RUNEPUNK
STEAMQUEST?

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Steampunk is a genre which traditionally identifies itself with steam powered technology, although this is a bit of a misnomer. Most Steampunk settings are actually alternate histories or fantasies based around the technology and cultural etiquette of the Victorian period. Using these technological anachronisms the genre has spread to include the American 'Wild West', and can be applied to almost any Fantasy or Sci-Fi setting; for example the long-vanished Dwemer of the *Elder Scrolls* computer games.

An important aspect of Steampunk is that the technology is not just limited to the use of steam power. It often includes primitive electrical devices, such as the sodium battery driven engines of Captain Nemo's Nautilus, lightning projected from Tesla Coils, and all sorts of wonderful electro-magnetic gadgets. The other primary technology is that of clockwork devices, from which marvellous automatons, difference engines and other Heath Robinson style contraptions can be fashioned.

Whilst many of the imagined devices are potentially possible to build, their motivating power is ultimately fantastic, requiring either a continuous supply of combustible material, or some other pseudo-scientific fuel. An example of this would be radium infused coal which releases far greater heat when burned, or for settings with more of a supernatural element, the conversion of animal or human souls for energy!

Technical explanations aside, the most important aspects of a Steampunk themed game are Setting Choice, Character Generation and the Equipment player characters can use or even create.

SETTING CHOICE

The first thing to consider when creating a Steampunk campaign for *RuneQuest*, is what period or location in which to place it. Although Neo-Victorian games lend themselves to the period of romanticism and industrial revolution within Europe, a *Wild, Wild West* style campaign would necessarily be limited to the gun-toting anarchy of 19th century Americas. Such regional selections have a very dramatic effect on the culture the players will face, and by necessity have to interact with.

Fashion, weapon laws, social rank, methods of transport, communication types, possible sexual or racial inequality, transportable wealth and even the level of governmental authority are all aspects which need to be considered. Beyond the obvious cultural foundation, Game Masters must also contemplate whether there will be any paranormal aspects to the campaign setting. For instance will there be monsters or creatures of the night?

Such nightmarish beings might the result of early genetic breeding programs, akin to the human-animal monstrosities created by H. G. Well's Dr Moreau. Conversely they might be reanimated creatures as raised by Mary Shelley's eccentric Victor Frankenstein. Science in fact need not be responsible since nature itself might already provide sapient animals akin to the polar bears of Philip Pullman's '*His Dark Materials*' series or classical monsters like werewolves or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. More fantastical settings might even include dragons as per Naomi Novik's *Temeraire* series or the *Girl Genius* web comics.

Another paranormal aspect to consider is the inclusion of the occult arts of Spiritualism and Parapsychology. The former utilises the Animism rules to communicate and intercede with the spirits of the dead. Incorporating the arts of mediums naturally leads to the involvement of ghosts which would add an additional dimension to a campaign. Parapsychology permits addition of mind powers such as precognition, clairvoyance or even telepathy – all of which can be replicated using the Mysticism rules. Of course, neither Spiritualism nor Parapsychology need have any basis of reality in the campaign, instead merely being the artifice of confidence tricksters.

CHARACTER GENERATION

The normal *RuneQuest 6* character generation rules can easily create player characters suited to a Steampunk campaign. Simply remove the magical skills related to Folk Magic, Sorcery and Theism. Although nothing actually stops characters from being stage prestidigitators or priests if they select the profession, magic should not be available to them.

Passions should be revised to match the culture the characters originate from. Sir

William Fopsworthy, a civilised British gentleman, might possess Love (Lady Emma Smyth-Green) the object of his unrequited adoration, Hate (Lord Heinrich Battenburg) who seeks to plunge central Europe into war using his fiendishly designed clockwork soldiery, and Loyalty (Queen Victoria and the Empire).

Lore skills should of course be updated to more modern specialisations, whilst Combat Styles can be revised so that they include weaponry suited to the period. Settings including pistols and other modern weaponry can easily use the free-to-download Firearms supplement at the Design Mechanism website (http://www.thedesignmechanism.com/downloads.php).

Two skills gain more importance however. Mechanisms should be renamed to Mechanics, and this combined with Engineering are heart and centre of a Steampunk campaign; at least one which focuses on utilising such technology. Mechanics permits the repair and maintenance of mechanical devices, from airship engines to clockwork automatons. Engineering on the other hand represents the ability to comprehend the processes behind, and architectural design of, actual mechanical devices.

EQUIPMENT

In any sort of campaign where technological equipment can provide significant new abilities, care has to be taken so that these gizmos and gadgets do not supplant the player characters' own skills. Thus an ornithopter backpack or one-man aerostat might provide flight to its user, but require a Pilot (Drive) skill to actually control. Similarly mechanical Steampunk weapons may be capable of tremendous destruction, but still necessitate a successful Combat Style roll to trigger correctly. Equipment grants the opportunity to use skills, never replace them.

