

CLOAK OF STEEL

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POSTMORTEM STUDIOS. James Desborough

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Dedication

To Japan, without which we would not have such wonderful things as hentai, anime, tentacles and giant robots
To Raven, our very own consumptive goth-waif, without whose efforts this game would never have seen the
To RPGnow.com for kicking arse and giving many, many micro-publishers a chance to exist.
Finally, to me, because I need a pick up and an ego-boost, go me, woo.

Credits

Cloak of Steel © 2004, Postmortem Studios (James Desborough).
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Layout by James 'Grim' Desborough.
Art by Icy Masamune, Raven Morrison, Kieron & James Desborough.
Contributions, thoughts and kibitzing by the Postmortem Studios community e-mail list.
This book was produced using Word, Adobe InDesign & Adobe Photoshop.



It stood, silhouetted against the bright blue sky with tufts of cloud scurrying its awesome shape, his Cloak.

His.

As a child in the village he had watched the great knights of the barony in their gleaming armour, riding past on their way to war. He had been awed by them and their pageantry but it was the Cloaks, great shining giants of steel and silver that had caught his imagination and fired his passion as they glittered in the sun, the noise of their passage near deafening, buildings shaking at their passing.

Great steel golems as tall as the highest of the village inn's gables, able to keep pace with a warhorse, lift a loaded cart in one hand and to take on giants single handed. Wizardry was rarely seen in the village, let alone on such scale. The Knightly Order of the Star had twenty of the massive, shining machines and he wanted to ride within one the moment he saw it.

From that moment of childhood fancy he dedicated his life to becoming a warrior, his whole being focussed on one thing and one thing alone, riding a Cloak. He trained and he fought, joined the village militia while still little more than a child, learned to read from the village wise woman and watched the nobility who came to watch the jousts, modelling his speech and behaviour on theirs.

It paid off for him and he was noticed, he became a squire to Sir Rantilous and his training began in earnest. Rantilous taught him swordplay, shields, riding and then finally came that glorious day when he first got to ride within a Cloak at the castle.

It came intuitively to him as though he were born to it, the straps and pulleys, the levers the arcane controls, peering out through the armoured chest slit to view the battle, moving as one with his machine, getting used to the momentum and weight, staring in wonder at the deep footprints its heavy steps left in the ground. He revelled in the strength and sense of power, muscles of steel and magic flexing as he flexed his own, truly a wonder, truly power.

He was the best student they had ever had.

In time he was a fully fledged knight. The baron himself pinned the starburst crest to his doublet and praised him for his youth, his energy and his skill as he welcomed him into the order. The baron's daughter, a delightful girl of chestnut hair and ready smile, favoured him with a congratulatory kiss that haunted him for months after the ceremony. Even now when he closed his eyes he could smell the scent of her.

It was done, a Cloak was his and as a knight errant he was sent deep into the land to strange places, to forests and deserts on the business of the baron, all the while longing to return to his home on the coast, to feel the sea breeze upon his face, to eat fish again, to see familiar faces and perhaps to once again see the baron's daughter.

Eventually his duties completed. The baron's business done he returned to his homeland and here it was, what little was left of it.

Burned, desolate, lifeless. Every body decapitated the castle in ruins the fields smouldering. He had missed the battle by days at the most and the ruin of it was all around him, shattered cloaks, the bodies of the dead picked over by looters and animals.

There was nothing left, nothing at all

Save hope.

Of the baron and his daughter there was no sign, of the old wise woman not a hint. The barony was not entirely dead. He lived and it lived on in him, a Knight of the Star; a knight with one of the most powerful weapons in the land.

It stood, silhouetted against the bright blue sky with tufts of cloud scurrying its awesome shape, his Cloak, his.

Now to use it...



Introduction

Postmortem Studios

Postmortem Studios is the name of a small role-playing game studio belonging to James 'Grim' Desborough. The business has two sides. On the one side is a small, non-profit venture producing semi-professional fan-based material & on the other side more professional material produced by Grim himself. Postmortem Studios was established in January 2004 for both freelance work for other companies & for the production of professional works both in PDF, which we support as a concept, & in print. Postmortem Studios' website can be found at...

www.postmort.demon.co.uk

You can contact Grim with any queries at...

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The Live System

The Live System is designed to be a more free-flowing, fast playing & looser interpretation of the Open Gaming system. It contains systems & rules that present a more flowing, less structured & modern updating of the system, stripping out unnecessary complication & updating with standard innovations, such as the removal of levels.

