

G U R P S[®]

MIDDLE AGES I

SECOND EDITION



BY GRAEME DAVIS

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

CASTLES AND CRUSADES

Welcome to the age of chivalry, fealty, and piety. *GURPS Middle Ages 1* takes you to the rich, dark world of medieval England, where heroic knights fight for King and God, nobles trade favors and treacheries, and peasants work the land.

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GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised and Compendium I: Character Creation are required to use this supplement in a *GURPS* campaign. *GURPS Middle Ages 1* can also be used as a sourcebook for any roleplaying system.

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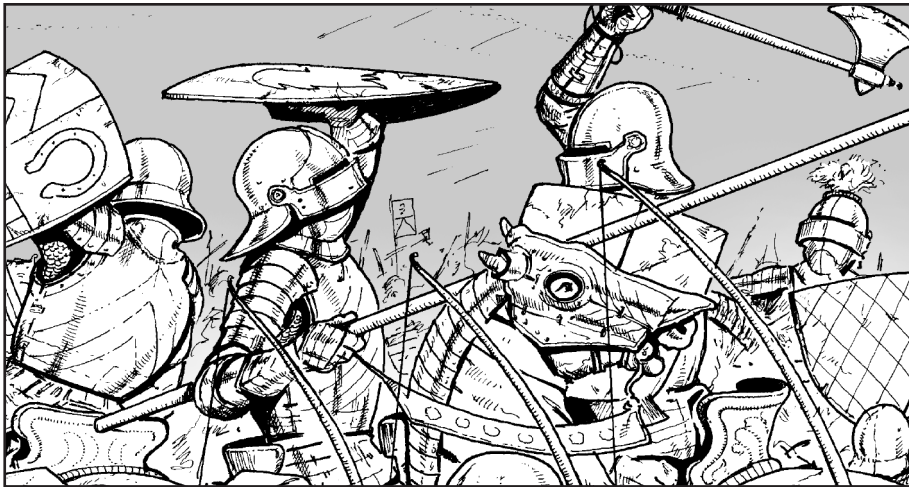
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ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources include:

Pyramid (www.sjgames.com/pyramid/). Our online magazine includes new *GURPS* rules and articles. It also covers *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and many more top games – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *In Nomine*, *Illuminati*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre Miniatures*, and more. *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online!

New supplements and adventures. *GURPS* continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. A current catalog is available for an SASE. Or check out our website (below).

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE. Or download them from the Web – see below.

Gamer input. We value your comments, for new products as well as updated printings of existing titles!

Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for an online catalog, errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. *GURPS* has its own Usenet group, too: rec.games.frp.gurps.

GURPSnet. This e-mail list hosts much of the online discussion of *GURPS*. To join, e-mail majordomo@io.com with “subscribe GURPSnet-L” in the body, or point your web browser to gurpsnet.sjgames.com.

The *GURPS Middle Ages 1* web page is at www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/MiddleAges1/.

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*. Page references that begin with CI indicate *GURPS Compendium I*. Other references are BE for *GURPS Bestiary*, CII for *GURPS Compendium II*, HT for *GURPS High-Tech*, MA for *GURPS Martial Arts*, MO for *GURPS Monsters*, PM for *GURPS Places of Mystery*, VE for *GURPS Vehicles*, WT for *GURPS Warehouse 23*, and WWi for *GURPS Who's Who 1*. A full list of abbreviations can be found on p. CI181, or see the updated web list at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

INTRO⊕DUCTION⊕

GURPS Middle Ages 1 is a guide to England of the Middle Ages, that vast span from the end of the Dark Ages to the dawn of the Renaissance. This includes three distinct periods, each with its own style and problems, and with its own opportunities for roleplaying.

The Saxon Kingdoms: Germanic invaders who had come as war bands, looting the crumbling Roman Empire, settled in England and established petty kingdoms. They adopted Christianity, warred among themselves and with the Celts, and were finally battered into a sort of national unity by the hammer of the Vikings.

Norman England: In 1066 England was invaded by the Normans, the descendants of Vikings who had settled in France. The ruthlessly enforced Norman rule provides the backdrop for the legends of Robin Hood and the dawn of chivalry. This was also the time of the Crusades.

The High Middle Ages: This was the age of great castles, wars in France, plate-armored knights, jousts, and longbows. It ended in 1485, when Henry Tudor led an army of European mercenaries and disaffected Englishmen against Richard III at the battle of Bosworth, establishing England's great Renaissance dynasty.

