage all across the opponent, but rather the damage is focused on a certain body part, i.e. a hit zone. This makes quite a bit of sense: Consider that cutting open someone's arm usually doesn't affect the legs directly. (Of course the pain troubles the entire person.)

We have already mentioned the hit zones on humanoid creatures, but there are more beings on Gushémal, and each main category must have its own set of hit zones. That we will deal with in this section. Below you will find several tables for each of these categories. With these tables you can deduce which body part was hit in an attack.

To use these tables, roll two ten-sided dice. One defines the row, the other the column of each table. With these easy coordinates you can read what the character has managed to hit.

4.6.1. Regular humanoids

This table applies to normal humanoids of all sizes, including humans as well as alreus or dwarves.

H1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
1	H	RA	RA	T	T	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL
2	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RL	RL	RL	RL
3	LA	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RL	RL	RL
4	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RL	RL
5	T	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RL
6	LL	T	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T	T
7	LL	LL	T	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T
8	LL	LL	LL	T	T	T	LA	H	RA	T
9	LL	LL	LL	LL	T	T	T	LA	H	RA
0	LL	LL	LL	LL	LL	T	T	T	LA	H

{continued next page}

4.6.2. Irregular humanoids

The following table applies to creatures which are roughly humanoid but deviate from the norm. One example would be ratpeople, which have unusually powerful hindlegs and nearly useless arms.

H2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
1	H	T	T	T	T	RL	RL	RL	RL	RL
2	T	H	T	T	T	T	RL	RL	RL	RL
3	T	T	H	RA	T	T	T	RL	RL	RL
4	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RL	RL
5	T	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RL
6	LL	T	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T	T
7	LL	LL	T	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T
8	LL	LL	LL	T	T	T	LA	H	RA	T
9	LL	LL	LL	LL	T	T	T	LA	H	T
0	LL	LL	LL	LL	LL	T	T	T	T	H

4.6.3. Winged creatures

This table applies to winged or insectoid creatures with a body length of more than 3 feet.

W1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
1	H	RA	RA	T	T	RW	RL	RL	RL	RL
2	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RW	RL	RL	RL
3	LA	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RW	RL	RL
4	T	T	LA	H	RA	T	T	T	RW	RL
5	T	T	T	LW	H	RW	T	T	T	RW
6	LW	T	T	T	LW	H	RW	T	T	T
7	LL	LW	T	T	T	LW	H	RW	T	T
8	LL	LL	LW	T	T	T	LW	H	RW	T
9	LL	LL	LL	LW	T	T	T	LW	H	RW
0	LL	LL	LL	LL	LL	T	T	T	LA	H

4.6.4. Small animals

For these creatures you don't require a table since they do not have more than a single hit zone. They are too small for any sensible distinctions to be made. Hitting them hard, there is a pretty good chance of killing them.

Under this category you can find any kinds of small animals, ranging from a mouse to a small dog. (And, yes, there can be reasons for attacking a small dog. The creature might have rabies or be ensorceled into a poisonous creature. Should it be a regular, healthy small dog, the GM should definitely dock any player experience points for attacking the poor little thing.)

4.6.5. Large animals

This category begins, obviously, where the previous one stopped. Animals in this category are large enough to warrant several hit zones being assigned to them.

Their size starts roughly at a German shepherd's dog or a wolf and includes all animals larger than these, including such as gargantuan as the thymbairs of Robhovard.

A2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
1	H	RF	RF	T	T	T	T	RH	RH	RH
2	LF	H	RF	T	T	T	T	T	RH	RH
3	LF	LF	H	RF	T	T	T	T	T	T
4	T	T	LF	H	RF	T	T	T	T	T
5	T	T	T	LF	H	RF	T	T	T	T
6	T	T	T	T	LF	H	RF	T	T	T
7	T	T	T	T	T	LF	H	RF	T	T
8	LH	T	T	T	T	T	LF	H	RF	T
9	LH	LH	T	T	T	T	T	LF	H	RF
0	LH	LH	T	T	T	T	T	T	LF	H