The Live System is faster & deadlier but is more suited to both cinematic style games & to 'harder' settings such as hard science fiction or gritty modern-day adventures.

Cloak of Steel is our first release using *The Live System*, slimming down some of the rules even more to power the mech-involved fun and adventure. The next will be the modular *All These Worlds...* science fiction game.

The Live System may also be used to play standard 3rd & 3.5 edition games with a little conversion work.

The full and more complex version of *The Live System* can be found at www.postmort.demon.co.uk

Piracy Notice

Hello there.

Odds are, unfortunately for me, that the majority of people reading this will have downloaded this file as a PDF file through P2P or from a website without paying for it.

Here is how it breaks down.

For the last couple of years I have been fruitlessly searching for full time employment with the skills I have been trained in. This year I have finally given up, scraped together a little cash and am now seeking to turn the thing I love, writing, into a full time career.

This is not an easy thing to do and PDF publishing does not make a great deal of money at the best of times. On this product I can expect to make, at the most, about \$800 USD in the entire lifetime of the product. After the exchange rate to British pounds that does not leave much.

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work by going to www.postmort.demon.co.uk and donating at least a single dollar to Postmortem Studios to help keep us running.

Thank you.

The Basics

Noted in the following are the very basic things you will need to know in order to play a game of *Cloak of Steel*. There are also some notes on some of the fundamental and important differences between the rules of *Cloak of Steel* and the more standard 3.0 and 3.5 based games. These changes are not too difficult to understand but do form the basis for the changes in the entire game.

Dice Notation

These rules use the following die notations for shorthand:

d4 = four sided die

d6 = six sided die

d8 = eight sided die

d10 = ten sided die

d12 = twelve sided die

d20 = twenty sided die

d% = percentile dice (Roll two d10, reading one as the tens & one as the units).

Die rolls are expressed in the format: [#] die type [+/- modifiers]

Example: 3d6+2 means: 'Roll 3 six sided dice. Add the result of the three dice together. Add 2.'

Rounding Fractions

If you wind up with a fraction for some reason, round the total down, unless the fraction is one-half or greater in which case you round up. Certain rolls, such as damage & Hit Points have a minimum result of 1.

Example: 1.4 rounds down to 1 while 1.5 rounds up to 2.



Multiplying

Sometimes a special rule makes you multiply a number or a die roll. As long as you are applying a single multiplier, multiply the number normally. When two or more multipliers apply, however, combine them into a single multiple, with each extra multiple adding 1 less than its value to the first multiple. Thus, a double (x2) & a double (x2) applied to the same number results in a triple (x3, because $2 + 1 = 3$).

Basic Task Resolution System

These rules assume a standardized system for determining the success or failure of any given task.

That system is: $d20 + \text{Modifiers vs. Target Number (TN)}$.

The Modifiers & Target Number are determined by the type of task.

If the result of the d20 roll + the Modifiers equals or exceeds the Target Number, the test is successful. Any other result is a failure.

A 'natural 20' (20 coming up on the dice when rolled) on the die roll is not an automatic success. A 'natural 1' (1 coming up on the dice when rolled) on the die roll is not an automatic failure, unless the rules state otherwise.

In *Cloak of Steel* a 'natural 20' is considered a 'critical threat' a 'natural 1' is considered a 'botch threat'. This applies to Ability checks, combat checks & checks for any skill that can be used 'untrained'. In other words any check where pure luck can play a part.

A critical threat is rolled again, if the second roll would also be considered a success then the task has succeeded as a 'complete success'.

A botch threat is rolled again, if the second roll would also be considered a failure then the task has failed as a 'complete failure'.

Example: Reynard makes a roll for his character to repair a broken knee on a Cloak, the target number of the check is 15, he rolls a 20 & then a 16. This makes it a critical success, good news for the damaged behemoth.

Ability Scores

Your ability score is a measure of the capabilities of your character. The various statistics measure how strong, tough, dextrous, smart, cunning and charming your character is and also determine certain factors about other abilities of your character.

Ability Modifiers

Abilities, after a change made because of race or other factors, have a modifier. The Table: Ability Modifiers shows the modifier for each score. The modifier is the number you apply to the die roll when your character tries to do something related to that ability. You also use the modifier

with some numbers that are not die rolls. A positive modifier is called a bonus & a negative modifier is called a penalty.

The Abilities

Strength (Str)

Strength measures your character's muscle & physical power. Strength limits the amount of equipment your character can carry. Many half-men types tend to be stronger than normal humans due to their heritage from the beasts.

