

A Walk Through

HackMaster Basic



This is an exciting month for *Kenzer and Company*. About the time you read this, **HackMaster Basic** (Some purists might prefer to call it “5th Edition”) will be hitting the shelves. If you’re reading this you might be thinking, “My god — yet ANOTHER fantasy role-playing game? Why bother?”

Well this is where we make our pitch and take a closer look at the game.

HackMaster Basic has truly been a labor of love. We have a passion for fantasy role-playing at Kenzer and Company. All of us here first picked up the dice and created our first characters in the late 1970’s. And we’ve spent the last 17 years working on role-playing products professionally. You might say it’s in our blood. HackMaster Basic takes the passion, know-how and attitude (more on that attitude in a moment) from the last edition, along with years of experience garnered along the way and takes the game to the next level.

Why another Fantasy RPG?

Because not all games are created equal. And neither are gamers. We all come to the table with our own likes and dislikes as far as game style and play. No single game can be all things to all players. We created HackMaster Basic with one goal in mind — to be the game we ourselves would want to buy and play with our friends.

This is the same approach to game design that earned us Best Game of the Year (for *HackMaster 4th Edition*) and Best RPG of the Year (*Aces and Eights*). We happen to think there are others out there like us. So far we’ve been right.

What does HackMaster “Basic” mean?

Just that — the basics. Everything the GM/Players need to run and play HackMaster for 1st through 5th level characters. All between two covers at a price anyone can afford. And when you’re ready to take the next step? Advanced HackMaster (currently in development) picks up where HMB leaves off. No need for conversions or changes to your characters or campaigns, just keep on playing.

If you’re new to the HackMaster experience, we encourage you to check out the new edition. And if you’re already a HackMaster 4th Edition fan coming to HMB with some concerns...? Let’s just say that we feel HackMaster Basic is the rightful heir to

the game(s) we all cut our teeth on. We wouldn’t have put the HackMaster logo on the cover if we didn’t feel we had met that challenge.

Isn’t HackMaster a Joke Game?

Okay, a brief word on HackMaster’s unique style and a bit of back history. When HackMaster 4th Edition came out it earned something of a reputation among some gamers as being a ‘silly’ or ‘joke’ game. A few quickly dismissed it as being such. A pity. Fortunately tens of thousands of gamers were able to look beyond the veneer and recognize that there was a truly fun and unique game underneath and quickly embraced HackMaster as their game of choice. Just to clarify, our previous license *required* that HackMaster 4th Edition be a ‘parody’ and approval for HM product required a certain bit of ‘silliness’ to be sprinkled about. HackMaster Basic (and its upcoming successor, Advanced HackMaster) are free of any such licensing requirements.

So how has that affected the new game? We reeled in and scrubbed the game of much of the over-the-top “silly factor”. But... we decided to KEEP the fun. And most importantly, the attitude. So while game play takes itself very seriously and is as rock solid as we could possibly make it — the rules are presented with the notion, ***“This is a game, it should be fun. It shouldn’t read like a text book”***.

Finally, you can run your HackMaster campaign with as much humor or even silliness as you want. Or... you can run it deadly serious. It’s all up to you. HackMaster Basic has been developed to support both styles of play.

So pick up those dice and have fun.

So what’s in HackMaster Basic?

Attitude and an enjoyable read are a given for HackMaster but since this is a new game from a premier design team and not a pulp novel, there is

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a Costco-sized bag full of crunchy bits inside. Let's take the nickel tour...

We begin naturally enough with the character creation process though we preface it with a set of abridged "quick start" rules for those of you too eager to read any further before stepping into a game (no shame in that – we appreciate the enthusiasm!)

What you'll quickly learn while rolling up a new character is that there are no "dump stats". While you may opt to expend every last building point improving your strength, that route won't necessarily transform you into the unstoppable panzer tank many inferior rules systems permit. Those latter games virtually codify the stereotypical idiot jock and pencil-necked mage by punishing any other choice (why bother when there's no practical reason not to min/max?) While the name "HackMaster" may invoke images of munchkinism in the mentally feeble, let me assure you that we have expended a Manhattan Project's ration of innovation in solving this ubiquitous dilemma.