4.6.6. Abbreviations used above

In the above tables, we have abbreviated the various hit zones. Here you will find the explanations for what each entry stands for:

Abbreviation	Hit Zone
H	Head
LA	Left Arm
RA	Right Arm
T	Torso
LL	Left Leg
RL	Right Leg
<i>Winged Creatures (W1)</i>	
LW	Left Wing
RW	Right Wing

<i>Large Animals (A2)</i>	
LF	Left Foreleg
RF	Right Foreleg
LH	Left Hindleg
RH	Right Hindleg

5. Creatures, foes and other misfortunes

In this section we will discuss several of the creatures that your players are likely to encounter in their travails on Gushémal. That means giving a short description of the creature itself, a few hints at its habits and strategies, as well as including the stats for the GRPG. By this it differs from the *Bestiary* you can find on our website (or download from there); the *Bestiary* offers you more atmospheric information rather than the dry and technical data you will find here.

As a GM, we recommend that you read the relevant articles in the *Bestiary* to get a better idea on how to present each of the creatures. (*Note:* Some of the creatures in this chapter may not yet have gotten a treatment in the *Bestiary*. That will follow at a later time.)

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and we will add new creatures irregularly. For that, you will need to check out our website at <http://www.gushemal.com>; in the section of the *Game Master's Guide*, you will find new additions. (We also announce them on the homepage, so you'll have an indication when something new comes up. You might also wish to subscribe to our newsletter which will also announce such additions. Simply send a mail to gushemal-subscribe@listbot.com, and you will receive a confirmation message and receive the newsletter from that point onward.)

The *Game Master's Guide* itself won't be updated for a while yet. The next edition is probably due somewhere around July 2001; until then we will be adding pages to the website and posting short PDF add-ons on the site. Check out the download section at <http://www.gushemal.com/si/download.htm>!

First of all, though, additional creatures will appear in the module B1 *The Courier's Oath*, which is due to be released in April 2001.

5.1. Your own creatures and tables

One of our major issues in GRPG is to give the game masters out there the freedom to develop their own creations – and inform us of them. (If you come up with great stuff, we would feel privileged to incorporate them into GRPG. Of course you would be named as the creator.)

So feel (very) free to generate your own creatures. If you would notify us of them, make sure to include some detailed descriptions of both the creature's appearance and its habits.

In some cases you will find that your creatures deviate from the hit zone tables defined in **4.6. Hit Zones**. If that happens, you need to develop your own hit zones and the according table. Fortunately, that isn't as difficult as it appears at first.

What you need to do first is to define which major body parts the creature has. These are the hit zones.

Then you need to define the percentage of hit points the body part is assigned. (Remember for this that in the regular scheme, the head has 10% of the overall hit points.) For this, consider two

factors: (1) How big is the body part, i.e. what is its percentage of the overall body mass? (2) How important is the body part to the creature; e.g. the head is a rather vital body part?

Now let's head for the tables:

For each percentage point of hit points, the body part has to appear *once* in the table. For instance, if a hit zone has been assigned 10%, it has to appear 10 times in the table.

You need not worry about the points or hit zones being arrayed next to each other, but you must take care that the overall sum of the hit zones does not exceed 100%.

5.2. Animals

5.2.1. Large animals

	Bear	Deer	Dog	Horse	Wolf	
Climate/Terrain:	All*	Forest	All	All	Forest	
Attack Penalty:	-35	-15	-10	-10	-20	
Number of Attacks:	1	0	1	1	1	
Attack Value:	<i>70 Claw:</i> 2d10+15 <i>60 Bite:</i> 4d10+10	runs away	<i>45 Bite:</i> 1d10	<i>50 Kick:</i> 3d10	<i>60 Bite:</i> 2d10+5	
Table:	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2	
Hitpoints:	H:	30	5	5	25	10
	T:	100	10	10	90	40
	LF:	20	5	5	20	10
	RF:	20	5	5	20	10
	LH:	30	5	5	20	10
	RH:	30	5	5	20	10
Experience Points:	750	20	75	50	150	

* the type of bear varies with the climate

5.2.2. Small animals

These are all animals below the size of a small dog or a racoon. Ordinarily they pose no threat at all to the characters and can hardly qualify as opponents.

