RPGStuck 3e Development Roadmap

==> Overview

> *"This is a quote."*

~~Sample~~ is a thing that you describe broadly here. This particular document is meant to display how any given document should be formatted.

A **Roadmap** is the thing ~~that your father insists he can read while driving as he misses yet another exit~~ that tells RPGStuck's plans for the future in terms of development and only development.

This document is meant to describe RPGStuck's future development and exposit about its short-term goals, its long-term goals, and its intended audience. This document is not meant to describe anything outside of those specific topics. ~~Mere this isn't software engineering or another business valuation, talk like a human.~~

==> Short Term Goals

"This is where we discuss short term goals for the foreseeable year or so."

Goal Group One: Grab Bag

The immediate concerns for RPGStuck as of 2020-12-04 are as such:

Bestiary

The bestiary has two primary concerns to be addressed.

- The first is that the high damage nature of the bestiary makes it akin to a game of rocket tag, where it is kill or be killed. While Metal Gear Rising tells us this is how nature rules, it is less amenable in a tabletop. Therefore, the monster damage outputs are being cut significantly.
    - Non-adversaries are also having their damage dice stripped in favor of a flat damage number, but why this will happen will be explicated upon further in the **Design Philosophy** section below.
    - This fix has also prompted a rebalancing of abilities tied to short rests, given that multiple strifes can and should occur between them. In general, any abilities in Pillars and Paths, Specializations, Racials, etc tied to short rests will be buffed accordingly. If it cannot be reasonably buffed, it will be changed to be strife-dependent instead. See more in **Short Rest Abilities**.
- The second concern is that the defenses for the bestiary are far higher than what feels reasonable. The fix for this is relatively simple, tiers 0 and 1 will have their defenses dropped by 4 across the board, while tier 2 will be dropped by 2.
    - Combined with the damage reduction for the bestiary, we're fully aware this might swing the first few levels to be too easy. This is a risk we are willing to bear at this time, to be remedied if the easiness proves too much.
- Another point worth commenting, despite its lesser urgency, is the addition of more monsters; tier 5 underlings have been created and are ready to go, as is the expanded carapacian bestiary.

The Bestiary can expect a release at the end of December 2020. The vast majority of these changes are done, we're looking into how to make the doc version easier to read that doesn't involve having to type them out over twenty hours.

Adversaries

The adversary rework is in progress. The enormity of the data required is the roadblock here; each adversary requires 1260 different stat blocks, based on that adversary's tier, number of players fighting it, difficulty, accuracy to damage ratio, and actual damage done. We're looking into how to make Google Sheets automate as much of this as possible at the stat block itself instead of the code.

The damage dice are the main issue; Google Sheets doesn't know how to generate damage dice for a given value. We could make custom code that allows this, but that creates more problems than it solves. Currently, no option is off the table.

- The blimp, renamed the Command Zeppelin, and the submarine, renamed the Sealurk, are in the works, per the community's suggestions. These will serve as more puzzle bosses like the other mechanical carapacian adversaries in that half the challenge is figuring out how to fight the thing to begin with.
  - Except for the Siege Titan, which manages to be a prime argument for AND against rules for dismemberment. Like Samurai Jack showed us, gratuitous violence is kid-amenable if it's robots and they bleed oil.
- The current rework also has an issue where variants of any existing adversaries need their own set of data, which runs into the current problem. We'll be looking for ways to amend this as well. And yes, we do want variants. A grimdark Black King? Sure! Why? Because your SM is a sadist that's why.

The Adversaries can expect a release hopefully within the next few months.

Psionics

The caste differences in psionic potential and psi gradient are being simplified. There will no longer be a difference in maximum slots or psionic resistances/vulnerability between lowblood, midblood, and highblood castes, removing the playstyle restrictions for said castes. We understand that doing this reduces the inherent uniqueness of each caste, but we've chosen to fully embrace reskinning as the law of the land.

- The psion/hybrid/martial divide will be similarly simplified. Personally, I can't wait to get rid of that -2 to Fortitude and Reflex for psions. Always felt out of place. Yes, most psions are inactive nerds as described by Weird Al, but did they really need to be called out like that?

Psionics can expect a release alongside **Specibi**, **Psi Power Affinities**, **Short Rest Abilities**, and **Racials** sometime early 2021, hopefully by February at the latest given that half of those things are already done, but we're not used to giving out deadlines so bear with us. ~~Saint put the grizzly away.~~

Specibi

This is a prelude to the **Alchemy** section described below. Unlike 2e, where everyone always had two specibi and therefore some could afford to be specialized or gimmicky since the secondary could be a more traditional shooty-stabby, this is no longer the case. Therefore, we're instead making sure each specibus is able to stand on its own.

