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## Introduction

*Compact Heroes* is a hybrid game that combines the progression and storyline of a traditional role-playing game with the portability and ease of use of a card game. It is intended to be played with 2-6 players, with one player acting as the Game Master (GM), and the rest taking the role of adventurers.

What separates *Compact Heroes* from other card games is that there is no finishing point. There is no traditional "winner". CH acts the same as a tabletop role-playing game in this regard. The very first character you create in CH can be used over and over again, gaining skills, magical items, and experience so that he or she grows in power.

The GM's role is to organize and run the adventure, and will have the maps and adventure descriptions, essentially playing the part of storyteller. The GM will run the non-player characters (NPCs) and monsters. This does not mean that the game is GM versus Players. Quite the contrary. For the most enjoyable experience, the GM should be an impartial participant.

## Tools Needed

In addition to the cards and dice included in this core set, you will also need something to write with as you update your character sheet, and having some scrap paper would also probably help quite a bit. And that's it! Nothing else is required, and everything should fit in your pocket.

## Instructions

**Character Creation:** Each player will have a character that he or she represents, which is made up from several elements. These include name, attributes, skills, experience points (XP), race, money, and items.

First select a race from human, dwarf, elf, halfling, or gnome. You will note on the race cards that each race has a bonus modifier towards an attribute. When you choose your race, fill in the appropriate bubble that corresponds to the bonus(es) on the race card.

Next choose your character's attributes: strength, agility, endurance, intellect, and luck. Each attribute impacts one of the mechanics differently. When you create a character, you will have two free points to distribute towards attributes. To choose an attribute, simply fill in one of the bubbles as each filled in bubble represents one point.

For example, if you are playing an elf (+1 bonus to intellect), and choose to spend your two free points on strength and agility, you would fill in one bubble under the *strength* attribute, one bubble under the *agility* attribute, and one bubble under your *intellect* attribute.

**Strength:** for each bubble filled in, add +1 point of damage whenever you would roll for damage in combat.

**Agility:** for each bubble filled in, add a +1 bonus to your character's *Evade* rating.

**Endurance:** for each bubble filled in, your character gains 2d6 hit points. When you fill in a bubble, roll 2d6 and add the result to your current maximum hit points. You do not re-roll all the dice over again for all bubbles each time you fill one in, only for the new bubbles being filled. All characters start with 10 hit points for free.

It is a good idea to note the character's total maximum hit points in the corner somewhere, because during your adventures, your character will take damage. Lost hit points can be healed, but you can never have more hit points than your maximum.

**Intellect:** For each bubble filled in, your character has a Power Rating (PR) of 1, and when attacking with spells, gains a +1 to hit for each PR.

**Luck:** Sometimes in an adventure your character may have to make a luck check. This may happen to avoid being poisoned, diseased, falling from a cliff, or a number of other scenarios. To make a check, roll 1d6. If the number is below or equal to your character's luck, then the check is a success and he or she may have avoided the effects of whatever bad thing was going to happen to him or her. Creatures have a luck score equal to 2 +1 for every 10 levels, rounded up. I.e., a level 18 monster will have a luck of 4 ( $2 + 1.8 = 3.8$ , rounded up to 4).

After you have allocated your attribute points, next choose skills, weapons, and armor. Each character starts out with 1 XP point to choose a skill (humans get 2). Go through the deck and choose any skill as long as you meet the prerequisite that is listed on that card. After choosing your skill, roll 5d6 and that is the amount of starting gold your character has. You will use this to purchase weapons, armor, or any other items. You can purchase any item that is not magical when starting out (you will notice that these items do not have a cost listed on the card). Keep in mind that even if you purchase an item, like chain mail, you may not be able to wear it unless you have learned the required skill first (in this case, *medium armor*).

Once you've got your skills and have your weapons and armor, tally the totals for "to hit", "+ to damage", "evade", and "Damage absorption" on your character sheet card, along with how much gold you have left over.

To continue the example above, you select the skill *novice combat*, which grants you a +2 to hit and +1 to damage with weapons. You roll a 13 for gold, and purchase a long sword for 7 gold and clothing for 5 gold, leaving you with 1 gold. On your character sheet, you put a "+2" under the "to hit" section to account for the bonus you got from your skill. Under the "damage" section, you put a "+2" due to your strength bonus of +1 and your skill bonus of +1. You are wearing clothing, so you put a "1" under the damage absorption section. "Evade" is 11 because you add the +1 bonus from your agility to the base rating of 10. "HP" is 10-- your starting amount but no more because you don't have any endurance bubbles filled in. And finally, you put "1" in the Gold section to account for the money you have left over.

You're done creating your character once you decide on a name!

**Core Mechanics:** You've heard terms like "hit points", "evade", "to hit", etc, but might not know what they mean. These will be described here, and apply whenever you find yourself in a combat situation. This will happen often.

