ADAPTING ROLEMASTER AND HARP CRITICAL TABLES TO CASTLES & CRUSADES

The subject of critical hits comes up rather frequently in role playing games. Some players love such things, while others hate them. Some games incorporate them into their base rules, while others do not even bother. Castles & Crusades falls into the latter category. In keeping with the rules light approach that has been taken in regards to the game, only the basics regarding dealing damage are provided. Very simply put, if you hit, you roll for damage.

But what about that exceptional strike? What about the natural 20? Should there not be a bonus for rolling so well, or more accurately, getting lucky? A lot of games say "no", citing game balance. To have critical hits would be akin to upsetting the apple cart full of apples. There are a few games out there that have built into their systems a critical hit system. Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay is an example. Its critical hit system is simple, focusing on body parts and the damage done to each part. However, this article does not focus on Warhammer's critical hits, as that system has already been ported over to Castles & Crusades. Instead, this article chooses to deal with another system, one whose origins can be traced back to the early days of role playing games.

The system? Rolemaster.

For those who have heard of the game, it's often derisively referred to as Chartmaster because of the overabundance of tables in the game, especially in regards to combat. Rolemaster first got its start as a set of alternate rules for the game that started it all, Dungeons & Dragons. The systems that Iron Crown introduced with Rolemaster were very realistic, which was a design goal, but also very complex, which tended to slow the game down. Perhaps the most complex portion of the Rolemaster system was combat. The Rolemaster solution to combat in their Arms Law product was to provide a table for each weapon versus 20 different armor types. The game master would roll a d100 and add modifiers to determine the result. The damage was recorded, but on particularly good or bad rolls, and additional roll was called for, a critical hit, or a fumble.

Following the launch of Arms Law came Claw Law, which provided hand to hand combat, using the same basic system. With the release of Spell Law, game masters everywhere had a complete magic system, with three different schools (Channeling, Essence, and Mentalism), some 2000 spells broken down into 50 levels, and rules for critical effects using spells. In Castles & Crusades, when an offensive spell is cast, a saving throw is required, the effects determined by the spell. Usually this would be a save for half damage, or no damage at all. Spell Law, in sharp contrast, required players to make an attack roll with their offensive spells, and if the results were particularly good, a critical attack roll as well.

With the popularity of these two supplements, more was wanted, and the Character Law and Campaign Law supplements were released. Character Law introduced the character generation systems, tying all the material together for the first time as a complete game system rather than as separate supplements for Dungeons & Dragons. Campaign Law provided new game masters with useful advice on creating a world and populating it. Of course, there were no creatures. That required Creatures & Treasures, which is not considered part of the core Rolemaster rules.

While Rolemaster is still available from Iron Crown Enterprises in a new edition, their focus as of late has been on HARP, or High Adventure Role Playing. HARP is derived from the original Rolemaster rules, but succeeds in eliminating a great deal of the complexity that the Rolemaster system has built in. For instance, combat is greatly streamlined, not requiring various tables to determine the effects. Critical hits borrow from ICE's Middle Earth Role Playing, in that there is only one table for each effect, rather than "A" through "E" levels of critical. This type of table has modifiers based upon the type of weapon used.

This article provides rules for using either Rolemaster or HARP critical tables, or even both if desired. Castle Keeper tastes will vary, and both the Rolemaster critical tables and the HARP equivalents have their pros and cons.

	Rolemaster	HARP
Pros	• Very diverse, with some 100 different possible critical effects per critical table.	• Very fast and very easy to use. • Critical tables available as a free download.
Cons	• Not as easy or as fast to use as HARP. • Some critical tables are only available by purchasing rulebooks.	• Critical effects are not as diverse as in Rolemaster.

NECESSARY INGREDIENTS

In order for this article to be of use, it's required to have the critical tables in the first place.

The game system decided upon will determine the ease in which the critical tables can be found. For Rolemaster, while its critical tables have a far more diverse range of effects, some of the critical tables are not available for download. This is not an issue if the Castle Keeper happens to own a copy of Rolemaster, or has access to one, but not every Castle Keeper is going to be so lucky.

Of the critical tables from Rolemaster that are listed later on in this article, all of the weapon-based critical tables are available

for download. However, none of the spell critical tables are available. The reason the weapon-based tables are available is that Arms Law, when it went to press in 2003, went to press with errors in every critical table in the book. In the form of errata, ICE made a corrected version of every critical table in that book available for download. For the Weapon Fumble table, ICE made available a scan of the table as a sneak peek of the current edition of the Rolemaster rulebook. At present, these tables are all that are available to those who do not own Rolemaster, and don't want to purchase PDF files or books just to get them.

If using HARP instead, there will be no problem with downloading the critical charts. While there are three different HARP PDFs on the HARP HQ website that include critical tables, including HARP Lite, the best download for our purposes in regards to HARP is the entire combat chapter from the revised HARP rulebook. Twenty-three pages long, it goes into great detail how to use the combat system. However, for the purposes of this article, how to use the combat system is not important. What is important is the critical tables. Those can be found at the end of the chapter. Tucked into the middle of the chapter a couple of pages before the critical tables is the Condensed Fumble Table, covering weapons and spells.