HackMaster was designed from the ground up to be played interactively at a table with your real life friends. It is thus worthy of the title "role playing game" not desktop adjunct to a MMORPG. We're no luddites and do recognize that there's a place for online gaming but no matter how stellar the graphics may be they cannot stand in for the power of your own imagination. Really – don't sell yourself short. And don't for a minute believe that



**Dwarves
at a Glance**

Ability adjustments

- +4 Constitution
- 2 Charisma
- 2 Looks

Dwarven Pros

- ▶ size Large for knock backs
- ▶ size Medium for HPs (i.e. 10 hp + Constitution + class roll)
- ▶ low light vision
- ▶ **Magic Resistance:** Dwarves receive a +1 on Saving Throws versus magic for every 3 full points of Constitution
- ▶ **Poison Resistance:** Dwarves receive a +1 on Saving Throws versus poison for every 3 full points of Constitution
- ▶ One free purchase of the Mining skill

Dwarven Cons

- ▶ Poor reach (effective weapon reach is -1 foot)
- ▶ Character's native language is Dwarven (must purchase any additional languages)

Preferential talent access

May purchase the following Talents at 50% BP cost

- ▶ Attack Bonus, Damage Bonus, Parry Bonus or Swiftblade (only for Axes or Warhammers)

pen and paper have been superseded by silicon.

Role playing (and indeed all stories worth retelling) are driven by characters. Think back to the characters you most vividly recall from novels, movies or television. Were they monochromatic heroes (or villains) devoid of personality? I think not. HackMaster employs a quirk and flaw system not as a handicap but rather as an aid. After all, your stats don't represent a mass production fighting vehicle, they are a character – YOUR character. And getting into that role is a little bit easier if you have a touchstone to draw from. Knowing that your fighter is foul-mouthed, your thief is afraid of heights or your mage is paranoid simply gives you material to riff on at the table. What you make of these is up to you.

At first glance, you may decide that HackMaster Basic's selection of four player character classes is limiting. You would be flat-out wrong in that rash judgment. Your ignorance can be forgiven though for that's what you've been trained to think. In other lesser games, each class has a pre-defined and largely unique set of capabilities. Variant classes merely blend the capabilities of others. In Hackmaster, you have a great deal of latitude in so far as acquiring capabilities is concerned. If you want your fighter to read scrolls, spend some building points on the Arcane Lore skill. Similarly if your mage feels the need to wield a two-handed sword



**Halflings
at a Glance**

Ability adjustments

- 4 Strength
- +1 Wisdom
- +2 Dexterity
- +1 Constitution

Halfling Pros

- ▶ One free purchase of the Hiding skill
- ▶ One free purchase of the Sneaking skill
- ▶ Harder to hit (+4 Defense bonus)
- ▶ Hiding in natural surroundings bonus (see sidebar)
- ▶ Initiative bonus (see sidebar)

Halfling Cons

- ▶ Poor reach (effective weapon reach is -1 foot)
- ▶ Size small with regard to HPs (i.e. 5 hp + CON + class roll)
- ▶ Size small for knock backs
- ▶ Character's native language is Halfling (must purchase any additional languages)

Preferential talent access

May purchase the following Talents at 50% BP cost

- ▶ Crack Shot or Greased Lightning (only for Slings)

or heft a heavy crossbow, you can take those proficiencies. This doesn't imply an à la cart classless system – classes are meaningful and determinate in that they lay out the character's core competencies. You simply have more room to play on the extras.

The cleric is a unique case in that his capabilities are proscribed by the religion he chooses. Each one of the five presented (i.e. The True, Caregiver, The Guardian, The Overlord and The Creator of Strife) is novel with a different set of abilities and restrictions. In effect, "Cleric" is a nominal name for a set of sub-classes.

The thief class has received special attention. Frequently miscast as a feeble technician or ancillary fighter capable only of ridiculously effective flanking attacks, we've reprised the role. 'Thief' carries a negative connotation, as well it should. Adept at fighting only when battling a weakened, helpless or oblivious opponent, the thief's advantages can be summarized as stealth, mobility and reactivity. The addition of a new mechanic – Luck Points – permits the character to be bolder and take risks that formerly held this class back.