Hit points are basically your character's life points. Once this number reaches 0 or less, your character will die. So it's important to keep an eye on this value.

Initiative is a metric used to determine who acts first when combat starts. Once every participant has resolved his or her action, that is called a round (approximately 1 minute of game time), and you would roll initiative again for the next round to determine the order of actions. To determine initiative, everyone

rolls one d6. Add or subtract any initiative modifier to this roll. The lowest number goes first, and you work your way up. The GM will only roll 1d6 for all of the creatures under his or her control.

After you have rolled for initiative and declared your action, when it gets to your turn, you resolve your attack (if attacking). To see if you hit your target, roll 1d20 (use 3d6 as a substitute if you have no d20 available) and add your bonuses from the "to hit" section of your character sheet. You tell the GM what your final result is, and he or she will tell you if the attack hits (your roll has to be higher than the target's evade value).

If the attack does hit, roll for damage, which is listed on the weapon card that you are using. Add to this the total bonus to damage that is listed on your character card. The GM will subtract the target's damage absorption rating from this value and then subtract that number from the target's hit points.

Attacking with spells works the same way, except your "+ to hit" may be different than it is with weapons (see various skill descriptions and the description of the Intellect skill above). Whenever attacking with a spell, you will always use the magical "to hit" bonus instead of your weapon "to hit" bonus unless otherwise specified.

When you are being attacked, the GM will follow the same process. When the creature rolls to hit you, the GM will call out a number (die roll + creature's + to hit). If that number is lower than or equal to your character's evade score, then the attack misses. If it is higher, then your character is struck and suffers damage. The GM will roll for damage and call out that number. From that number, subtract the amount of your damage absorption value, then subtract the new number from your current HP total. If the new number is a negative, you do not gain HP back, you simply suffer no damage. If HP goes to 0 or less, your character has perished.

There are healing items and spells that can be used to gain back your HP, but note that your current HP can never go higher than your maximum HP (the total of what you had rolled so far).

There are other things that may affect your character other than just damage. Poison and disease are examples. The effects of the disease may vary depending on the type of disease, but the general rule for poison is that if an attack is successful in striking your character, you must make a luck check or your character will perish.

#### Abbreviations:

DA = damage absorption

DMG = damage

EV = evade

HP = hit points

TH = To Hit

**Rnd = Round** (the amount of time after all participants resolve their actions. Also equal to roughly a minute)

**+x/PR = + X** for every PR the character has, where X is a value.

#### Example of Combat:

You are playing Hagar, a human warrior that has a DA of 2, a "+ To Hit" of +3, a "+ Dmg" of +2, an Evade of 13, and have 22 hit points. You encounter a large Stormmount Orc (DA: 2, TH: +1, Dmg: 1d6+3, EV: 11, HP: 13). You and the GM controlling the orc both roll a d6 for initiative. You roll a 4 and the GM rolls a 3. Neither of you have anything that modifies your initiative, so the orc attacks first since it had the lower number.

The GM rolls the d20 and gets a 14. He adds the orc's TH bonus of +1 for a final result of 15. The GM calls out a 15 to you, and since that number is higher than Hagar's EV of 13, the attack hits. The GM then rolls for damage (1d6+3) and rolls a 4, plus the +3 bonus equals a total of 7 points of damage inflicted to Hagar. However, Hagar has a DA of 2, so instead of taking 7 points, he only takes 5 points of damage. You subtract those 5 points from Hagar's current total of 22, leaving him with 18 hit points left.

Now it is your turn. You roll to hit and roll a 9. You add your +3 bonus TH which results in a final value of 12. You call that out to the GM and since your 12 is higher than the orc's EV of 11, your attack hits as well. You look at the weapon card you are using (a long sword) and see that the damage there is 1d6+2. You roll a 6, and add the +2 bonus. You also see on your character sheet card that you have a bonus of +2 to damage, so you add that as well, totaling 10 points of damage to the orc. The GM subtracts the orc's DA of 2, so the orc actually only takes 8 points of damage.

That is the end of the first round, and the start of the second round you both roll for initiative again to see who goes first in that round.



**A note on spells:** You may have noticed that on each type of magical spellcasting school (necromancy, elemental, etc), there is text that says you can cast one spell per day per PR. It should be noted that if you learn multiple schools of magic, such as both necromancy and elemental, your *total number* of spells cast per day is one per PR. You do not gain the ability to double the amount of spells per day by learning another school of magic.

For example, if you have learned Necromancy and Summoning magic, and have a PR of 4, you can cast a total of 4 spells per day, and not 8.

