

The HackTrack System: Part I



By Jolly R. Blackburn

The new edition of **HackMaster** has a very elegant and (in my somewhat biased opinion anyway) exciting combat system. I love the **Count Up** system — every tick is as though a big second hand is sweeping the clock, as combat unfolds fast and furious. What's not to love?

The party runs into a roving Grevan patrol on a narrow winding mountain pass, and it's on, as initiative is rolled and the GM announces "One!"

One of the things I like best about the system is you're NEVER in a position of waiting idly by for another player to take his turn. You've got something to do on every count (second). Be it moving, casting a spell, readying a weapon or whatever. Combat in **HackMaster** requires a player to pay careful attention lest he lose an action and be at a disadvantage. With the flow of battle constantly changing, you don't want to be caught off guard.

Recently, at **GaryCon III**, I ran a game for 13 players and it was exciting to see 13 hands reaching out to move miniatures on the table on every count.

Now the downside (and it's a minor one really) is there's a bit of a learning curve to the new combat rules. Some GMs and players stumble when using them the first few games. And let's face it — we're not all engineers like my partners who are a breeze at fast math, keeping track of numbers in their heads and calculating the volume of that fireball just fired down the hole on the fly.

Enter the **HackTrack** system.

In the last installment of the **GameMaster's Workbench (Strongbox of Doom)**, a curious deck of cards could be seen standing in one of the bins.



As promised, this month we'll be discussing those cards and what we've fondly come to refer to as the **HackTrack System** (HTS) here in house.

Note: before delving further I want to make it very clear — you do NOT need to use this system to enjoy **HackMaster**. It's simply a game aid — a tool. Much like the **HackMaster Combat Wheel** was for **HM4e**.

While helping playtest **HackMaster**, I tried a variety of methods when gamemastering to keep track of what each of my NPCs and Monsters were doing, and when, during the count-up.

Now the D-Team are a blood-thirsty lot. They demand large battles and LOTS of them (usually in waves). At any given time there may be as many as a 20 figs out on the table (a dozen or so monsters and 7 or 8 PCs/Hirelings). For someone a bit touched with dyslexia (coupled with the D-Team's habit of mocking and taunting the acting GM) it can sometimes be challenging to keep track of so much activity and still bring your game.

I tried the old tried-and-true method of tick marks on scrap paper, fancy battle sheets with each monster listed and a nice place to mark down its next count, pennies on a count-up grid, spreadsheets...

Nothing was really working for me and all the record keeping was distracting me from what I love to do most as a GM — Bringing it! So — out of personal necessity came the **HackTrack System**.

THE HACKTRACK SYSTEM

The HTS has two basic components. **Hack Cards** (see the figure on the right) and a **Hack Rack** (more on that in a moment).

HACK CARDS

The **Hack Card** is roughly the size of a standard playing card and contains virtually ALL the information a GM needs to conduct combat for the creature listed on it. Attack modifier, Damage Reduction, Armor, Saves, Movement, Hit-points — you name it, it's there.

You can download blank templates from www.kenzerco.com and fill the cards out yourself (extracting the data from the new **Hacklopedia of Beasts**.

GameMaster's Workbench



Talking Shop and Sharing Tools of the Trade

GREVAN		FF
Size: 11/67/5lbs	Speed: 7	Init: -1
Moves: 5/10/15/20/25	Attack: +8	Defense: +6
Alignment: NE	Damage: +9 (+3)	Hit Points: 4d4p
Tenacity: Fearless +2	M: 7/6	Top Save: 8
Vision: Standard	Intelligence: Average	Weapon: Battle Axe
Fatigue Factor: 7/4	Phys: +9 Mental: +8	Hvy Crossbow
Dodge: +10	M/3 ft REACH	HITPOINTS: 35+4D8
ATTACK NOTES:	Will use heavy cross bow if able then discard and draw Battle Axe.	DEFENSE NOTES:
Medium Shield	Leather Armor	CARRIED:
54 sp, Medicine Bag, Dagger		EPV: 500

Above: A fully filled out hack card for a Grevan — armed and ready to ruin a player-character's day.

You can also download some pre-generated cards with all the monster data filled in (Gm only needs to roll up hit-points and calculate Threshold of Pain). Also, starting this month, all newly published **HackMaster** modules (in pdf format) will include pre-generated cards for all the NPCs and monsters in the adventure.

Each **Hack Card** represents a single individual monster or NPC. I won't explain the **Combat Rose** featured on the card or the data elements here — you can find all that information in the introduction of the new **Hacklopedia**.

I do, however, want to go over a couple of the unique elements on the cards.

Monster Identifier: The small yellow circle in the upper left hand corner of



Above: A curved wooden card holder — good candidate for a **Hack Rack** and highly recommended.

the card is for the GM to assign a code to the monster. This code usually corresponds with a tag/number on the miniature representing the monster on the battle mat. Useful for large encounters/skirmishes and identifying who is who.