Nonetheless they can be attacked (e.g. for food), and the following stats apply:

There is only **one hit zone**. The number of hit points ranges from **1 to 10**. (You may use a 1d10; but you should take the size into account, i.e. a mouse should average 1 hit point while a racoon should average about 10 hit points.)

They have an **attack penalty of -20**.

Their **attack value** is **25**. They can cause a maximum of **1** hit point of damage.

A character receives **5 EP** for killing a small animal on the hunt.

5.3. Orc

Climate/Terrain	Near mountains	
Attack Penalty	-30	
Number of Attacks	1	
Attack Value	60	With weapon = +8
Table	H1	
Hitpoints	H	15
	RA	15
	LA	15
	T	60
	LR	22
	LL	22
Experience Points	135	

Orcs are a primitive, humanoid race. They commonly live in caves and are comparable to neanderthals in their behavior and appearance.

The creatures are hairy, flatnosed and have tusk-like teeth in their lower jaw. They can grow roughly as tall as humans but are generally a little stronger.

Orcs have been driven from most areas by humans and have by now taken refuge in mountainous areas, which means they are rarely encountered elsewhere. Only in peripheral areas and mountain regions can they become troublesome to humans, and sometimes become regular plagues.

They generally live in clans of up to 150 individuals. Since they are a highly aggressive species which not only attacks members of other races but also other clans, that number is rarely exceeded.

Combat

Orcs often use very primitive weapons (most often fashioned from stone). Nonetheless they use metal weapons and better armors whenever they can steal them in raids.

Their only long-range weapons are spears; the art of archery clearly eludes them.

When large groups attack, they prefer to rush their enemies.

5.4. Skeleton

Climate/Terrain	Any	
Attack Penalty	-10	
Number of Attacks	1	
Attack Value	50	1d10+3 or Weapon +3
Table	H1	
Hitpoints	H	10
	RA	10
	LA	10
	T	40
	LR	15
	LL	15
Experience Points	100	

Skeletons are undead creatures which have been re-animated by magical means. The skeleton of the deceased reassembles and can execute simple tasks or fight with a weapon. Since practically any race can be reanimated, the size and appearance of skeletons varies greatly.

The magical powers behind their reanimation are not necessarily evil in origin. Ordinarily no trace of the dead person's identity remains, as the soul has long since travelled on to the next life. (There are exceptions, and those are clearly evil.)

Skeletons are brainless, emotionless creatures without any will of their own. They are mentally controlled by their creators and mindlessly execute their orders.

Oftentimes they are not immediately animated by the spell, but rather they lie dormant until a trigger event activates them and makes them run through the orders placed on them. Therefore they are excellent guards of treasures which still function after centuries.

Combat

Skeletons execute their orders mindlessly and relentlessly. If they are told to attack a target, they will do so until they succeed or are destroyed. In this matter they use any weapons they have been given. They might also use armor. (Read the relevant sections in **Chapter 7** of the *Player's Handbook*.)

Skeletons are destroyed by decimating the hit points in their torso or skull.

5.5. Ratpeople

Climate/Terrain	Forest	
Attack Penalty	-15	
Number of Attacks	2	
Attack Value	50	Bite: 2d10+2
	30	Claw: 1d10+1
Table	H2	
Hit Points	H	15
	RA	9
	LA	9
	T	73
	LR	22
	LL	22
Experience Points	150	

Ratpeople are about five feet tall, walk upright. Covered by thick gray fur, their upper body seems stunted compared to their legs.

The hindlegs are much too big in comparison to allow these creatures any kind of walk like ordinary people. Rather they shuffle along, half skipping, half walking.

Its jumping where the ratpeople truly excel in. Propelled by their hindlegs, they can cover large distances (about 6 – 8 yards in an ordinary jump, up to 12 when they put a lot of effort into it). That is what they prefer to do, and when the tribe is travelling, there will be a bunch of ratpeople leaping through the forest.