GURPS Middle Ages 1 provides source material for historical medieval life, and for a few Middle Ages that exist only in fiction. In the romantic “High Chivalry,” questing knights ride alone against giants, enchanters, and Saracens, with never a thought to food, horseshoes, or Black Plague. The heroes of “Cinematic Chivalry” buckle their plate firmly to joust, but prefer rapiers and a light, unencumbered style of fighting – armor makes the final clinch with the heroine uncomfortable, and a helmet hides your face in the close-ups. The “Heroic Fantasy Middle Ages” mixes everything together, incorporating magic and other fantastic elements.

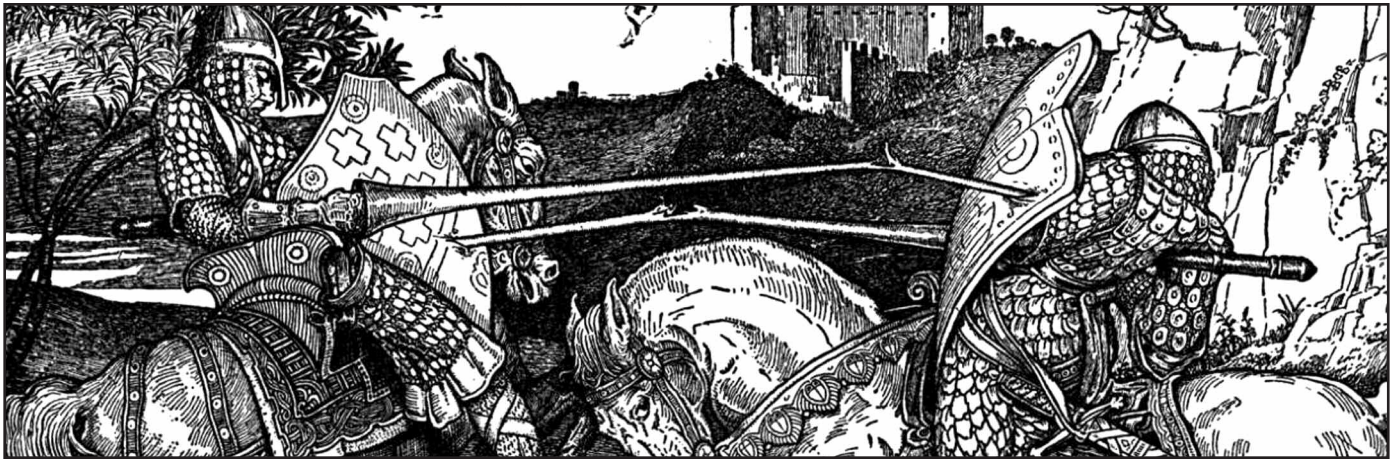


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graeme Davis also wrote *GURPS Vikings*. He has contributed to various other *GURPS* volumes, and to other games including *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *Vampire: the Masquerade*, and *Dungeons & Dragons*. He lives in Denver, Colorado with his long-suffering wife, Gina, and two very pampered cats.

ENGLAND IN THE MIDDLE AGES





MEDIEVAL MASS COMBAT

Feudal armies are mentioned briefly in the mass combat rules in *GURPS Compendium II* (p. CII114). This section covers medieval troop types in more detail.

Saxon Troops

Saxon armies are TL2. Troop types are as follows:

Fyrdmen: Light infantry with light or no armor, armed with axe or sword, spear, and shield. Base TS is 3, maximum troop quality is Average.

Housecarls: Medium infantry with some armor, armed with sword, spear, and shield. Base TS is 4, troop quality ranges from Seasoned to Elite.

Thanes: Thanes were usually commanders, though a king's bodyguard might be composed entirely of thanes. Medium infantry with medium armor, armed with sword and shield. Base TS is 4, troop quality is Veteran or Elite.

Cavalry: Saxon armies used horses for mobility, but mostly fought on foot. Horses were light, and ridden without stirrups.

Ranged Weapons: Slings, javelins, and longbows were used by the Saxons, but they were not especially common. Fighting was most often hand-to-hand.

Norman Troops

Norman armies are TL3. Troop types are as follows:

Feudal Levy: Irregular light infantry with little or no armor, spear or agricultural implement used as an improvised weapon. Some feudal levies could also use slings and bows. Base TS is 1, troop quality is Raw or Green.

Men-at-Arms/Mercenaries: Medium infantry with leather armor and some mail, spear, sword, and large kite shield. Base TS is 3, troop quality is Average or better.

Foot Knights: Heavy infantry with chain mail, sword, and large kite shield. Base TS is 4, troop quality is Average or better.

