

TFT: Superhero

(The 1980s Northern Nevada Version)

by Bob Portnell

Let's do the legal stuff early:

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"The Beast," "Captain America," Cyclops," "Hulk," "Iron Man," "James Bond 007," "Spider-Man," "Superman," and "The Thing" belong to neither me nor Steve Jackson Games. We know that, right? Same for the other games I mention, right? And we're not going to complain about "Superhero" being a trademark co-owned by two major publishers, are we?

The Fantasy Trip was my first (RPG) love. It was fun, it was fast (even faster if you skipped the minis), and it was simple. My friends were comic book fans, so it was natural to extend the rules to see how superhero play worked. SPOILER: it worked fine!

Credit for most of the design work goes to Fred Wehling, Don Nutting, Jim Martineau, and others (please don't be mad if I don't mention your name! You know I love you!) who worked out on the fly what eventually settled into a consistent practice for modeling superheroes with *TFT*. I was a late arrival, but with enthusiasm and a love for documentation.

So, what was done to make *TFT* super? Very little, actually. (Page references below refer to the Metagaming editions of the rules. When the SJ Games edition comes along, I'll revise this.)

Scaling the Attributes

We set a maximum ST for normal humans of 30; this was based on notes on page 8 of *In The Labyrinth (ITL)*. ST for the superhuman tended to a maximum of 300. This figure was derived from the rule that a character can lift ST^2 kilos (*ITL* p. 35). A character who could be expected to lift 100 (U.S.) tons (about 90,000 kg) would have ST 300.

All other matters related to ST were mostly by the book. Wounds needed to Stun or to Knock Down for normal humans was the same as in *Advanced Melee (AM)* pg. 18, but for very high ST, Stun = $ST/6$ and Fall = $ST/4$. Bare-hand damage came from a custom table which didn't climb as dramatically as the one on *AM* pg. 21 -- at the higher levels it was +1 per +10 ST, not +1d! Thus the Hulk (ST 300) does 9d+2 with fists.

Maximum DX was 26. I have no clue how this figure was determined, but I suspect Captain America was defined as "the ultimate," and then DX values were playtested until they gave the right balance of "too good" vs. "not good enough."

IQ topped out at 20. Which was plenty good for a 3D6 roll, even with bunches of negative modifiers.

Defining the Powers

First, we ditched the Talents & Spells from the book and also the need to purchase such things based on IQ. We used the Talents and Spells as guides for *effects*, but the assignments of character special abilities was completely abstract and relative... based on our understandings of what the characters had done and could do in the comics.

Thus, when you know it takes 75 points to knock down the Hulk (see above), you know a character needs to dish out 75 points of damage... but that's 22 dice! Ah, but we were giving double damage on a natural roll of 4 on 3d6... and triple damage on a natural 3. With luck, even a middling power can knock down the Green Goliath. (For some values of luck. After all, the madder he gets, the stronger he gets...)

(We used the table on *ITL* pg. 38 a lot, extrapolating and adding double- and triple-damage levels for each die roll and noting the critical failure point within the automatic failure zone.)

So damage was simple. What about powers & abilities? Let's consider Captain America, regarded as the ultimate human fighting machine (ST 30, DX 26, remember). It made sense to treat him as having the highest level of Unarmed Combat talent, harder to hit based on which hexside you approach him, and harder still if he's dodging or defending.

All of the other martial artists were scaled against this standard, using the Unarmed Combat talents as guides. For example, the Beast got the "Acrobat" harder-to-hit bonuses but not the "combat sensing" modification to side & rear hexes.

Armor was scaled in comparison to existing armor types in *AM*. Fine Plate stops 6... The Thing's rocky hide stops 10 hits. This was generally the most we'd give armor. Iron Man's armor stopped most hits but some still got through; we called that "90%" armor, where 9 out of 10 hits were ignored. Cap's chain mail was given to be slightly more buffed than normal mail but not much.

Speaking of stopping hits, we used the "Warrior/Veteran" talents as a guideline to reflect fighting experience. Naturally, Cap had the most and could avoid 3 hits of any attack. Most martial artists could avoid 2 hits; most brawlers just 1. This gave another bit of protection in the absence of armor or other special defenses.

We decided that Cap's shield, when thrown, did slightly more damage than his punch (after all, unlike Cap's fist, the shield is solid metal). Multiple attacks were often handled with the "sweeping blow" mechanic... one attack roll to make the throw, at -4, and if successful affects up to three targets. If it was in-hand, the shield would also stop hit points.

Energy attacks were generally picked for the average likely amount of damage. Cyclops was known to be able to take an average moderately armored goon to unconsciousness with one shot... call that 14 points. 4d would do that on average; give him 5d for fun. We added modifiers for when he restrained himself or when he really cut loose; and a different set of modifiers for being able to also control the beam width.