Psi Power Affinities

Most psi powers will be gaining something called an Affinity, a set of baseline abilities anyone who knows that psi power will be able to perform. Most prominently, Power Device from Electrokinesis would be its Affinity. A short-range telepathy for DMC and EMC. An ice-manipulation ability for Cryokinesis. That sort of deal.

- Affinities are meant to be for non-strife usage, primarily, as of 2020-12-04. We might change our minds in the future, but currently, Assist and Enchant would not have Affinities. Mainly because we have yet to begin work on this in earnest; if something comes to us, or people suggest something that seems in line with what we come up with, we'll go with that. They will be expanded greatly though, personally aiming to get Assist to have six subpowers as a minimum.

Short Rest Abilities

Given the changes detailed in **Bestiary** above, short rest abilities will be more infrequent than they currently are. In that light, abilities whose uses are tied to them in Pillars and Paths, Specializations, Racials, etc will be buffed accordingly, or altered to tied to strifes instead.

- On a more personal note, I'll wager that the majority of the community wouldn't mind if short rest abilities that provide crowd control, buffs, and debuffs have a higher power budget, so to speak, than purely damage-based abilities.

Racials

In conjunction with the **Psionics**, **Short Rest Abilities**, and **Psi Power Affinities** sections, racial changes are noteworthy enough to deserve its own section.

- Racials that grant specific subpowers will grant affinities instead. Supernatural, for example, mostly has wording changes given that Power Device and Ignite are both good examples of affinities anyway.
- Second is being shelved and replaced. It might come back when housebuilding is looked at in the future, but it's tentative.
- Brave is being replaced. We aim to have a much tighter grip on the action economy. ~~Courage and Action Surge, you're next on the chopping blocks.~~

Miscellaneous:

Various things that weren't done but didn't fit into any of the above categories:

- Sylladex ejection will be a thrown weapon.
- Three new conditions coming up.
  - **Broken**, which gives advantage to vs Fortitude attacks on the target and gives disadvantage to their physical attacks and Athletics. A physical counterpart to Disrupt.
  - **Clipped**, which forces all movement to cost an extra foot per foot moved (difficult terrain, but ignoring difficult terrain does not ignore this), gives advantage to vs Reflex attacks against them, and imposes disadvantage to Acrobatics. Similar to Break and Disrupted.
  - **Weakened**, which reduces a monster's damage done by their damage mod. For players, it reduces their damage dice by one step, for when we inevitably run another tournament and open the salt mines once more.
    - This effect already exists in a few places in the system, it's just being made more official. Rupture has a similar history in RPGStuck, originally specific to just Scythekind, before being used by a few monsters, then eventually being made a condition.
- Lots of little things that don't specifically come to mind right now, or might come up between the release of this roadmap and the various doings of the prior items on this list.
  - Like changing session speed to session length at some point.

The various miscellaneous things are also little enough that they're not getting set release dates. They'll be released as they get done, which is to say after some of the bigger topics in this section.

Goal Group Two: Alchemy

Alchemy is the next big project, and consequently, it has its own section. Expected time frame for this project is most of 2021 for design, feedback, implementation and any necessary adjustments

Overview

Alchemy is a fundamental part of RPGStuck and Homestuck. But while its open-ended nature might've been excusable in the past given RPGStuck's relatively nascent existence and community attitudes being firmly against any sort of rules at all, neither of those hold true today.

Terminology

Before diving into this, let's define an **Item** as an object with a set of effects that would constitute some tier's alchemy item. An effect that would be suitable for a tier 1 sword alchemy would be referred to as a tier 1 item. A set of four effects that would be suitable for a legendary

tier 4 wardrobe alchemy would be referred to as a tier 4 item. When we refer to an item in this section, we're referring to a set of effects, not some specific thingadoo.

Intended Audience

And let's add that the intended audience for these rules are:
- New SMs who are just getting the hang of the system.
- SMs who would prefer to utilize premade content rather than create their own.
- Older SMs who would prefer to omit unnecessary or tedious work for every alchemy session.

If you do not fall in any of these groups, we'll only mention that the bestiary is going to be balanced with the assumption of an alchemized specibus/focus and wardrobe. Consider these rules as a floor for how weak something can be and still be viable, for the brave lot of you who have the time and the inclination to brew your own materials.

Implementation

Alchemy is going to be given in the following manner: alchemy items will be categorized by one or both of the following ways:
- By **concepts,** similar to the prototyping effects. If an SM looks up, say, Fire in the SM Sheet or the Session Master's Assistant, they'll find a list of fire-based alchemy items, organized by tier.
- By **specibus, power, step, or decor**. If an SM looks up say, Swordkind or Enchant or Worship Iron or Direction: Destroy in the SM Sheet or the Session Master's Assistant, they'll find a list of effects that improve upon that specibus, power, step, or decor.