Mounted Knights: Heavy cavalry with chain mail, sword, light lance, and shield, mounted on medium horse with stirrups. Base TS is 6, troop quality is Average or better.

Siege Weapons: Norman armies could use small and large siege engines (see p. CII115).

High Medieval Troops

The High Middle Ages saw a gradual transition from TL3 to TL4. Situated on the fringes of Europe, England lagged behind countries such as Italy; despite the use of early gunpowder weapons, High Medieval armies are best treated as TL3.

Rabble/Revolting Peasants: Irregular light infantry with little or no equipment. Base TS is 1, troop quality is Raw or Green.

Men-at-Arms: Medium infantry with leather armor and some mail, spear, knife or shortsword, and shield. Base TS is 3, troop quality is Average or better.

Yeoman Archers: Light infantry with leather armor, shortsword, and longbow. Base TS is 5, troop quality is Average to Veteran.

Crossbowmen: Light infantry with leather armor, shortsword, and crossbow. Because the crossbow was a less effective weapon than the longbow (see p. 82), its TS bonus is treated here as +2 rather than the +3 given on p. CII115. Base TS is 5, troop quality is Green or better.

Handgunners: Light infantry with leather armor, shortsword, and handgun. Early handguns are crude and ineffective weapons (see p. 83) and are given a TS bonus of +2 instead of the +TL on p. CII115. This bonus is negated by wet weather, as gunpowder becomes unusable. Base TS is 5, troop quality is Green or better.

Pikemen: Medium infantry with leather and mail armor, pike, and short sword. Pikemen gain a +2 strategy modifier when charged by cavalry. Base TS is 4, troop quality is Green or better.

Knights: Heavy cavalry with a mixture of chain and plate armor, heavy lance, sword (or other hand weapon), and shield, mounted on heavy horses with stirrups. Base TS is 8, troop quality is Seasoned or better.

Siege Weapons: High Medieval armies could use small and large siege engines and light artillery (p. CII115).

CAMPAIGN STYLES

A Middle Ages campaign can take many forms, ranging from mundane to highly magical and from bloodless to all-action. While no magic was involved in the *real* history of medieval England (at least, so far as academic historians are concerned!), the romantic-chivalric stories of Malory, Chretien de Troyes, and others were thick with sorcery and miracles. And while there were many wars during the Middle Ages, there was at least as much politicking, plotting, and skullduggery as fighting.

The various campaign styles may seem very different, but in fact all may be defined by reference to three variables. The first is the *setting*; this can be one of the historical periods, as defined in Chapter 1, or it can be inspired by romantic-chivalric literature, Hollywood epics, or plain silliness. The campaign opportunities offered by each setting are outlined below.

The amount of *magic* in a campaign governs whether it is *historical*, *fantastic*, or *mythic*. Finally, the amount of *violence* in the plotlines the GM chooses will govern the balance between *thoughtful*, bloodless roleplaying and all-out, blood-and-thunder *action*.

MAGIC LEVEL

With no magic at all, the campaign becomes more or less *historical*. Monsters are absent or reveal themselves to be nonmagical. Everything has a rational explanation, even if it may not appear so to the superstitious.

With a moderate amount of magic, the campaign becomes *fantastic*. There are monsters, enchanters, and other supernatural creatures, but interaction between deities and mortals is infrequent and low-key.

Increasing the amount of magic further creates a *mythic* campaign, where divine action is open (but not always obvious) and PCs can interact with beings of awesome power, affecting the fate of gods and men as they do so.

This chapter treats campaigns in these three categories, although the divisions are not rigid. By fine-tuning the magic level – or by varying it from time to time and place to place – it is possible to produce a campaign which falls into more than one category, or which blends aspects of more than one style.

VIOLENCE LEVEL

Like magic level, this is a sliding scale. A campaign with less violence can be described as a *thoughtful* campaign, while a campaign with more can be described as an

action campaign. A thoughtful campaign places more emphasis on peaceful interaction, character play, and using the law and social conventions to achieve the PCs' goals; an action campaign stresses combat skills and solving problems by main strength and force of arms.

THOUGHTFUL HISTORICAL CAMPAIGNS

This can be one of the most challenging campaign styles, especially if the players like social interaction, problem solving, and skills like Fast-Talk. In a thoughtful historical campaign, the PCs face social dilemmas, malicious lawsuits, dirty politics, and bad weather. They have to solve problems using their wits, their skills, and their knowledge of the social system.

