

KARP: Kids and Adults Role-Playing

a card and dice-based game about fighting things, making and spending money, and special abilities

Ages 8 and up

by Conall Kavanagh, © 2003

KARP is a free-form, mechanics-lite set of rules for running RPGs with kids. It strives to incorporate the interests of both **kids and adults**. For kids, it is designed to be easy to play. For kids and adults, it is designed to allow for meaningful and fun role-playing.

KARP is grounded on **simplicity and adaptability**. Character creation is fast and easy, and is meant to handle virtually any setting -- fantasy, modern, sci-fi, mystery. Character design revolves around three common themes: fighting things (Attack, Damage, Hit Points), making and spending money (Income), and special abilities (which can include magic, special knowledge, or super powers). By combining brawn, bucks, and brainpower, it is hoped that most kids (and adults!) will be able to develop a character that interests them.

KARP's scale is kept simple. There are low numbers of hit points (HP), and successful attacks typically inflict one HP of damage. This removes excessive dice-rolling, and puts game mechanics in the background. KARP involves **cards and d6 dice -- common items in children's games**. The cards describe the attributes of player characters, non-player characters, and monsters. Cards are advantageous because they are convenient, handy, and, perhaps best of all, can double as playing pieces. KARP's cards are also designed so that the game can be largely played right off them, without frequent reference to rule pages. A few boldfaced statements in these rules should be memorized for routine gameplay, as they do not appear on the cards.

KARP is designed to be adaptable to any setting or genre. For illustrative purposes, a fantasy-medieval setting of castles, knights, and monsters is presented in Sections 3 and 4. In KARP, player characters can be landless adventurers or leaders of people. Gameplay can easily shift between the level of individual character and that of the larger political level, such as the kingdom.

1. Basic rules

Task resolution. **Task resolution involves rolling a small number of d6s and adding them up.** Thus, some players should be able to add above 10. Task resolution typically involves combat (discussed in "Attack and Damage") and the use of Special abilities (discussed in "Special"). For other situations, the Game Master (GM) may elect to set a basic "difficulty level", and require the players to roll this value or higher on 1d6 (e.g., roll 3 or higher to eavesdrop on a conversation).

Attributes. Cards for the player characters list all of the game's attributes. Monsters typically have fewer of these attributes.

Attack and Damage. The number before "d6" indicates how many d6 to roll to resolve combat. **A round of combat consists of opponents rolling their Attack d6s. The combatant with the higher sum wins the round, with the loser deducting HP equal to the winner's Damage capability (in parenthesis on the card).** Note that exceptionally large or strong characters or monsters, such as dragons or giants, inflict 2 HP of damage against other units (character, other monster) and 1 HP against a strong building (eg. castle).

HP (Hit Points). How much physical damage a unit (character, building, or monster) can withstand. A completely healthy unit has all of its HP boxes clear; wounds are indicated by crossing out HP boxes. Reaching maximum HP can mean death or unconsciousness, at GM's discretion.

Income. How much money a character earns at each gaming cycle. This "cycle" is some sort of calendar or schedule determined by the GM. In a quasi-medieval setting, the cycle could occur every autumn, when crops are harvested and taxes are collected. A player's money can be spent on Castles, Knights, Villages, and Catapults. The GM may also determine that certain Special abilities (e.g., spells) cost time and money to learn.

Special. This number represents special abilities, skills, or knowledge. Each player should be encouraged to design his/her own special ability and write it into the blank space. This could include magic or "super powers." Each player should be encouraged to think of his/her own special abilities. To determine the effects of a Special, the GM sets a number that reflects the difficulty of the desired task. **The player then rolls the number of d6 that equals the Special ability -- rolling at or above the difficulty level indicates success. If an enemy opposes the Special roll (say with an Attack roll), the player roll must simultaneously be at or above the difficulty level AND exceed the enemy's d6 roll to succeed.** Example Special abilities and difficulty levels:

	Difficulty
Special: ability to heal yourself and others	
Healing 1 HP on one target	4
Healing 2 HP on one target	8
Healing 3 HP on one targets; 1 HP on 1d6 targets	12
Healing 4 HP on one targets; 2 HP on 1d6 targets	16
Special: "enchanted arrow" spell	
Inflict 1 HP on target	4
Inflict 2 HP on target	8
Inflict 3 HP on target	12
Inflict 4 HP on target	16

Special: "fireball" spell	
Inflict 1 HP on 1d6 targets	12
Inflict 2 HP on 1d6 targets	16
Inflict 3 HP on 1d6 targets	20
Inflict 4 HP on 1d6 targets	24
Special: invisibility	
Invisibility for 1 minute	4
Invisibility for 1 hour	8
Invisibility for 1 day	12
Invisibility for 1 week	16
Special: flight	
Medium speed for 1 hour; Fast for 1 minute	4
Medium speed for 1 day; Fast for 1 hour	8
Medium speed for 1 week; Fast for 1 day	12

Move. How fast a character or monster can move (i.e., Slow, Medium, Fast). This is useful over the short time-scale when characters or monsters race or chase each other. Over a longer time-scale, Move indicates how quickly characters or monsters can march from place to place.

2. Characters: player and non-player

Player characters. These are characters controlled by the players.

Name: the character's name is written on the card's top line.

Picture: space is left for the player to draw a picture of a character, or place a sticker or paste a picture that matches the character concept.