Another aspect of Steampunk technology is its gratuitous weight and bulk. This is in part a reflection of needing large capacitors, complex clockwork or steam engines to power said devices. Truly miniaturised mechanisms are not part of the genre and awkward bulkiness should be embraced as a feature of its nature and baroque artistic appeal. Indeed the larger the device is, the more resilient it is to damage. It also prevents player characters from overloading themselves with multiple gadgets.

Since technological gadgets are the equivalent of magic items in traditional fantasy campaigns, construction of these devices is fundamental to certain character archetypes, such as the absent-minded genius professor. The following rules give a rough framework to limit the power of what can be built.

CONSTRUCTING DEVICES

Engineering is the primary skill required to devise new Steampunk equipment. However, an engineer cannot simply design anything imaginable, but must have knowledge of the precise sciences upon which the final machine is based. This is represented by different Lore skills as listed, each permitting the device an increasing level of sophistication.

Lore Specialities:

- **Lore (Animus)** – Only utilised for the construction of automatons, the animate device can be programmed with one skill (starting at base value) per 10% known in Lore (Animus). Once functional the skills of the automaton can be improved by an engineer investing their own Experience Rolls.
- **Lore (Architecture)** – Permits the device to be constructed at larger scale than normal. The maximum SIZ it can reach is equal to the value of Lore (Architecture), granting it a bonus to its final Hit Points.
- **Lore (Destruction)** – Utilised only for destructive automatons or weapons, the device inflicts ranged damage based upon on the value of Lore (Destruction). For projectile weapons, damage is 1d6 at 01-20%, 1d8 at 21-40%, 1d10 at 41-60%, 1d12 at 61-80%, 2d6 at 81-100% and progresses as per the Damage Modifier table (*RuneQuest* page 13) for each 20% thereafter. Energy weapons such as Tesla Rays or Lightning Projectors follow the same pattern but start at 1d2 at 01-20%. Unlike projectiles however, energy weapons are not stopped by armour.
- **Lore (Energy)** – Controls how many hours or shots the device operates for before needing a rewind, recharge or refuelling. The maximum number of charges is equal to the value of Lore (Energy). In the case of projectile or energy weapons, the device may simultaneously expend a number of charges equal to one twentieth of this skill, each 'shot' affecting a different target.
- **Lore (Locomotion)** – Assuming a vehicle or automaton, permits the device a Movement Rate equal to one tenth of Lore (Locomotion). Usually the device is designed for only a single type of locomotion, either driving, sailing or lighter than air floating. If the engineer wishes to combine two or more methods, the Movement Rate must be divided between them.
- **Lore (Metallurgy)** – Adds protection to the device to make it more physically resilient. It gains a number of inherent Armour and bonus Hit Points equal to one tenth of Lore (Metallurgy). This armouring is vulnerable to the Sunder special effect in combat.
- **Lore (Specific Science)** – Permits the inclusion of an unusual Creature Ability (see *RuneQuest* pages 312-317) relevant to the specified science into the device for every full 20% in the skill, subject to Game Master approval.

None of the individual Lore skills can be utilised at a greater level than the capping value of the designer's Engineering skill, but there is no limit to the number of sub-skills incorporated into the project. The total value of all the Lore skills used to create the design is the time in days it takes for the schematics to be conceived and ironed-out.

Once the design period is finalised, a roll must be made against Engineering to see if the blueprints are drawn up correctly. A normal success means the plans can be used to build a copy of the device, whilst a critical success implies the final design exceed expectations, gaining a 10% bonus to its relevant capabilities. Failure means a fundamental flaw was discovered and the designer must return to the drawing board. A fumble on the other hand indicates a chronic or deadly flaw exists, but won't be discovered until the machine is built and activated for the first time.

After the blueprints are drawn up, it must still be built. This relies on engaging characters possessing the Mechanics skill and having access to the necessary tools and raw materials needed to build the device. In some circumstances this might take the entire output of a factory. Construction takes an amount of time equal to the design phase, divided by one tenth of the Mechanic's skill.

The finished device ends up with a total SIZ equal to one tenth of the totalled Lore skills used to design it, except of course for Lore (Architecture) which instead supplants this value if the engineer wishes the machine to be larger. By default, the device gains a number of Hit Points equal to one fifth its SIZ. In the specific case of automatons designed to physically move heavy objects or smash things with their own limbs, they only use their SIZ (not SIZ+STR) to calculate their Damage Modifier.

Team Construction Efforts

Although the construction rules allow the creation of small scale devices or vehicles, they preclude manufacture of truly massive automatons, vehicles or weapons. Building larger scaled or more complex devices usually require entire teams of scientists and workmen to construct. To represent the aid given by additional manpower, grant the lead engineer or mechanic in charge of the project a bonus of 1% for each person in the team who possesses that particular skill.