Mages (i.e. Magic-Users) utilize a spell system that is a blend of the best that point and slot systems offer. The baseline closely mirrors the traditional slot system that players of 4th edition HackMaster and AD&D will be familiar with. However, once acquainted with the flexibility of spell points, the mage has a number of options open. He can boost spells as needed or reduce the charges drawn when utilizing a magical device. He can even draw upon spells not memorized. All in all it makes for a more rewarding playing experience.

The book details over 40 Mage Spells such as White Hot Metal, Heat Seeking Fist of Thunder, Skipping Betty Fireball and Cheetah Speed. Spell levels now correspond to character levels dis-



Humans at a Glance

Ability adjustments
none

Human Pros

- ▶ Size medium for HP (i.e. 10 hp + Constitution + class roll)
- ▶ May purchase Language (Merchant's Tongue) at 50% cost

Human Cons
none



Elves at a Glance

Ability adjustments

- 2 Strength
- +2 Dexterity
- 4 Constitution
- +2 Looks
- +2 Charisma

Elven Pros

- ▶ Two free purchases of the Arcane Lore skill
- ▶ One free purchase of the Listening skill
- ▶ One free purchase of the Observation skill
- ▶ One free purchase of the Sneaking skill
- ▶ +2 defense bonus
- ▶ Hiding in natural surroundings bonus (see sidebar)
- ▶ Initiative bonus (see sidebar)

Elven Cons

- ▶ Size small with regard to HPs (i.e. 5 hp + CON + class roll)
- ▶ Size small for knock backs
- ▶ Character's native language is Elven
(must purchase any additional languages)

Preferential talent access

May purchase the following Talents at 50% BP cost

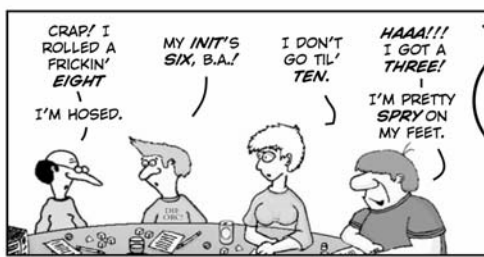
- ▶ Crack Shot or Greased Lightning (only for Longbows or Shortbows)
- ▶ Attack Bonus, Damage Bonus, Parry Bonus or Swiftblade (only for longswords or short swords)
- ▶ Charm Resistance
- ▶ Less Sleep

selling that age-old confusion. For example, a fourth level mage can cast 4th level spells (and lesser spells). The same holds true for Clerical spells.

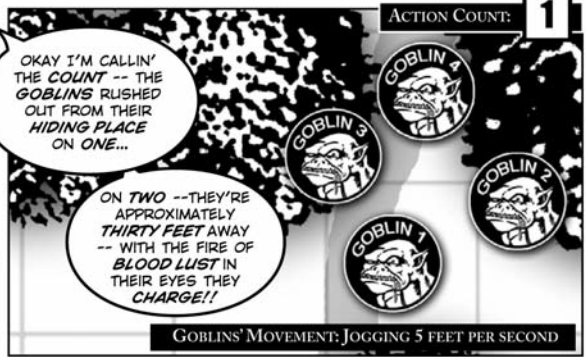
HackMaster has an extensive skill system with over 60 presented in the basic rules. Many of these are 'universal' (e.g. cartography, climbing/rappelling, escape artist, sneaking, tracking) meaning that all characters have a basic level of proficiency and can accomplish simple tasks. "But wait!" you say. "I thought only thieves can climb or sneak." I don't know about you, but I've personally climbed onto my roof and snuck past a bouncer both without any formal training as a footpad. While thieves have the opportunity to be better at these things, anyone can try (and possibly succeed!) They may even spend building points to match the thief's skill.

Supplementing the skills are talents and proficiencies. These are different in that they permit some far more specific capability (such as knowing how to shoot a crossbow or fighting in the dark) without the need to check for success. Note that weapon proficiencies are open to all classes, albeit with some specific religious restrictions. It simply costs more building points for a mage to become proficient in a halberd than it does a fighter.