Prizes in this kind of campaign include powerful allies, personal prestige and influence, promotion up the social ladder, and perhaps even the crown. Sources of ideas include the history of the period itself, and some of the better historical novels and movies. The bibliography at the end of this book offers some starting points.

A campaign inspired by the “Brother Cadfael” murder mysteries (see *Bibliography*, p. 123) would be classified as thoughtful historical.

THOUGHTFUL FANTASTIC CAMPAIGNS

This campaign involves similar themes to the thoughtful historic style, but problems are complicated by magical and supernatural factors. Monsters and nonhuman races come on the scene, with their own abilities and motivations; magic appears as a third force alongside the law and force of arms. Magical treasures and knowledge join wealth, power, and position among the prizes of this kind of campaign.

The thoughtful fantastic campaign can contain elements of supernatural horror as well as high fantasy. High fantasy tends to be heavily populated with monsters and well-supplied with magic, making both commonplace; horror, on the other hand, most commonly focuses on a single creature or paranormal ability, and plays it for maximum effect in a setting which is otherwise mundane. The rarer magic is, the more inexplicable and horrifying a supernatural creature becomes, and the rarer and more precious becomes the knowledge of how to deal with it. Players' imaginations (and nerves) can be stretched to the limit if they must face a supernatural foe without magical knowledge or assistance.

Inspiration for this kind of campaign can come from a number of sources. The Anglo-Saxon heroic poem *Beowulf* features encounters with supernatural creatures, as do many of the later Arthurian stories. Folklore is also a worthwhile source. Dealing with ordinary folks rather than great heroes, the problems in folk tales are pitched at an every-



day level and their solutions can be both simple and complex at the same time. Folklore makes an ideal inspiration for a campaign where the PCs are young, inexperienced, and lacking in combat skills. Finally, modern horror novels sometimes feature creatures derived from folklore, and many have themes, situations, and creatures which can take on a whole new dimension when transferred back to the Middle Ages.

Campaigns inspired by movies such as *Dragonheart* or books such as *The Mists of Avalon* fall into the category of thoughtful fantastic.

THOUGHTFUL MYTHIC CAMPAIGNS

This campaign style is one of the most challenging for both GM and players. The stakes have risen significantly, and the problems are more exacting. In the quest for the Holy Grail, entry to Heaven itself is the prize. Divine forces work both for and against the searchers, who have to struggle with their own mortal failings at the same time. Moral dilemmas abound, and situations which look obvious but turn out otherwise can stretch characters to the limit. Is it really a maiden whom the knight in black armor is keeping imprisoned? Or is it a terrible demon which has adopted the form of a maiden in order to persuade the heroes to free it?

Though thoughtful mythic campaigns can take place in almost any setting, they are particularly characteristic of the romantic-chivalric tradition (see p. 119). Campaigns inspired by movies such as *Legend* would be characterized as thoughtful mythic.

ACTION HISTORICAL CAMPAIGNS

This campaign style features wars, border skirmishes, and other kinds of conflict. As well as mountains of plunder and a fearsome reputation, the goals of this kind of campaign might be to carve out a new domain, conquer land from your neighbor, defeat the evil sheriff, regain Jerusalem from the infidels, or seize the throne of your homeland.

Ideas for an action historical campaign can come from a number of sources, including epic movies and some historical novels. Campaigns inspired by movies such as *Braveheart* would be classified as action historical.

ACTION FANTASTIC CAMPAIGNS

This campaign style is the closest in tone to the “standard” fantasy roleplaying campaign. There are places of mystery to be explored, princesses to be rescued, enchanters to be defeated, dragons to be slain, gold, silver, and magical treasures to be acquired, and so on.

This might be an appropriate campaign style to start with, especially if most of the players are only familiar with

generic fantasy roleplaying settings. As the campaign progresses and the players become more familiar with the game world, the GM can swing the emphasis around as desired. Or the group can stick with the action fantastic campaign – it’s not far removed from many medieval tales, and it certainly can be fun!

The sources for an action fantastic campaign are pretty much the same as those for a thoughtful fantastic campaign – simply increase the ratio of violent to nonviolent events. Generic fantasy can also be plundered for ideas – it’s only fair, after all, since generic fantasy steals most of its ideas from the Middle Ages in the first place!

MONSTERS FOR FANTASTIC CAMPAIGNS

Most, if not all, of the creatures that might be found in a fantastic medieval campaign are already well-used by generic fantasy, and as such they may be found in the *Basic Set* and other standard *GURPS* sources, such as *GURPS Bestiary*.