You apply your character's Strength modifier to:

- Melee attack rolls.
- Damage rolls when using a melee weapon or a thrown weapon (including a sling). (Exceptions: Off-hand attacks receive only one-half the character's Strength bonus, while two-handed attacks receive one & a half times the Strength bonus. A Strength penalty, but not a bonus, applies to attacks made with a bow but not a crossbow.
- Skills that have Strength as their key ability.
- Strength checks (for breaking down doors & the like).

Dexterity (Dex)

Dexterity measures hand-eye coordination, agility, reflexes & balance.

You apply your character's Dexterity modifier to:

- Ranged attack rolls, including those for attacks made with bows, guns & thrown weapons.
- Defence Class (DC).
- Reflex saving throws, for avoiding fireballs & other attacks that you can escape by moving quickly.
- Skills that have Dexterity as their key ability.

Constitution (Con)

Constitution represents your character's health & stamina.

You apply your character's Constitution modifier to:

- Your Hit Points (though a character may never have less than 1 Hit Point).
- Fortitude saving throws, for resisting poison & similar threats.
- Skills that have Constitution as their key ability.

If a character's Constitution score changes enough to alter

Table: Ability Modifiers

Score	Modifier
1	-5
2-3	-4
4-5	-3
6-7	-2
8-9	-1
10-11	0
12-13	+1
14-15	+2
16-17	+3
18-19	+4
20-21	+5
22-23	+6
24-25	+7
26-27	+8
28-29	+9
30-31	+10
32-33	+11
34-35	+12
36-37	+13
38-39	+14
40-41	+15
42-43	+16
44-45	+17
46-47	+18
48-49	+19
Etc	Etc



his or her Constitution modifier, the character's Hit Points also increase or decrease accordingly.

Intelligence (Int)

Intelligence determines how well your character learns & reasons.

You apply your character's Intelligence modifier to:

- The number of languages your character knows at the start of the game.
- The number of skill points you have at start of play.
- Skills that have Intelligence as their key ability.

An animal has an Intelligence score of 1 or 2. A creature of human-like intelligence has a score of at least 3 though this represents a drooling idiot. The average human IQ of 100 is represented by an intelligence score of 10 to 11.

Wisdom (Wis)

Wisdom describes a character's willpower, common sense, perception & intuition. Wisdom represents being in tune with & aware of one's surroundings.

You apply your character's Wisdom modifier to:

- Will saving throws.
- Skills that have Wisdom as their key ability.

Charisma (Cha)

Charisma measures a character's force of personality, persuasiveness, personal magnetism, ability to lead & physical attractiveness.

You apply your character's Charisma modifier to:

- Skills that have Charisma as their key ability.
- Checks that represent attempts to influence the emotions or attitudes of others, to gain favour, to win someone over, to seduce & similar effects.

When an ability score changes, all attributes associated with that score change accordingly except skills.

New Concepts

Cloak of Steel contains several new concepts and important distinctions that mark it out from the usual Open Gaming fare. The most important ones are listed below though we recommend a complete read-through of this book with no assumptions being made before commencing play.

Success Factor

Succeeding at a skill in *Cloak of Steel* is not so simple a matter as merely overcoming the target number (TN is what *Cloak of Steel* uses instead of Difficulty Class or DC' to

avoid confusion with Defence Class). ' You must overcome the TN by a larger number to get a decent success. Succeeding by 15 or more, more than the TN is a complete success, the same as a critical while failing by 15 or more is the same as a botch. Getting within 5 either way of the TN is a marginal success. This allows evenly matched contestants to draw out their contest and allows a measure of skill to be more important than pure luck in a lot of circumstances.

Hero Points

Hero Points are what mark a character, a hero, out from the crowd. They are the touch of the divine, of unnatural luck, that indefinable 'hero quality' that allows this person to go on when others would fail and to succeed against the odds. Hero Points are spent to alter die rolls, reduce damage and for other sundry effects that can alter your fate.

Big villains can also have Hero Points.

Hit Locations

Combat in *Cloak of Steel* is generally much faster and quicker than in normal OGL systems and this is partly to do with the reduced number of Hit Points and the introduction of hit locations. When you are struck by a weapon in *Cloak of Steel* you do not simply lose a few Hit Points from a central pool, you take damage to the specific location in which you were struck. This means you may find yourself with a disabled arm or even decapitated if you are unlucky. Hero Points help make it less likely that heroes will be struck dead with a single hit but even so combat should not be entered into lightly.