The chapter on combat is considered by some to be the true delicacy of the smorgasbord of hack



EL RAVAGER 6 (rolled 5, +1 Base Initiative)
 KNUCKLES 8 (rolled 8, with no Base Initiative modifier)
 JUSTINIA 10 (rolled 7, +3 Base Initiative)
 NOIR LOTUS 3 (rolled 1, +2 Base Initiative)



Above: Even the **Knights** make a cameo appearance in **HackMaster Basic** in a visual-combat example.

being offered here. Rules for melee and missile combat, timing, surprise, ambushes and movement, are, of course, included. HackMaster has dispensed with static "to-hit" charts. Combat is resolved with both the attacker and defender rolling a d20 and adding their attack or defense modifier as appropriate. Not only does this alleviate the burden of consulting charts but it also makes for a more exciting battle as you are now totally in charge of your own destiny.

One of the most vivid rule additions to combat is the inclusion of Knock-Back rules. Whomping on an opponent becomes that much more satisfying when you hear that not only did you damage him, but you knocked him back 10 feet on his keister. Players may also make special moves such as Aggressive Attack, Full Parry and Charge.

The chapter on combat is rich, crammed with a wealth of goodness that has to be played to be believed. It is in this chapter that our favorite Knights of the Dinner Table put in an appearance to give us an example of combat that is as clear as it is hilarious.

The infamous and popular Dice Chapter is also included and has been enriched for your reading pleasure, as well as your education on the proper techniques for keeping those important tools working properly.

The Gamemaster Section of the book is a private area designated for only those people skilled enough to take the reigns of this game.

It begins by detailing the monsters. We've provided over 70 creatures for the GameMaster's arsenal from the humanoids (kobolds, goblins, orcs, hobgoblins, gnoles and bugbears) to fiercer beats such as sturm wolves, owlbeasts and a full compliment of undead.

A chapter on magic and treasure is included to instruct GMs on how to appropriately dole out rewards based on the challenge he has set before the players (because there's always an aspiring Monty Haul out there.) Following this block of instruction are details of the potions, wands and other magic items. A unique feature of wands is that a mage may utilize his spell points to limit the number of charges expended when using the device.

A character sheet rounds out the offerings within the pages of this book as well as the important HackMaster GM's oath, without which no HackMaster product would be complete.

It is our hope HackMaster Basic will be embraced by fans of the old edition as well as new players. If you love hard hitting old-school role-playing then chances are this game is right up your alley. We hope you'll pick up a copy and give the game a try at your table — how can you possibly refuse at this insanely low price? (192 pages \$19.99 retail!)

It may be a wild boast, but we consider HackMaster Basic to be the best fantasy rpg available. We challenge you to prove us wrong.



HackMaster Basic

Further peeks into
the new edition...

Player character Quirks and Flaws are a popular and uniquely HackMaster feature. **HackMaster basic** continues this tradition with the stipulation that PCs must roll for these characteristics. Don't fret... the quirks and flaws in basic are very tame and intended to facilitate roleplay.

We've taken the opportunity to address several shortcomings of 4th edition's quirks and flaws, most notably those with seemingly no downsides. For example, the frequently cherry-picked *Anosmia* flaw has been reworked.

Anosmia: People with anosmia have no sense of taste or smell. This is mistakenly believed to be an advantage by some adventurers as it permits them to enter areas with extremely strong odors that would repel others.

A serious problem stemming from this flaw is that an individual cannot judge if food is spoiled or liquids are tainted. Rotten meat, sour wine, curdled milk and spoiled fruit are indistinguishable from fresh and wholesome food and drink. Because he has never experienced the revulsion of tasting and immediately spitting out putrid food, neither has he had the visual cues identifying such noxious stuff burned into his brain. Anosmiacs are therefore very prone to food poisoning and dysentery.

In addition to the classics, we've also added several new ones. A particularly colorful quirk follows:

Foul-Mouthed: While most people may utilize the occasional epithet for particular emphasis, the foul-mouthed individual peppers his speech with a stellar compliment of vulgarities for no seeming purpose. Even when in polite company, the vulgarian finds it

extremely difficult to curtail his frickin' swearing.

As David Kenzer mentioned in KoDT #150, HackMaster basic employs a hybrid slot and point system for magic spells. This provides a spellcaster with many more options than they had in 4th edition – in essence you can now tweak your spellcasting to the tactical situation instead of employing a “one size fits all” solution.