The rest of the characters, the little powers, just tended to be improvised. For example, Cyclops has a natural mathematical gift... he can process geometry in three-dimensions and has staged some very elaborate ricochet shots in his time. We called that -1 to hit and -1d damage each bounce.

Entangling attacks like Spidey's web were adapted from the rules for net or bolas weapons. Firearms were extrapolated from the black-powder weapons in *AM*. Et cetera, et cetera: work out the game effect, find a similar rule mechanic when possible, otherwise make one up.

Wrap-Up and Examples

We used this for almost all our supers gaming, preferring it over every other game we saw or tried. I've made a sub-hobby of comparing supers games, and I haven't found many to match our *Superhero Melee* (as we called it then). The *Marvel Superheroes Adventure Game* and *ICONS* came closest for me.

Here are a few sample characters which I played. The first, Cyclops of the X-Men, I played a great deal (we were the same height and mostly the same build, tho' he had about 40 pounds of muscle on me); the second, James Bond of the British Secret Service, I only played twice but had a joyous time. The third is a version of Superman... 'nuff said.

Cyclops, aka Scott Summers

Male, age 28. Height 6'3", Weight 225#

Hair: Brown. Eyes: Brown. Nation: USA.

ST 20 *very fit; works out regularly* Stun: 6 Fall: 9

DX 16 *good but not a gymnast or acrobat*

IQ 14 *bright but not a genius*

MA 12 *typical value is 10 on foot; Scott's pretty fit.*

Damages

Hand-to-Hand: 1d+1

Optic Blast: Variable up to 12d; useful range 2d-8d. See below.

Abilities, Powers, Devices

Armored Costume: Stops 4 hits from each attack.

Optic Blast: Declare basic damage, from 2d to 8d.

Beam Width Modifiers: choose one

Minimum Beam (-4 to hit, +2d dmg, Fatigue Effect on 16, 17, 18 if pushed)

Narrow Beam (-2 to hit, +1d dmg, Fatigue Effect on 16, 17, 18 if pushed)

Normal Beam (no mods)

Wide Beam (+2 to hit, -3d dmg)

Ricochet Blast: Roll to hit on each reflected target, cumulative -1 to hit and -1d damage with each bounce. First miss ends ricochet.

Fatigue Effect: Optic Blast fatigues only on a natural 18 to hit under normal conditions. If blast is pushed (requiring IQ save on 3d), fatigue occurs on 17 or 18. No Optic Blast when fatigued.

James Bond, code name 007

Descriptive Information: Classified. *Hint: This was the dawn of the Timothy Dalton years...*

Nation: UK.

ST 20 *very fit; works out regularly* Stun: 6 Fall: 9

DX 22 *gymnast-level agility*

IQ 17 *rather smart but also very firm-minded*

MA 12

Damages

Hand-to-Hand: 1d+5

H&K P77 pistol: 3d *Yes, I was taking my cues from the first series of post-Fleming novels here.*

Abilities, Powers, Devices

Martial Arts: Opponents must roll 4d to hit 007 normally (6d if he is Dodging, 7d if he is defending).

007 can throw opponents (opponent must roll 6d vs DX to remain standing (5d if ST > 40). 007 can attack to disarm; successful with H-T-H damage \geq 3 pts. *Almost as good as Cap...*

Stealth: When 007 is trying to be sneaky, foes must roll 8d vs IQ to hear him, 6d to see him at night.

Marksmanship: +3 to hit when using firearms. May fire automatic weapons in six round bursts with a net DX mod of -3.

Experience: Avoids 2 points of damage. Side hexes count as front; rear hexes count as sides. Does double damage on 5-7; does triple damage on 4 or 3.

Q-Branch: Often in possession of useful gizmos: Homing device, metal detector/compass, garrote, etc.

Other: Class 1 pilot, SCUBA instructor rating, top physical condition, skilled gambler.

Superman, aka Clark Kent

Male, age 34. Height 6'2", Weight 210#

Hair: Black. Eyes: Blue. Nation: USA

ST 300 *The Max* Stun 50 Fall 75

DX 24 *Very fast and agile*

IQ 18 *Very bright*

MA Unreal

Damages

Hand-to-Hand: 9d+2

Heat Vision: 8d

Super Breath: 4d

Abilities, Powers, Devices

Invulnerable: Ignores 10 points of every attack. *This probably seems low, but he's so seldom hit...*

Superior Senses: Limited only by lead.

Super Breath: Can lower local temperature in a 2 cubic meter volume by 50 deg C in a round.

Weaknesses

Magic: Invulnerability does not work against the arcane arts.

Kryptonite: Exposure to this radioactive ore will be fatal within minutes