Armour

Instead of making you harder to hit armour in *Cloak of Steel* reduces the amount of damage you take, its value removed from the total of the damage you take. Weapons have an armour piercing value that reduces the protection of the armour when struck.

Defence Class

Defence Class replaces Armour Class from conventional OGL games and represents solely your ability to avoid and to dodge damage in close combat. It is perfectly possible that wearing heavy armour will reduce your Defence Class and will, thusly, mean that you will be hit a lot more often.

Classless & Without Levels

Cloak of Steel discards the familiar conventions of classes and levels. Instead of having a character class you get to choose your own suite of skills and no skill is denied to you. If you want to create a sword-wielding magick user all the more power to you, just remember a specialist in one or the other will still outclass you.

Levels are removed and replaced with an experience point system wherein you spend experience points to increase the levels of skills your character has or to increase



statistics or other abilities. When and how far you raise these things is entirely up to you and is not broken up into arbitrary raise points like levels.

Feat & Mana Based Magick

Rather than having learned spell lists or a certain number of castings per level, so many times per day *Cloak of Steel* uses the Feats system to provide characters with magickal Feats. These Feats represent a certain amount of accomplishment with magick and each 'spell' actually allows a variety of different effects. Someone with a Fire Feat might, for example, be able to light candles, create small blasts of magickal fire or twist a campfire into interesting shapes.

When a spell is cast it uses up magickal energy or 'Mana' from the caster. These magic points are the controlling, determining factor on how many times spells can be cast.



There, to aum, the sun rises, glinting on the earth shield, the mountains that surround the world. The first rays of light strike the craggy peaks of the mountains and shine through, streaks of light glittering off the Steivante Ocean as the sun continues to climb, scattering light and warming the water.

In the far aum of Mecanisola the light cut through the crisp, cold morning, the icy water surging around the island from the Fralte Sea keeping it cooler, the sunlight bringing mist to the mountains of the aum and awakening the hunters and farmers who fed the great cities of the cad. In the cad of the island, in Markato, in Atterissung and especially in Giesicona the sun would be hard pressed to force its light through the acrid smoke and steam though the clockworks and mechanical precision of the cities would tell them it was day.

In Terrado the morning sun was welcomed by the priests of Desolit, their towering guards shining in their golden armour as they called upon the blessings of the day star to make their land rich, prosperous and fecund.

In Hieloneve it glared from snow and ice, blinding rays deflecting off mountains like teeth and cutting through the boughs of the great coniferous forests bringing its feeble warmth to this frozen land. In the lowlands the clan mounted their cloaks and clashed their weapons, another offensive against the ice giants called, the day the best time to assault them.

In Staholm the astronomers of Erlemmasitz aligned their telescopes and smoked sheets of glass, peering through magickal instruments at the light of the sun, measuring the Mana of that burning orb, sketching equations on slates in chalk, seeking ways to harness this great power in the service of their nation.

In Verderre the bright morning light revealed the tawdry and desperate state of the castles and forts of the minor nobles and the resplendent indulgence of L'Emperor as well as the desperate poverty of the people. On the field of battle two knights of The Order of the Moon met to settle their dispute, metal titans shattering the piece of the morning as well as each other.

Gendivaisa suffered as it suffered every day, the high king dead the minor nobles squabbled over succession, the country rent by civil war, eaten into by the Muertivans and the Verderrans, tearing itself to pieces faster and faster. The smoke from the night's burnings hung, scented the mist and tainted it with the scent of death.

Guilletagna, aum-most of the Trecamasan cities, seat of a former empire, its airways alive with the passage of airships even at this early hour, the slaves in the many households rising before their masters to do their chores, a cat person slave girl, eyes red from terrified lack of sleep, holding a sheet to herself as she tries to slip away from the bed of her owner before he wakes, before...

And in Royomuertivo, city of the dead, place of skulls, land of bones the light reveals that which most would wish were hidden, the lurching bodies of the dead, undead servants of the decadent heretics who live without a god and without death, defiling corpses to defend themselves and living in the lap of luxury. A preserved corpse, perfumed with herbs pushed into its cavities gently wakes its mistress with a leathery hand. A new day brings new suitors, new petitions.

It rises as the day progresses, climbing towards its apex, shining down on the boiling sea before it descends, slowly into the cad, boiling away into the Candenqueda Ocean, shrouding the land in darkness again, concealing its nightmares, its dreams, its hope...

...its destiny.