While the HARP critical tables are indeed fast and easy to use, there aren't nearly as many critical effects possible. In fact, the Condensed Fumble Table only has four options available for weapon and spell fumbles. However HARP's biggest advantage is that all the critical tables are available for Castle Keepers to download.

LINKS

- **Rolemaster Critical Tables:**
  http://www.ironcrown.com/errata.htm (look for the link marked "Arms Law #5810 CORRECTED Critical Tables)
- **Rolemaster Weapon Fumble Table:**
  http://www.ironcrown.com/images/SneakPeekPics/5800_pics/5800_240.gif (a picture of the page, but readable)
- **HARP Combat Chapter:**
  http://www.harphp.com/webextras.htm (look under HARP Revised Downloads for HARP Revised Chapter 10: Combat)

THE TABLES

It's the decision of the individual Castle Keeper as to which tables he or she may want to use. For many Castle Keepers, the weapons critical tables available at the links above are likely to be all that's needed. Others may want the spell criticals in addition. How many, or how few critical tables used is entirely up to the Castle Keeper's tastes.

The following chart gives the recommended critical tables for use with this article.

- **Rolemaster:** Weapon Fumble, Slash, Puncture, Krush*, Grappling, Unbalancing, Heat, Cold, Impact, Electricity, Spell Failure
- **HARP:** Condensed Fumble, Slash, Puncture, Crush, Grappling, Martial Sweeps/Unbalancing, Heat, Cold, Impact, Electricity.

*Krush is spelled with a "K" in Rolemaster to avoid confusion with "C" critical results in Arms Law.

In the lists above, Slash, Puncture, and Krush/Crush all deal with weapon blows. The Weapon Fumble Table is pretty much self explanatory. Slash criticals are for blows with a bladed weapon, such as swords and daggers, that cut opponents. The Puncture criticals are for those weapons that stick into an opponent, such as spears, pole arms, crossbow bolts, and arrows. At the Castle Keeper's discretion, a sword or dagger may be used for puncture criticals if the player specifies that he is attempting to impale his opponent. Krush/Crush criticals are for those weapons whose primary form of damage is by pounding on an opponent. Hammers, maces, morning stars, and flails all fall under this category. Axes also fall under Krush/Crush criticals, as there is no "chop" critical in Rolemaster. This covers the basic weapons that can be found in every fantasy role playing game. For other weapons not covered, it is up to the Castle Keeper to determine if they cause a critical, and what critical table they are placed under.

Grappling and Unbalancing critical tables deal with unarmed combat. The Grappling criticals are for wrestling maneuvers while Unbalancing criticals apply to all other unarmed combat, including attacks by monks. While it was entirely feasible to incorporate the Martial Arts critical tables as well as the other tables, doing so seemed to be unnecessary when there were already a pair of tables dealing with unarmed combat.

The last five tables (Heat, Cold, Impact, Electricity, and Spell Failure) are all spell critical tables. They are all reasonably self explanatory, except for the Impact critical. Impact is for those spells which do bludgeoning damage, such as Clenched Fist or spells like Gust of Wind. The only time the critical tables are consulted though is if the spell is one that can do damage of the listed type. For example, Cloudkill does not do heat, cold, impact, or electricity damage, and thus there is no critical roll. Fireball, on the other hand, does heat damage, and thus a critical could be implemented.

READING A CRITICAL RESULT

Most of the critical results are rather self explanatory, however the Castle Keeper may need to modify the result to fit the circumstances. For example, a puncture critical calling for damage to a leg may need to be modified to an arm if the leg happens to be under cover. In general, the damage done by a critical strike is added to the amount of damage already done by weapon type or spell type.

In some cases, a notation of "next swing/roll" is noted in a critical result. This can refer to missile attacks, movement, and spells as well a normal melee attack. If a target's critical occurs before it can take an action in the round, and the critical lasts for a set number of rounds, then the action the target could have taken in the round instead is considered one of the rounds affected by the critical result. Otherwise, effects from the critical begin on the following round.

The following section provides guidelines for reading individual results on the critical tables, adapting the results in the critical tables to fit in with Castles & Crusades. In all cases, *n* references a number in the result on the critical table.

- **+*n* hits/+*n* hits per round:** The target takes additional damage equal to *n* divided by 3, always rounding up to the next whole number. For example, a critical result that calls for +5 hits would mean the target would take an additional 2 points of damage (5÷3=1.66, rounded up to 2). Depending on the critical result, this damage may be just once, or it may be per round.
- **Foe at -*n*:** The target's next attack roll is made at *n* divided by 5 and rounded to the nearest whole number. For example, a critical result with "Foe fights at -30" would mean that the target's next attack roll would be at a penalty of -6 (-30÷5=-6). In rare cases, the penalty may extend for more than one round. Should this occur, and another critical result of "Foe at -*n*" result, the penalties are added together.
- **+*n* to your next roll:** The character's next attack roll is at a bonus of *n* divided by 5 and rounded to the nearest whole number. For example, a +15 bonus would translate into a +3 bonus (15÷5=3). In rare cases, the bonus may extend for more than one round. Should this occur, and another critical result of "+*n* to your next roll" result, only the best bonus is used. The bonuses are not cumulative.
- **Must parry for *n* rounds:** The target is treated as dodging (see the C&C PHB, p119) for *n* rounds.
- **Stunned for *n* rounds:** The target cannot attack and receives a +2 situational modifier for *n* rounds.
- **Cannot parry for *n* rounds:** The target is treated as evading (see the C&C PHB, p119) for *n* rounds.
- **Down for *n* rounds:** The target is prone (+5 situational modifier) and cannot act at all for *n* rounds.