The SM Sheet integration is crucial; as of 2020-12-04, we anticipate that the master list of effects will easily top one thousand, before rewriting them according to the above category groups. The SM Sheet will use the lookup function currently underutilized in the character sheet to make this easier than poring through the Assistant.

Design

Difficult to talk about design at the moment, given it relies on two factors we've yet to do.

One is the rework for the specibi and psi powers as detailed in **Specibi** and **Psi Power Affinities** above. We're waiting on that to finish before we start alchemy.

The second is that we're going to get the community involved in some way. A community event where we throw up bits of work we've already done as a guide, and ask you to try your hand at it, perhaps, as of 2020-12-04 we haven't decided yet. Everyone gets together, compares

alchemy, we pick out ones that are in line with what we want or can be brought in line, maybe during it the community realizes there are common themes/threads in their alchemy and we assimilate that as part of what would count as being in line with what we want.

Alchemy Design Philosophy

There is something at the core of designing the rules for alchemy that we intend to uphold. This would be that alchemy should not invalidate decors or paths. This means alchemy should never exactly replicate anything already in there. Your decor and path choices are going to feel worthless if it's possible to just substitute alchemy for everything. This is to be avoided.

More will crystalize as 2021 comes rolling in and alchemy work begins in earnest; the foundations for this work have been laid, but there's far more to be done.

==> Medium Term Goals

"This explains the development goals for RPGStuck for late 2021 and beyond."

Anticipated release times for these won't be given, as it's difficult to forecast where and when things will be in eight, ten months from now.

Stratagems, Fraymotifs, & Housebuilding

These three sections of the system have been neglected since their initial release. Consequently, there's not as much to be said about them at this juncture.

Stratagems

Current playtesting shows their implementation is too complex to be of much use beyond setting up the session. They need to be redone to be significantly simpler, or removed outright. The current line of thinking is to instead give a series of session prompts and plotlines that SMs can adopt for their sessions.

- These prompts would include at the least, a list of notable NPCs and their motivations/personalities, their plots that the players will inevitably run into, and the effects of said plots if they are or are not resolved.

Fraymotifs

The freeform creation method currently in use isn't actually very exciting. Given the current Classpect implementation, complex and flashy God Tier power manifestations can be filled by fraymotifs.

- ~~Canon's fraymotifs are surprisingly boring. So in this regard, like canon gates, the canon is ours to rewrite as we please.~~ We'll wait on alchemy to show us the way before we proceed with this, in that alchemy should never exactly replicate fraymotifs either.

Housebuilding

Integrate it more deeply into the system by redoing its available NPCs if necessary, otherwise audit its utility and move on.

- Very few people use Housebuilding as is, beyond the gate costs, and even that I'm told most people handwave them anyhow.

Upkeep

By this point, any flaws from the short term goals will have shown themselves. These will be fixed as they come up, if they come up frequently enough to prove an issue.

Additions

There are currently at least eight new paths in store. While they'll take longer because they'll also need alchemy written out for it, we do want to see them brought in. A Dex sentinel keystone, a psiblade keystone, ~~chemical warfare paths~~, and more grappling steps, for example.

Sandbox Alternia

Due to a mix of community favor and expanding RPGStuck's horizons, the first supplement for RPGStuck will be Alternia or an Alternia-equivalent, for the sandbox style games. ~~I would say Hiveswap but that requires me to not be drowning in grad school so I can play them.~~

Atlas of Alternia

The foundation relies on having a common Alternia to use, with its regions, institutions, cultures, etc. Which is to say, make a setting that's adventure-friendly, which won't be difficult. Y'know, because it's Alternia.

Troll Compendium

And the stat blocks to represent its inhabitants. As of 2020-12-04, we're looking at a lot of trolls, then some lusii and drones. The Alternia monster manual from Second Edition will be ported.

Non-Sburb Differences

Right off the bat, there won't be underlings, carapacians, dream selves, grist, gates, and alchemy. We'll likely just make boondollar drops more common ~~and spend a disproportionate amount of time over what to name the currency~~. (its called caegars, merc.)

System Differences

Unlike Sburb, it's pretty much guaranteed players will be traveling in parties, not by themselves. Accordingly, not only will the **Troll Compendium** need to assume multiple combatants, there are other considerations to be made. Somewhere….. possibly.

Extras

As good a time as any to add in more psionics, weapons and racials. It bears repeating that we'll be continuing to edit the base game as necessary during all of this.

Scenariostuck

Scenariostuck will be returning. The scenarios from Second Edition will be returning, and actually finished this time around. Likely to see even more blocks added to the bestiary. In particular, monsters with gambits incorporated into them, more adversaries, and possibly random boss generation tables, depending on the state of the bestiary at this point in time.