Their arms are very short, compared to their entire body, but they have claws and although their reach is minimal, they can cut pretty well when they get close.

Far more dangerous are their snouts, ratlike in appearance (hence the name), with an elongated snout that features sharp fangs and two short tusks set along the snout. Each of the tusks functions like a dagger, with the fangs adding more damage to the attack.

Combat

Ratpeople have two attacks per round, one for the arms and one for the snout.

Due to the low reach of their arms, that attack gets a modifier of -20 on the attack value. (Meaning that it's a lot tougher to get through someone's personal defenses that way.)

5.6. Zombie

Climate/Terrain	Any	
Attack Penalty	-15	
Number of Attacks	1	
Attack Value	65 60	Punch: 1d10+10 Choke: 1d10+10 *
Table	H1	
Hitpoints	H	20
	RA	20
	LA	20
	T	80
	LR	30
	LL	30
Experience Points	200	

* The damage is done to the torso. The character needs to roll a check against his strength attribute with a modifier of -30 in order to try to escape from the choke hold. If he fails the check, he remains in the hold and will receive another set of damage in the next round. The character can try once per round to escape the hold.

Like skeletons, zombies are undead which have been animated by magical means. Unlike skeletons, zombies are created from recently deceased people. They look, as one might imagine, like walking dead people which still decay and rot.

Zombies are supernaturally strong, but they move very slowly. It's easy to run away from a zombie, but the creature needs neither sleep nor any rest period. Since they have no will of their own and execute orders as mindlessly as skeletons, a zombie might pursue someone relentlessly day and night. Since the victim will have to sleep, even at its slow speed.

Being reanimated does not stop the zombies from decomposing, and therefore they don't last forever. After about 2 years they fall apart.

Combat

Zombies fight in a very simple manner. They punch with the extreme strength of their fists, or they try to catch their victim in a choke hold.

5.7. Fast hit point tables for NPC opponents

If you quickly need a spread of hit points, refer to the table below to choose a good set.

Should you wish to use a random factor, roll 1d10+9 and select a set from the row for the *Head* values.

H	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
RA	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
LA	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
T	40	45	48	53	56	61	64	69	73	77	80
LL	15	16	18	19	21	22	24	25	27	28	30
LR	15	16	18	19	21	22	24	25	27	28	30

6. Wounds and Healing

There are two basic distinctions of injuries:

- **Surface wounds:** These commonly result from unarmed combats or light falls. The bruises or light cuts heal very easily and rarely encumber the character very much. The reduction in hit points is considered temporary and will affect the PC only for a few rounds. (The player might exploit the surface injury for some good role-playing by whining about it a lot and annoying the hell out of the other players, not to mention you, the GM.)
- **Serious injuries:** These result from combat, magic, but also from dangerous falls and the like. Their effects are very much lasting and directly affect the game. It's very easy to imagine which wounds fall into this category, i.e. all those which would put a real person into hospital, such as splintered bones, deep cuts or any injuries caused by energy (also including fire).

In this section, we will only deal with the latter category. Light injuries are, as mentioned above, temporary and it is up to the GM how to run them in her game.

6.1. Ordinary healing

If a character gets injured, you need to consider whether there is an open wound, e.g. from a blade weapon or from an arrow. In that case the wound is bleeding and needs to be taken care of, i.e. it has to be bandaged to staunch the blood flow.

Naturally a character will heal a certain amount of hit points, which is represented by his *constitution* (CON) bonus, per day. That means, if a character has a CON value of **77** (and therefore a CON bonus of **+7**), he will restore **7** hit points per day.

If a character has only one wounds, the entire CON bonus is assigned to that wound.

But it gets more difficult when there is more than one wound. In that case, the healing effect is distributed among the wounds, by order of their severity. (The wounds are attributed to each hit zone. The seriousness is defined by the amount of hit points deducted from the nominal value.)

