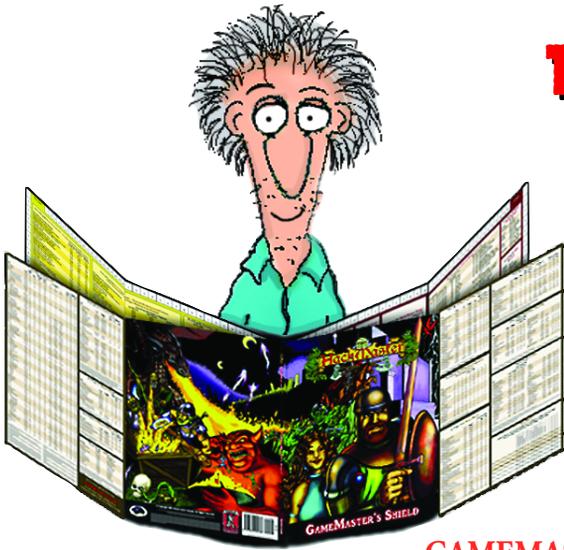# THE HACKMASTER GM SHIELD FIELD MANUAL

by Jolly R. Blackburn

Screen schematics by Jiffy Burke.

Figure 2: Player Side — Combat Mode!

GAMEMASTER'S SIDE

General In-Game

The only thing we neglected to include with our new **HackMaster GameMaster Screen** was an **Owner's Manual**. This brief article will introduce you to your new screen and help you better understand how it is organized. It will also give you a few tips on how to better use and maintain your screen so it can serve you well in the years to come.

For those with internet access, be sure to check out the interactive guided tour on our website (www.kenzerco.com) which actually goes into greater detail on the various sections of the **HMGMS** and it's functions.

OVERVIEW

With 32 panels of color-coded **HackMaster** information, the **HMGMS** is easier to use than ever. Each panel is laminated to facilitate the use of dry-erase and wet-erase markers.

The screen includes flip-up *Critical Hit* charts as well as flip-over combat mode panels.

Each panel of the shield is lined with the **HackTrack**™ tracking system. Use the multiple numbered rows to track initiative, time, spell duration, PC kills or any other quantity. The **HackTrack** system was designed for use with colored paper clips but you may also use dry erase markers to keep track of time and events.

Each section is color coded to correspond with its function (see figure 1). The GM screen is organized as follows;

PLAYER SIDE

1. Weapons/Armor Tables
2. Misc. Equipment Lists
3. Pizza Matrix

GAMEMASTER'S SIDE

1. General In-Game (Grey)
2. Combat (Maroon)
3. City/Town/NPC (Dark Blue)
4. Post Game/E.P.s/Align (Gold)
5. Honor/Wilderness (Green)
6. Dungeon (Purple)
7. Critical Hits (Maroon)

You'll find that once you've used the screen for a few sessions, everything related to a certain GM task will be right at your fingertips.

The Player's Side is pretty much self-explanatory so we won't be discussing it here. We're more concerned with what's on the business-side which faces the GameMaster.

The *General In-Game* section includes those tables most often consulted during a game session. These include such things as *Rates of Climbing, Skill Difficulty Modifiers, Stowage Capacity*, etc. (By the way, every table listed on the **HMGMS** includes the name and page number of the core rule book where the appropriate table/rules can be found).
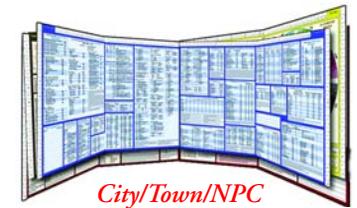

Combat

When the game shifts to combat mode so do you. By flipping the combat panels over you reveal all the combat charts and tables you'll need to moderate melee. Everything from *boulder damage* to *item saving throws* to *attack matrixes* and more. As a bonus, when you flip into combat mode your players are treated to a full color panorama of hack-inspiring art. (See figure 2).

In addition to the necessary tables and charts you'll find handy rule summaries for such things

Figure 1: Each Section of the Screen can be identified by the tab in the upper right/left hand corner of the page. The Sections are also color coded which each color denoting the section's function.

as *Fatigue Factor, Trauma Damage, the Combat Sequence,* etc.

In fact, you'll find the **HMGMS** is so well organized that it can actually help teach you the game as it constantly reinforces the rules and reminds you of the finer points of gamemastering.

City/Town/NPC

This section includes everything you need to run city/town adventures as well as NPCs. *Loyalty tables, Random NPC generation charts* (including *random name generator*), *racial preferences, tavern names, lodging* and *food rates, intoxication levels*... Over 28 tables in all right at your finger tips.


Monster Index & Post Game

This section is split into two parts. The left two panels include an index of all 1600+ monsters from the **Hacklopedia of Beasts** and their *E.P. Values.* The right two panels include all the experience point tables (both *Group* and *Individual*) as well as the full color alignment

Post Game: Honor & Wilderness

graph for tracking individual/party alignment.

Again this section is split into two parts. The left two panels include all the tables needed to award and track the effects of *Honor*. The right two panels include all the tables for *Wilderness Adventures* (green) such as *Overland Movement, Outdoor pursuit, Random Wilderness Terrain*, etc.
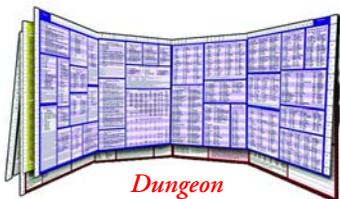
Dungeon

Perfect for on-the-fly adventures.