DETERMINING CRITICALS

In Castles & Crusades, the formula for determining whether a player hits with a weapon is 1d20 +BTH +Str Bonus >= Target's AC. To determine if a critical hit is scored, compare the 1d20 roll used in the attack, without any modifiers, with the following chart. For example, a 5th level Fighter with 18 strength challenges an orc (AC 13). To hit the orc, the Fighter only needs to roll a 5 or better on 1d20. He rolls a 17 on the d20 instead, clearly hitting the orc (17 +5 +3 = 25, 25 >= 13). The 1d20 roll of 17, when checked against the chart, shows

that our 5th level Fighter scored a "B" critical (Rolemaster) or a subtraction of 10% from the critical hit roll (HARP).

Spells that cause damage to their targets, like *fireball* and *lightning bolt*, could also cause critical damage. When the spell is successfully cast, the player rolls 1d20 and compares the 1d20 roll to the chart. Results of 16 or higher on the d20 result in a critical hit.

1D20 ROLL	CRITICAL ROLEMASTER	HARP
16	"A" Critical	-20% to roll
17	"B" Critical	-10% to roll
18	"C" Critical	None
19	"D" Critical	+10% to roll
20	"E" Critical	+20% to roll

Once the severity of the critical is determined, roll 1d100 and read down the appropriate column (if using Rolemaster criticals), or modify the result by the percentages shown (if using HARP), and determine the final critical. Apply all effects immediately.

CRITICAL EFFECTS - SPELLS

Determining the critical for a spell is no different than determining the critical for a weapon. However, a lot of spells don't require a "to-hit" roll, only requiring a saving throw. Criticals for spells depend on the success of the saving throw. If a saving throw negates a spell's effect, and that saving throw is successful, there is no critical. Spells that have a saving throw for half damage or no saving throw at all are subject to critical strikes. In the case of spells where a successful saving throw deals only half damage, there is no effect on the critical itself. All effects apply fully and immediately, so it is still possible that a target could die from a spell that was saved against. Also, in order for there to be a possibility of a critical, the spell must do damage, and the damage it does must fall into one of the critical types, subject to Castle Keeper interpretation.

FUMBLES

While critical results are always desirable, sometimes mistakes do happen, and the outcome is often not what the character expects. This is the fumble. Fumbles, just like criticals, have varying effects depending on the percentile roll. If the unmodified roll on a 1d20 is 1, a fumble has occurred.

In Rolemaster, the Fumble table does not have levels of severity, like the critical tables. Instead, fumbles are broken down by weapon types (1-handed weapons, 2-handed weapons, spears, mounted arms, thrown arms, and bows) and effects determined using a percentile roll. Some of the most painful results at the bottom of the table call for a roll on a specific critical table. Roll on the table as normal, applying the effects to the character, as the character is the target.

HARP's Condensed Fumble Table covers all weapons and all possibilities. When in HARP it says "Condensed", believe it. There are only four possible fumble results in HARP, and no mention is made of rolling additionally on another critical table.

FUMBLES - SPELLS

Rolemaster's Spell Failure table is different from the weapon Fumble table in that there are more results than can be rolled on a d100. This is because Rolemaster utilizes different types of percentile rolls, defined as closed (a standard d100 roll), open low-ended (d100 where a result of 1 provides a bonus roll), and open high-ended (d100 where a result of 100 provides a bonus roll). The Spell Failure table in Rolemaster is an open high-ended roll, with results rising as high as 300 or more. Spell Failure though is going to be rather rare as the spell casting classes are generally well versed in how to use their spells.

Spell Failure only applies to spells that do damage of any kind, so ignore the Non-Attack Spells portion of the Spell Failure Table. To determine if a spell failure occurs, roll 1d20. On a result of 1, spell failure occurs. Roll 3d100 to determine the effect on the caster and apply the effects immediately. For purposes of this article, and to avoid angry mobs of players with dead spell casters, the instant death entry on the Attack Spells portion of the Spell Failure table (entry 301+), is ignored. Note though that death is still a possibility for spell casters, especially if they happen to roll 192-195 on 3d100.

HARP spell failures are determined in the same manner as described above. However, spell failure in HARP is covered under the Condensed Fumble table rather than having its own special table. If a spell failure occurs as noted in the prior paragraph, roll 1d100 and apply the effects immediately to the caster.

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