For those of you thinking, “That’s great and all, but why do you have to change a system I’m comfortable with?” I’ll let you in on a secret. If you simply go with the defaults, the system mirrors 4th edition. You have the option of running a spellcaster just like you’re used to and then taking advantage of the new features as their benefits become rapidly evident.

A sample spell illustrating some of these principals follows:

Translate

Base SP Cost:	50
Components:	V, S, M
Casting Time:	10 seconds
Range:	Personal
Volume of Effect:	Personal
Duration:	5 minutes
Saving Throw:	None
Additional Spell Point schedule:	Extend Duration: 10 SP/minute Extend Comprehension to Written Text: 25 SP

This spell lets the caster comprehend unintelligible speech as easily as if it had been spoken in his native tongue. The caster can also extend his comprehension to written text in an unfamiliar language (at an additional Spell Point cost). In both cases, however, the caster must first touch the creature or text that he wishes to understand (which may prove to be a cultural or situational difficulty). Magical writing is immune to this spell's effect, nor does the spell translate secret codes or reveal writing hidden by magic.

The material component for this spell is a songbird's tongue.

Magic Items

HackMaster basic has magic items that parallel their 4th edition contemporaries. One novel feature is that wands utilize the point feature of the magic system. By expending spell points, you can economize on the number of charges a particular effect drains from the wand. Wands typically have many related features but the most powerful options require a fully charged wand to employ and are no longer accessible once many charges have been drained out of it. A sample wand follows:

Fire and Flame [Mage]: The potent Wand of Fire and Flame has several effects:

The wand's most rudimentary power, one that does not require charges and functions as long as any charges remain, is to produce a small tongue of flame at its tip. If used in conjunction with the Fire-Building skill, it provides a +50 bonus to Fire-Building skill checks.

The following list of increasingly potent effects requires the expenditure of charges.

- *Fire Finger* (1 charge and 5 SP): effect as Fire Finger spell inflicting d3p+6 points of damage with a range of 25 feet

- *Scorch* (2 charges or 20 SP plus one charge; 21+ charges remaining required): effect as a Scorch spell inflicting d3p+15 points of damage.

- *Flaming Orb* (3 charges or 30 SP plus two charges; 41+ charges remaining required): Creates a 10 foot diameter ball of flame at a range of up to 100 feet that can roll in any direction commanded by the Mage (this concentration precludes other actions) at a rate of 5 feet per second. Further, it can roll up and over any barrier, even along ceilings and ignites all combustibles in its path.

The flaming orb only persists for 10 seconds. However, the Mage invoking it may expend 1 Spell Point per second to maintain its existence.

Those coming in contact with the flaming orb suffer 2d6p damage (save for half) while those within a 5 foot radius of the fiery ball sustain 1d6p points of damage per 10 full seconds of exposure. The damage suffered cannot be reduced by armor or natural hides, etc.

A successful save by an individual in contact with the orb immediately causes it to wink out of existence.

- *Fireball* (4 charges or 60 SP plus two charges; 61+ charges remaining required): A small (3 inch diameter) ball of flame shoots forth from the end of the wand up to a range of 200 feet. At maximum range or anywhere along the path chosen by the Mage, or on contact with any obstacle, the tiny fireball bursts into a 20 foot diameter ball of flames. Whilst the fireball has no concussive effects, anyone within the area of effect suffers 6d6p damage (save for half damage). The damage suffered cannot be reduced by armor or natural hides, etc. Any combustibles engulfed in the flames are also ignited.

- *Wall of Flames* (5 charges or 100 SP plus three charges; 81+ charges remaining required): The wand creates a wall of flames up to 60 feet wide and 20 feet tall (at the discretion of the wielder). Any creature that comes within 10 feet of any side of the wall is roasted for 6d6p damage immediately and another $\frac{1}{10}$ of that rolled sum per second that he remains within this vicinity. Further, any creature actually attempting to pass through the wall suffers an additional 6d12p damage. In both cases, the victim may attempt to save for half damage, but the damage suffered cannot be reduced by armor or natural hides, etc. Any combustibles touched by the flames are also ignited.

Once invoked, the Mage must concentrate exclusively on maintaining the wall and expend 2 Spell Points per second doing so.