This section is packed with nearly 40 tables dealing with dungeon adventuring. *Odors, Unexplained Sounds, Mood Enhancers, Random Dungeon Generation* — everything you'll need to run your players through a dungeon crawl. Whether you're running a prepared adventure you've spent hours on or simply running by the seat of your pants, you'll find this section indispensible.

Critical Hit Tables

It wouldn't be **HackMaster** without critical hit tables. Cramming them all into the **HMGMS** was an engineering feat in itself. These flip up charts have the added advantage of sending fear through the hearts of your players as you search for the dreaded results.

Best of all the *Critical Hit* tables are color coded based on weapon type.

Well, that's the end of our whirlwind tour of the GM screen. Again, if you want a more in depth walk-thru be sure to go to our website and check out the Interactive Tour.

USING YOUR HMGMS

Just like veteran combat soldiers, every GM has his own tricks and tools of the trade. Those little modifications and field-tweaks he makes to his equipment in order to better his game and sharpen his edge.

Before I close I thought I'd share a few of my own secrets as well as pass along some things I've learned that you may find useful.

Dry Erase Markers

Take it from me — not all dry erase markers are made the same. I've tested a wide variety of markers and brands with various results. Here's my take on the subject.

My humble opinion is that the Sandford '**Expo**' line of drymarkers (available at any office supply store) are the best. Other brands I've tried tend to stain if not removed immediately. Another excellent brand is **Lumocolor,** though

Figure 3: Tools of the Trade

these require a moist cloth or towelette to erase.

Regardless of which brand you use, be sure to clean your screen after EVERY session. Leaving any dry erase markings on your screen for an extended period of time is asking for trouble. Me? I avoid dry erase markers all together for reasons you will soon see. Read on.

Plastic Clips

Office Max sells a box (300 count) of '**Plastic Clips**" for a few bucks which I highly recommend. They come mixed in five to six colors and two different sizes. (small and medium).

Plastic Clips make excellent markers to keep track of time on your screen's HackTracks. The way they are designed they serve perfectly as pointers clearly showing the current number. (See figure 4).

I use different colors for different units of time. (Red for combat rounds, Green for Turns, Blue for Hours, etc.) You can also use them to indicate the end of timed events (such as when a torch is to burn out or a spell's effects wear off). Be forewarned — Plastic Clips have a draw back. If you 'slide' them along your HackTracks they tend to indent the edges of the screen. It's best to remove a clip and then replace it in its new position rather than sliding.
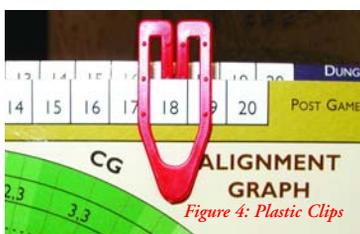

Figure 4: Plastic Clips

The Miracle of Velcro

When I first got my **HMGMS** I had a devil of a time keeping things in place during the game. Like most GMs around me, I was using paper clips to hold the pages back. This became a royal pain in the butt whenever I needed to switch from one mode to another.

The solution? Velcro! Most drug stores sell little packages of self-adhesive velcro tabs. By putting a velcro tab at the corner of each panel and on the bottom edge of the flip over Combat Panels, everything is held in place and only moves when YOU want it to.

Try it — you'll thank me later. Just be sure to stagger your tabs and don't stack them. Otherwise your screen will be too thick to fold back into its stow position.

An Ounce of Prevention...

Although the **HMGMS** is ruggedly construction and designed to hold up to the rigors of repeated play, it doesn't hurt to ward off trouble.

The staples holding the center panels to the spine of the screen can take a lot of wear and abuse over time and loosen.

Maybe I'm just a worry wort but I applied a bead of silicone based glue (flexible) along the inner spin to give the whole thing some added support. A friend of mine took a fat rubber band and simply placed it around the spine and outer screen to give it extra support.

Again, this probably isn't necessary, but it couldn't hurt.

PC DEATH TAGS

Not that a GameMaster is supposed to gloat over a player character death, but around here it's traditional to post PC Kills at the office. Kinda like a WWII Ace putting little flags on the fuselage of his plane to denote how many Zeroes he's shot down. Or the old west gun fighter who carves a notch in his gun for every opponent felled by his steady hand.

Me? I put a little Skull and Crossbones sticker on the Combat Panel (the one exposed to players when it's flipped over). I print the Jolly

Rogers out on label paper on a printer and snip and apply them to the screen as needed. I even have a little system.

A black Jolly Roger means the PC was killed by a monster. A red Jolly Roger means he was killed by a trap. If he was killed by another player the Jolly Roger goes on upside down.

If one or more players are killed in a single session I apply the Jolly Rogers in strips. (i.e. three Jolly Rogers in an uncut strip indicates 3 character deaths in a single session).

Picture a group of players sitting down to an unknown GM's table at a convention only to have him flip over his Combat Panels to reveal a cascading wall of PC Death Tags. (evil grin).

To be honest, the practice is more than a cruel player taunt. It's a reminder of those who have fallen before them. That nothing is certain and that 'this' GM let's the dice fall where they may.

If you'd like to adopt this system check out our website. I'll post a pdf of my template so you can print out your own PC Death Tags (Just don't tell your players where you got the idea).

Well that's it. A brief GM Screen familiarization exercise between one GM and another. Take care of your **HMGMS** and it should serve you well.

Til next time — may all your hits be crits! ❏

Enough to strike fear into the heart of the most stalwart player. Egaads! Look at those PC Deaths-in-a-Single Session counters!!