**Checks:** Occasionally you may be asked to make what is called a “check”. This means that there is a task that is assigned a difficulty and you are attempting to succeed at it. In order to make a successful check, you must roll the d6 and get the difficulty number or higher (after adding bonuses, if any). For example, if you are trying to pick a lock that has a difficulty of 5, you must roll a 5 or higher on the d6 to be a success. If you happen to have a +2 bonus (say from a Treasure Hunter skill for example), then you would only need to roll a 3 or higher (a roll of 3 plus the +2 bonus = 5).

Most of the time there will not be an assigned difficulty rating and the GM will have to determine one. For example, if a player is wanting to sneak (hide and remain undetected while moving) in a darkened forest, you may assign a difficulty of 3. If the enemy would have good detections skills (like a dog for example), you may want to assign it a difficulty of 7 or 8. It really depends on what is reasonable for the situation.

**Special Monster Abilities:** Certain monsters and creatures will have a special ability that is noted on the monster card. To reduce confusion, some of these special abilities will be explained here. If an ability says that it permanently reduces hit points, this means that the character will lose that amount from both his or her current total, as well as his or her maximum level. A monster may also require a character to make a check (for poison for instance) that may have a penalty assigned to it. For example, if the ability states, “make a luck check at a -2 penalty or die from poison in 1d6 rounds”, that means that the character will need to make a luck check as if his or her luck were 2 points less than what it actually is. I.e., if the character’s luck is 6 and is successfully attacked by the creature above, he or she would need to roll a 4 or less on the d6 instead of a 6 or less.

**Gaining Experience:** As you are progressing in the adventure with your character, he or she will gain valuable experience. These points are awarded by the GM at set intervals, and are typically described in the adventure itself as to how many your character receives. When your character gains an experience point, he or she has the option of either adding another bubble to an attribute, or to learn another skill.

Please keep in mind that most non-starting skills will require a prerequisite before you can learn it. I.e., before learning *Medium Armor*, your character must first have learned *Light Armor* and met the minimum attribute requirements. This is described on each of the skill cards. When you do learn a new skill, you may need to adjust your appropriate fields on your character sheet card.

Note that the bonuses from a skill card replace the bonuses from a previous prerequisite skill. They are not cumulative unless specifically stated on the card. I.e. if you learn *Adept Combat*, your

total bonus to hit would be +4 and your total bonus to damage is +2. You would not add the +4/+2 bonuses on the *Adept Combat* card to the +2/+1 bonuses from *Novice Combat*.

**Game Master:** Your job is to run the adventure. You will keep the maps, encounter description cards, monster cards, and treasure cards to yourself. Before running an adventure, familiarize yourself with the encounter descriptions and adventure text. This will tell you the story that the players will be completing—hopefully alive.

It’s your job to keep things organized. Yes, it is more work, but on the bright side, you have what is called “GM fiat”. What this means is that often in gameplay you might come across a situation where there is not a rule that covers what to do. Most often this is when a player declares that they want their character to perform a certain action, such as, “I have Hagar pick up a chair and throw it at the ogre across the room.” In these situations, it’s up to you to come up with a fair rule off the top of your head with how you would handle it.

To continue the example, you might respond with the following, “Ok, Hagar has an overall bonus to hit of +5, but has never used an awkward item like a chair before, so go ahead and roll to hit at a bonus of only +2.” Whatever you decide, try to keep it fair to the players. Arguments are never fun.

It’s also your job to award XP points. Award them as fast as your group feels is a good flow for advancement, but because this is a rules lite system, don’t be stingy.

**Adventure Layout:** As mentioned, the GM will be the one running the adventure, and players need not worry about how the adventure is organized. However, if you are the GM, there are certain guidelines that will help you keep organized.

If you look through the included adventure in this starter deck, you will see that there is an overland map, a couple dungeon maps, a GM’s Background card, a Player’s Hook card, and a few encounter description cards. All of these cards should be seen by the GM only, with the exception of the Player’s Hook card. This should be read to, or given directly to, the players as this tells them why they are adventuring in the first place.

The map cards are pretty self explanatory, and may be given to the players if there is a reasonable expectation that the characters are familiar with the map area, but shouldn’t in most cases.

The GM’s background card describes the basics of the adventure, and any information that he or she may need to run the adventure.

The encounter cards should be labeled to match the room #s on the map cards, and lets the GM know what the players will encounter when they reach that area.

# The Cards

# Card Symbols

Card Name



Symbol

Description



 Creatures

 Items

 Non-player Characters

 Skills

 Spells

 Playable Race

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THE  
FOLLOWING EXPANSIONS!

UNLEASHED HORDES

100+ new monsters

ADVENTURER'S PACK

100+ advanced skills and magical items!

\* Creature cards have a level assigned. As a general rule, each creature level equals one XP point a character has been awarded, so you can easily see which monsters would be a good fit as opponents.

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