Character creation. A good guide is to let each player have 5 points to allocate to the various attributes. This allows for a reasonable balance between Attack, Income, Special, and default Move (Medium) and HP (4). The GM may opt to let players increase Move to Fast (say by spending 2 points), increase HP (say every 2 points earns an extra HP -- extra HP boxes can be added in ink), or increase Damage (say every 2 points earns an extra Damage point). The GM may also let players downgrade default Move to Slow (and thereby gain 2 points), or decrease HP (say every lost HP earns 2 points -- lost HP boxes can be filled in with pencil).

Advancement. Player characters may increase their attribute scores as the game goes on.

Ideas for awarding advancement points include: rewarding good play by players (e.g., cooperation, creativity, teamwork), rewarding good in-game results (e.g., a character does a valiant or heroic deed), making a point available at every gaming "cycle." GMs should note that the numerical values of Attack, Damage, HP, etc. are low numbers, so awarding advancement points too freely can lead to overly-powerful characters.

Non-player characters. These are GM-controlled characters that may have their own agenda and personal development. They can be friends, allies, family members, evil lords, retired player characters, etc. They use the same cards and creation rules as player characters.

3. Other units: fantasy-medieval setting

Castle. This is the homebase for characters. The GM may assign a Castle to each player character, or may have the player characters share one Castle. Besides the player characters themselves, their families, friends, allies, pets, and servants live within a Castle. Because of these many possible inhabitants, one Village must be devoted to providing food for a Castle. A Castle is well-defended; only Catapults and huge creatures can damage its walls. Characters, Knights, and Villagers can gather within a Castle to be safe from attack. During an attack, every Villager card gathered within a Castle is assumed to man the walls and fire 3d6 of missiles. When a Catapult or huge creature attacks a Castle's walls, it is assumed to be within the Castle's firing range. In this case, combat is resolved by the enemy's d6 against the Villager crew's 3d6 roll. If the enemy loses, it takes HP damage; if the Villager crew loses, the Castle's walls take HP damage. During a battle, the GM may determine that other enemy units, such as non-player characters or Knights, come within the Castle's firing range. Villager crews that are not engaged with other enemies can automatically inflict HP damage on these units.

Knight. These are well-trained soldiers that can explore and fight for the player characters. The Knight unit includes the warrior mounted on a horse, armor, weapons, and an accompanying squire. Because of the Knight's accessories, there must be one Village devoted to feeding every three Knights under the player's control.

Village. A Village supplies food for Castles and Knights, and the sale of its goods and services generates income for the player character at every gaming "cycle." Unlike a Castle, a Village can be destroyed by any unit.

Villagers. The capable workers of a Village are represented by one card. Villagers are usually only summoned to fight enemies that attack Village. A player character can also gather Villagers into a Castle to have them fire missiles. If Villagers are killed but their home Village remains, the Village may regenerate Villagers at the next gaming "cycle" (say a roll of 1 on 1d6 regenerates a new Villager card).

Catapult. The Catapult card represents heavy equipment used to hurl stones and batter down buildings (Castles or Villages). While Catapults can only inflict damage on buildings, they can be damaged by any unit. When not at war, a Catapult is housed within a Castle.

Monsters. "Monsters" are typically non-human creatures that often pose a threat to the player characters. Their cards are simpler than those of characters. Example monsters and creatures:

Dragon: a huge, powerful lizard or snake, often with a unique name (e.g., Kraken, Tiamat, Godzilla, Puff the Magic Dragon). Besides being able to wreak much damage, a Dragon has some Special ability (e.g., magic or secret knowledge).

Giant: can be big and dumb, or huge and gentle. A Giant often has a name and a Special ability (e.g., great strength).

Smaller monsters (but still pretty big): Bear, Boar.

Group of small creatures: fairies, goblins, rats.

4. Gameplay, with reference to a fantasy-medieval setting

Individual-based adventures. KARP is designed for the "troop of adventurers" style of play, where the band of player characters quests for fabulous items, slays monsters, and fights duels. The characters need not ever concern themselves with owning a Castle or managing Villages. In such a game, the GM may set the characters' Incomes to 0d6 at first.

Kingdom-based adventures. KARP easily handles running a kingdom. In this kind of game, the action includes building up a kingdom's defenses and economy, as well as possibly conquering others through a combination of warfare and diplomacy. Monsters and raiders may ravage a kingdom, which would prompt player characters to call out their armies.

Pacing and schedules. The GM is encouraged to develop an in-game schedule to mark the passage of gaming time and "cycles." In a fantasy-medieval setting, the gaming year could proceed thusly: spring (constructing and upgrading Castles and Villages; construction is completed in summer), summer (quests, raids, wars), autumn (earn Income from d6 rolls and Villages; taxes), winter (character advancement).

Buying things. Players can keep track of money and items by writing on the front or back of the cards. Alternatively, players may have more fun if they can actually feel and handle the money (cf. Monopoly, Life). Thus, the GM may opt to use gaming money or plastic chips for different money values. GMs may also wish to create "Item" cards for special items (a few sample Item cards are included). Sample prices for an example fantasy-medieval setting (in pounds, £):

Catapult	2	Includes crew.
Horse	5	Enables character to move Fast.
Knight	10	Includes horse, armor, weapons, squire
Village	20	Construction cost. Includes villagers.
Castle	80	Construction cost. Includes servants.

Exceptional items, such as a magical horse, armor that confers an extra HP, or a sword that gives an extra d6 to Attack may be the objects of quests, rather than purchase.

Killing things and taking their stuff. A player character's reason for getting out of bed should be more compelling than killing something and rifling the corpse. Player characters' Income and Villages are in-game mechanisms to generate spending money. To reduce rampant or pointless violence, the GM may assign on-body wealth only to certain non-player characters, or have powerful monsters guard magical items.