Let's say the character has suffered two wounds, one for **15** hit points of damage, and one for **8** points of damage. That means his regular **7** restored hit points are distributed among the wounds, **4** going for the most serious wound, and **3** for the lesser wound. After one day the character would have two wounds, one for **11** hit points of damage, and one for **5** points of damage. (The same procedure is resumed during the following day.)

Please note that it is necessary for a character to rest in order to heal. If the character persists in moving around rather than recuperating, his wounds will *not* heal.

There is also the possibility of a character in the group possessing the *healing* skill. This skill has no connection at all with the **magical** healing of clerics. When this character tries to apply her skill, she needs to roll a check against her skill.

For each successful check, she can heal **1** hit point of damage for every wound the character has sustained.

6.2. Damages and their effects on the character

If a character is seriously injured, his abilities will be impaired accordingly. Wounded legs force the character to limp, provided he can still walk at all. A hurt arm may keep the character from properly wielding a sword.

Whenever a character is damaged for 50% or more of their hit points in a specific body part, the character receives a penalty on every action associated with this body part.

Then there are wounds that carry a character to the brink of death, which we will refer to as critical wounds. More on that a few paragraphs further down.

6.2.1. Effects

Which effects are caused by the damages? Well, they depend on the hit zone where the wounds are sustained. The arms in particular suffer from these effects, therefore they receive a penalty of -20.

The penalties for losing 50% and more of the hit points in a body part are:

Head	-10
Torso	-10
Arms	-20
Legs	character can only walk at half speed

The worse the damages, the more serious are the effects. If all the hit points of a body part are withdrawn, the body part is still present but can no longer be used at all. For instance, a leg without hit points may still be attached but it is for all intents and purposes paralyzed – the character can no longer walk or even move the leg.

6.2.2. Critical zones

There are two critical zones which can lead to deadly injuries:

- Head
- Torso

If all hit points are destroyed in either of these hit zones, the character sustains a fatal injury. The injury does *not* immediately kill the character, that happens when the value of the hit points falls beneath -10. (Yes, it is possible to cause damages below zero. To illustrate, if a character has only

two hit points left in a body part but sustains a blow for 10 points of damage, the hit zone value would sink to -8 .) Until that happens, the character lies in agony and is dying.

Each round that the number of hit points in a body part is below 1, the character sustains an additional point of damage.

That means, unless treated with healing magic or the skill of healing, the character has a maximum of 10 rounds to live once his hit points reach zero.

Please note that both the application of healing magic and the skill of healing can only restore the character to a hit point count of zero. He remains in a critical condition, and further applications of healing are required for improvement.

6.2.3. Losing limbs

It's not quite easy to lose a limb in the GRPG, but it is possible.

When the hit points in a limb sink below 0, they can no longer be used. Should they reach -100% , there is a danger of losing the extremity. For instance, if a character has ordinarily **23** hit points in his right arm, but the body part has now sunk to -23 or below, the arm might be lost.

To find out what happens, the player has to roll a check against half his CON value. If the roll does not succeed, then the unthinkable happens and the limb is lost. (How it is exactly lost is defined by the last attack the character sustained in that body part; i.e. whether a sword slashed off the arm or an animal tore off the leg.)

There is also a lethal danger in a wound like this. If it is not properly treated (i.e. bandaged), the character will sustain an additional 1d10 hit points of damage in the torso for every round. (We discussed the danger of hit point loss to the critical zone of the torso in the previous section.)

6.3. Magical healing

Please note that we haven't completed the magic system yet. Therefore we cannot offer you any specifics on how magical healing works. That will be taken care of in the coming months.

This kind of healing can only be executed by priests (who have acquired the class ability). It is the fastest and most effective form of healing known on Gushémal. The degree by which a priest can effect cures, though, depends not only on his advancement in the class ability, but also on the god or goddess he has chosen as his patron. Darawk priests, for instance, have the lowest efficiency, while a Decalleigh priest has devoted himself to healing, like his patron god, and therefore can work the best healing effects. (*More details will follow at a later time.*)

Casting a healing blessing on an injured person immediately closes and cleans the wounds, all bleeding ceases immediately. There is no need to bandage the wound or care for it in any other way. A goodly number of hit points are restored immediately.