Shield Icon: The Combat Rose on the cards differ a bit from the one presented in the **Hacklopedia**. A shield icon has been added to the center to help quickly ascertain if a Monster is using a shield (or not).



There two ways you can use it. Some GMs prefer to put a letter indicating the shield size (S, M, or L). Others, (like myself) like to put the monster's modified Damage Reduction here when using a shield.

It's really up to you.

HACKTRACK SYSTEM EXAMPLE OF PLAY

In Figure 1 we see a combat encounter in progress. Looking at the Sweep Card (A) we know the count is at 57 — a hard fought battle is in progress as the players take on a patrol of hardened Grevan warriors.

The Grevan, on count 58 (B), will swing when the sweep card reaches him in one second.

The Grevan, on count 59 (C), has dropped his weapon and will pick it up when the sweep card reaches him (his card is turned upside down to indicate his status).

The Grevan at count 74 (D), has been topped and will regain consciousness when the sweep card reaches him.

When the sweep card reaches count ten on its current track, the GM will advance the wheel to 6 to indicate the count is now in the 'sixties' On the following count, he will move the sweep card to the "1" position (61) on the next track up and continue the count.

Hit Point Box: It's worth mentioning how the hit-point box works on the cards. If a **Hack Card** is pre-generated, you'll find a number of check-boxes that equal that individual monster's hitpoint total. If you've downloaded a monster template, you'll see a number of tick boxes in black equaling the monster's basic HP total along with a number of red tick boxes up to that monster's maximum possible hitpoints. You simply need to roll the number of dice indicated at the top of the box, add the result to the monster's base hp (along with any modifiers) and then line through any excess boxes.

THE HACK RACK

Now this part of the **HTS** is going to require a bit of work on your part — and some decision making. The **Hack Rack** is simply a card holder that holds your **Hack Cards**. The rack is used to show



Above: Card holders marked with segments numbering 1 thru 10.

what action count each **Hack Card** attacks or takes its action on.

There are lots of options out there ranging from \$5 to \$25 in cost. You can even make your own (which I ended up doing — see the photo at the bottom of the page). One really nice option that's been popular are the wooden curved card holders **Chessex** (www.chessex.com) sells. (see the photo above). Another good option if you're on a budget are domino card holders (readily available on **Amazon.com** and **Ebay**).

It's really up to your personal taste/budget.

Once you've acquired a card rack you need to modify it by segmenting it into 10 to 20 sections. Each segment represents 1 second on the Count-Up. You can be quick-and-dirty about it as I was in the photo using a Sharpie or you can print up fancy labels like the rack in figure 1.

Two **Hack Racks** that run 1 thru 10 works best. As you will see this will allow you to run battles of infinite length.

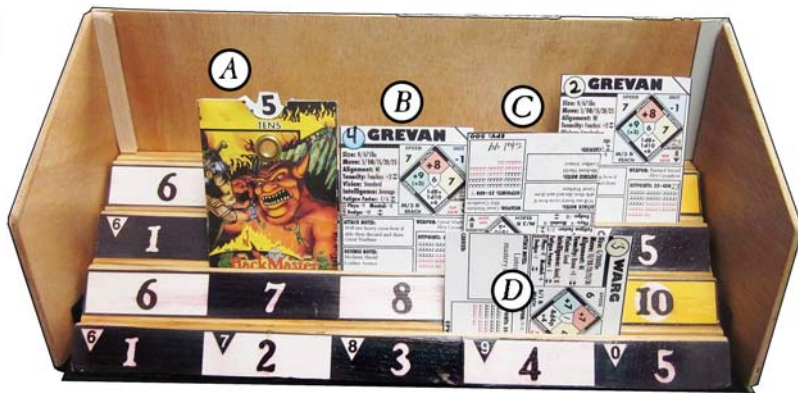
THE SWEEP CARD (OPTIONAL)

One more component of the basic **HackTrack System** is the **Sweep Card**.

Now, this is completely optional. Some GM's see no need for it. Other love it.

Basically, the sweep card is a marker that tells indicates the current count. Everything to the left of the card is seconds in the past — everything on the right is in the future. As the GM calls out the Count-Up, he moves/slides the **wheel** along the track, ticking off the seconds like the second hand of a clock. As it arrives in a new second segment any **HackCards** in that position are

Figure: 1



Note: the card rack above is home-made. GMs using the **HackTrack** system have come up with a wide variety of solutions which they've shared on the **kenzerco** forums. You'll find plans for this one there.

'swept' and take action. The sweep card can be as simple as a card-sized piece of paper with a solid color or more elaborate like the wheeled sweep card pictured on the opposite page.

USING THE HACK TRACK SYSTEM

Now that you have all the parts of the HTS gathered up the fun can start.

Using the system is fairly simple and straight forward.

Initiative: When a combat encounter begins, initiative is rolled. The GM takes a **Hack Card** for each monster/npc participating and places the cards on the appropriate count on the **Hack Rack**. He then places the sweep card on count 1 and begins the count.