The cockatrice, gryphon, and strix (p. B145) are suitable for use in a fantastic medieval campaign, and creatures from *GURPS Bestiary* may be included at the GM’s whim.

Apart from the “standard” creatures from medieval folklore and literature, such as giants, dragons, and unicorns, the GM must decide which creatures are appropriate for the campaign on a case-by-case basis. This affects not only just *how* fantastic the campaign is, but also its overall tone. The wider the range of creatures, the more the campaign shades toward generic fantasy; another characteristic element of generic fantasy is the common availability of nonhuman PC races, such as those presented in *GURPS Fantasy Folk*.

Creatures of non-European origin need a reason for being in the campaign. A djinn might have traveled to medieval England in a bottle brought back from the East by a merchant or a returning crusader, for example, while a zombie could only be created by an evil spellcaster versed in African tradition. Haitian voodoo would develop much later than the Middle Ages. A golem could only exist in a place with a Jewish population, and so on.

Depending on the desired tone of the campaign, the GM may find useful information in *GURPS Spirits*. Ghost stories have a timeless quality, and indeed may provide a refreshing change from monster-hunts.

A fantastic campaign that crosses over into other cultural areas may bring PCs into contact with a wider range of creatures. *GURPS Vikings* features a number of monsters from Norse legend that might be encountered in the Danelaw as well as in the Scandinavian homelands, while *GURPS Arabian Nights* provides an invaluable source of ideas and information for fantastic campaigns that involve the Crusades or pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Several creatures from *GURPS Monsters* could also make interesting foes for a group of medieval PCs.

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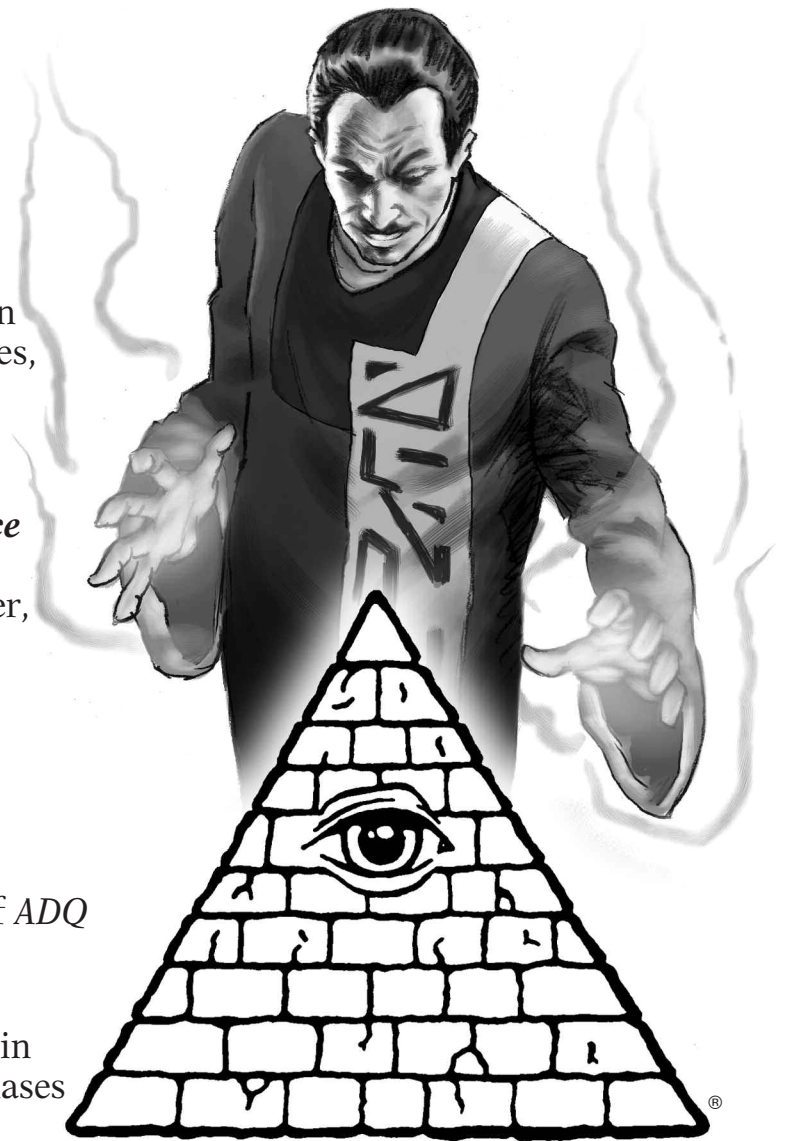
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