Magical healing can also restore hit points should they have slipped into the negative. Meaning that if, say, the head has taken a critical wound (i.e. the hit points are in the range of -1 to -9), and the character is dying, a blessing can pull the character back into the land of the living. (It depends on the ability of the cleric whether the character receives enough hit points to immediately return to action; generally, though, when a character has been critically wounded, he needs more than one blessing for this.)

6.4. Damages on creatures and other foes

It would be ludicrous to apply the above rules to run-of-the-mill NPCs and creatures that the characters encounter in combat. Ordinarily, the opponents of the party are dealt with by simplified rules:

Whenever a NPC's hit zone reaches zero, the according body part becomes unusable. It is up to the GM to declare that a limb was torn off or not; since the NPC or creature will (probably) not be healed, it is completely inconsequential for the game what the GM decides.

If either head or torso are damaged to zero or less hit points, the creature or NPC dies.

As always, there are exceptions: The more important and more interesting opponents of the party should have access to the same options as the PCs have. An advanced wizard can have healing potions at the ready, or the leader of an army might have a cleric ready to apply his magical skills.

7. Travel

Travel is one of the most common occurrences in any adventure. To reach the destination of a quest, you necessarily have to travel, and for this you need some information. In this section we will be discussing a number of influences on travel, the rates of speed, and the like.

There are several methods to cross a given distance. For one thing, there are the traditional ways of walking or riding a horse (or some other beast of burden). In the world of Gushémal, though, you can also ride a horsedragon or travel on an airship (only when available, of course) or use other means of travel.

Please note that this chapter will definitely be expanded in later editions, for instance when we will include magical transports.

7.1. Influences on travel

There are several influences that affect travel, both rate of speed and the expenditure of energy required by the characters. The major influences are:

- Weather
- Layout of the land

Ideally the weather is dry and not too warm, while the land is plain and even. Then the characters can proceed at their normal rates of speed, while they only have to put their normal strength into the feat.

On the other hand, rain turns the landscape dry and mushy. Unless the characters are travelling on a paved road, that means the ground will turn soggy and be more difficult to traverse. Wet clothes also add additional weight the characters have to carry.

But even if the weather is dry, temperatures can become uncomfortably hot or cold. In both cases, the traveller expends more energy to cover a certain distance and will require more breaks during the day.

The lay of the land has also its natural influences. Crossing a hilly or mountainous area is obviously more difficult than walking across an even meadow. Swamps require particular attention, since missteps can easily trap a character in the bog. (A good GM should have a set of dice ready for random rolls in that regard. Unless a precise path has been marked previously, or the characters have previous knowledge of the area, they could get stuck in the mud – or fall into a crevice in the mountains -, so that they (a) sustain damage and/or (b) require rescue by their companions.)

A classic obstacle to travel is a river: In order to cross it, you need to find a suitable place, be it a bridge or a ford. (Alternatively, there could be a ferry service, or the characters might get hold of a boat.)

7.2. Rates of speed

The rates of speed are dependent not only on the above hindrances, but also on the weight which is carried by the characters. This also applies to travel when riding, since the beast of burden can – despite its name – not carry an infinite amount.

7.2.1. Walking

Most humanoids can walk a distance of **15 + ($\frac{1}{2}$ * CON bonus) miles** per day, when burdened down with ordinary luggage and leather (or no) armor. Heavier armor is not suitable for walking any longer distance; especially plate mail is too much of an encumbrance, and the character would probably keel over from exhaustion in short order.

If the humanoid is not burdened down by any luggage or armor, he can reach **18 + ($\frac{1}{2}$ * CON bonus) miles**.

7.2.2. Riding (a horse)

Riding is a much faster way of travel than walking – and certainly more pleasant to the rider. But it is important to remember that horses are no machines; they require breaks as much as humans do. These breaks become longer the more distance a horse has to cover in a given time.

A horse can cover 45 miles per day without being overly exhausted.