The Count-Up: As the GM calls out the count, he moves the sweep card down the track. When he comes to a card he picks it up, performs any action such as attacking, loosing a spell, etc.

Moving Hack Cards: Once a monster has taken its action, the GM advances its card down the track based on its speed/weapon speed. For example, the sweep card arrives at Count 6 where a Kobold card waits. The GM picks up the card and decides the Kobold is attacking the PC Fighter standing before him. Once the attack is resolved, the GM looks at the Kobold's speed (which hap-

pens to be six in this case) and moves the card down the track to Count 12, where it awaits the Sweep Card's arrival so it can attack again.

Scribble Scribble: The **Hack Cards** are designed to be marked up. As a monster takes damage, the GM checks off the hit-point boxes. If it is fatigued, the GM indicates that as well in the Fatigue box. If you use pencil the cards can be used again and again before being disposed of. Some GMs like to put their cards in plastic card protectors and use dry-erase pens. Whatever floats your boat.

Wheeled Sweep Card: If you are using a sweep card with a thumb wheel when you reach the "10" segment on the track, this is your cue to advance the wheel by one. For example, the count-up is 9 and you advance the SC to 10. The wheel would be moved from 0 to 1 to indicate the count is in the 'tens' and the next count will be 11. When the SW reaches the next "10" segment the wheel is advanced to "2" and the next count would be 21.

Hack Card Status: The HLS is fairly new and extremely flexible. Every GM I know has his or her own special tweaks and additions. Many of them are available as downloads on our website or have been discussed in the forums.

I'll make brief mention here of a few of my own uses for the cards.

When a monster is topped, I generally just remove its card from the track since it's unlikely it will revive before combat is over. But, sometimes I'll simply 'tap' the card and turn it sideways

Monsters who drop their weapons I simply turn upside down (after moving them up to the count on which they will have picked up the weapon - if applicable).

If a monster is being effected by a spell, is spell fatigued, bleeding out, etc I use special markers to place over the monster's card as a visual reminder.

Decoy Cards: You may find using the HTS that some players have a wandering eye. Clever 'card counters' might glance over and figure out there are a few yet-to-be revealed combatants by comparing cards to minis on the table. If you can't hide your HackTrack from view, using decoy cards will thwart such player tactics.

Conclusion: And that's the basic **HackTrack System**. Again you can play **HackMaster** just fine without this system, but like myself, a lot of GMs who have adopted it are reporting it's making their job easier (especially with those LARGE skirmishes) and frees them to focus on other things (like monster tacticals). It's there if you need it.

Plans for the HackTrack I built from scratch and pictured on the left hand page can be found at www.kenzerco.com.

Next month, we'll be looking at some other cool GM aids that build on this system.

Until then, game on!!! — Jolly Blackburn



Free Downloads and Accessories

At www.kenzerco.com you'll find an ever growing number of free downloads to help you bring **HTS** to your own table.

From both blank and pre-generated **Hack Card** templates, to **Hack Card Status Markers** and even a DIY constructable **Sweep Card**, there are plenty of game aids to explore and choose from.

In addition, a lot of **HackMaster** GMs have embraced the **HTS** and have been putting their own thumbprint on it and introducing even more ideas and innovations on our HM forums.

GREVAN

Size: 11/5/5lbs
Move: 5/10/15/20/25
Alignment: NE
Tenacity: Fearless +2
Vision: Standard
Intelligence: Average
Fatigue Factor: 7/4
Phys: +1 Mental: +8
Dodge: +10

ATTACK NOTES:
Will use heavy cross bow if able then discard and draw Battle Axe.

DEFENSE NOTES:
Medium Shield
Leather Armor

CARRIED:
54 sp, Medicine Bag, Dagger

WEAPON: Battle Axe
Hvy Crossbow

HITPOINTS: 35+408

EPY: 500

HEAVY CROSSBOW

DISTANCE	ATTN DIE	SPEED	INIT
5-80	d20p	7	-1
81-140	d12p	+8	
141-190	d8p	+3	7
191-250	d4p		

RATE OF FIRE: 60
AMMO: 30

THROWING AXE

DISTANCE	ATTN DIE	SPEED	INIT
5-20	d20p	7	-1
21-30	d12p	+8	
31-40	d8p	+3	7
41-60	d4p		

RATE OF FIRE: 7
OF AXES: 4

Hacktrack Sweep Card Rev 1.a

ACTION SPEEDS IN SECONDS

Change facing or initiative	1"
Stir/Knock/Stand from prone/reverse	1"
Pick up dropped weapon at feet	1"
Draw/Ready small weapon	6"
Draw/Ready medium weapon	1"
Draw/Ready large weapon	2"
Ready control ranged weapon	1"
Draw loaded weapon from back	1"
Draw stored weapon	5"
Take Aim (ranged weapon)	4"

*Free when combined with another movement or action

Sweep Card
www.kenzerco.com

WHEEL OPTION 1

WHEEL OPTION 2

FOLD

GLUE

FOLD

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Front

Optional - Back