(If the horse is loaded down with very heavy burden, such as plate mail armor or similarly heavy items, the horse won't be able to run as fast nor will it be able to cover as much of a distance.)

7.2.3. Tour de force

Characters can choose to run tour-de-force marches (or rides) which enhance the rate of speed by 30%. But the party buys this increased speed at the cost of requiring an entire day of rest after two days of the tour de force. They will be so exhausted that they will practically fall asleep where they stand.

If the tour de force is chosen to increase the speed by 50%, the party will need a full day's rest after every day of the march.

There are obviously good reasons for driving oneself to this kind of excess. Some adventures have a time limit, and the characters have to force themselves to match a deadline, or something dreadful will happen (e.g. the realm falls prey to an evil general, or one of their number dies from poisoning). But the payment needs to be regarded.

As a GM you should also keep close watch over tours de force when the characters drive their horses to exhaustion. If the players choose (needlessly) to ignore the plight of their horses, you ought to consider punishing the players for their superciliousness. Have the poor beasts die from exhaustion, so that the players are stuck with walking. That ought to teach them a lesson about how to deal with animals.

7.2.4. Other modes of transport

(The following table will be enhanced in future editions.)

Mode of transport	Maximal range
Cart or Wagon	24 miles (40 kilometers)
Carriage	48 miles (80 kilometers)
Riverboat	18 miles (30 kilometers) upriver / 36 miles (60 kilometers) downriver
Sailing boat	118 miles (200 kilometers)

8. Optional rules

In this chapter you will find rules that are not firmly a part of the GRPG. GMs are free to work them into their game.

Why present optional rules at all? Why not put them right in the regular rules?

The reason for that is to keep the game a bit more variable and not rigidly structured. The rules in this section can improve the game, but they are not required. And in some cases they might not even impact the game at all.

Take a look at these rules and make up your own mind whether you think they are good for your game.

Please note that we currently have only *one* optional rule. This section will grow with time, especially if you make suggestions on **house rules**. Those in particular can be incorporated in this chapter, and rest assured that if any of your suggested rules are published in this chapter, your name will appear right along with them.

8.1. House Rules

The GRPG is not a fixed structure which has to be obeyed at all costs. Following each rule to its exact letter might lead to a game session bogging down (*might*, I underline, it doesn't have to). Sometimes the rules don't sit too well with both GM and players, for such a multitude of reasons that I won't even begin to enumerate them.

And sometimes a GM has an idea how to solve a specific situation better than the official system has stated. (Since we are infallible, that is impossible, but we pretend otherwise for a moment. Just kidding.)

In that case, the GM may introduce a so-called *house rule*, in accordance with the players. That is just such an optional rule as I have described in the introduction to this chapter; it can change and/or enhance the way GRPG runs at your gaming table.

If you feel the need, you may also alter the usage of certain skills, weapons, equipment, etc. But please think your changes through, they are likely to affect the entire balance of the game.

Should you have developed a house rule that you feel would make an excellent addition to the official rules, please send them to chris@gushemal.com. They might wind up in future editions as either *optional rules* or as *regular rules*.

8.2. The “Always hit or miss” rule

This rule allows the element of chance to enter into combat: The perfect super-warrior, veteran of countless battles, excellently schooled in the use of his weapons, can still *miss* a target, or *fail a parry*. No matter how good he has become in his training, there is a chance that his skills slip for a moment – and the aura of infallibility falls off.

On the other hand the poor, unskilled peasant – who normally would be no more than sword fodder – has the odd chance of *hitting a fully armored knight*. Imagine the thrill of this situation, when the peasant defending his field... actually succeeds against seemingly impossible odds!

How does this work?

For every attack you roll a percentage check – as you normally do in combat. But with this rule in place, rolling 01 – 05 means that your character automatically hits his target. It doesn't matter whether the roll would have been successful according to the regular rules.

On the other hand, rolling 96 – 00 means the character automatically misses, even though technically (by the regular rules) he would have scored a hit.

As you can see, this allows the seemingly impossible – and it makes the game a bit less predictable.

The same rule can also be used for skills.