~~Also something about tricksters.~~

Grimdark Equinox

It wouldn't be Homestuck without the ancient horrors from beyond realspace. It'll incorporate elements of the Second Edition grimdark doc, though any details beyond that are scant.

==> Long Term Goals

"This explains the goals for RPGStuck for late 2022 and beyond."

We anticipate using the second half of 2022 to tune up everything covered in the above sections. We'll likely embark on more experimental ideas. A bit on that to be covered in **Design Philosophy** below. More paths, weapons, psionics, etc, as well.

This is because a long term goal would be to finalize the system documents. So far, the system documents are frankly speaking, long walls of text with no pictures or colors. 2022 will be focused on working the aesthetics, as a prelude to being able to call Third Edition a complete product.

Third Edition development, outside of supplements, is going to be finalized and completed by late 2023, with any luck. ~~I have a lot of toblerone and blue dice to ship, if we don't have everything done by September 2022.~~ After that, where RPGStuck goes is up in the air. Most likely more supplements, throw out every bit of internal reference documentation we can find out to be used in homebrew, and the like.

And after that? We'll see what the RPGStuck and Homestuck communities are like by then.

==> Design Philosophy

"This describes RPGStuck's design philosophy, its intended audience, and in general anything that didn't fit within the previous three sections."

Intended Audience

Now, as anyone that knows anything about tabletop development can tell you, you need to have an intended audience for whom the system is being made. RPGStuck has actually committed a fatal flaw in this regard, in that we've deliberately made our system to have as broad an appeal as possible. It satisfies a lot of people, but it doesn't exactly enthrall any one group.

You have MSPFA artists, Pathfinder-level crunch fanatics, PbtA/Dungeon World fans, tabletop newbies, indie tabletop enthusiasts, DnD players, and RP connoisseurs in the same community. There's no way to satisfy every group at once.

And then you get to the purpose of the system. Is its primary focus to support the ridiculously long RP sessions Homestuck's chatlogs became, with strifes and gambits as backdrops to punctuate the tension? Is it primarily strifes, against all sorts of enemies using all types of tactics in a medley of different environs? Is it to tell a narrative story and strifes can be done once in a blue moon, or never for the SMs who just really don't like running strifes?

We're not playing favorites with that either. We want a system that can support all of those, ideally. ~~Except for that first suggestion, I don't know anyone that's picked up RPGStuck specifically to do literal roleplay and little else.~~ But where it can support all of those, it doesn't specifically cater deeply to any of those. ~~It does cleave towards strifes, but it could always cater harder.~~

It's a balancing act. The primary focus of RPGStuck is to have fun, but each of the above groups defines fun differently. So the focus turns to facilitating as many different definitions of fun as possible. We all have our opinions on Homestuck, Hiveswap, Homestuck^2, etc. ~~If you don't like SBaHJ we are kindly but firmly asking you to leave.~~ We all have our headcanons. We aim to allow for as many people to write their own stories as possible.

RPGStuck History Time

To understand why RPGStuck's design philosophy is the way it is, it's worth going through its history.

In the beginning, there was an idea: that Homestuck should be a tabletop. And so came forth Zeroth Edition, which had no rules.

And then came First Edition, which used DnD 5e rules where possible. At this point, the community was maybe forty people. And it was new. Homestuck was in the Omegapause at this point, ~~optimism was high~~ ~~optimism was not high at all~~ ~~let me have my rosy nostalgia glasses Jerry~~ the fandom wasn't as fractious as it currently is ~~being dead as it was due to said Omegapause~~. So half the entire community was involved in collaborating to create the system.

This birthed a long-term problem.

RPGStuck operated by consensus, doing whatever was agreeable and/or asked for at the time. While this on its own was amenable to the community, it lacked a long-term direction.

By the time Second Edition entered its second half, broad strokes for the foundations of Third Edition had been crystallized by this point. This fabled, memetic Third Edition that was promised but never to be made, like Half Life 3.

But the vision for Third Edition was crystallized by then, you say? Where did it come from?

Since development operated by consensus, it wasn't very clear where the ideas behind it had come from. Not to mention the ideas were just that, ideas without much of a plan for how to actually see it through.

There was no roadmap. There was a plan, certainly. There were multiple plans, even; not everyone was wholly on the same page. There was no organization to it, just some hobby enthusiasts doing everything on scrap paper and coffee and the faith of the community that it probably wouldn't end up burning down atrociously.

Fast forward to now, with Third Edition's advent and the dream in the distance of years finally fulfilled. ~~To be later shattered to activate Take Flight.~~ At this point, the following goals have been achieved:

- The storytelling and non-strife capabilities of the system have been increased, at acceptable margins of cost to the strife side of the system, if any. Decors, stakes and flaws, story beats XP, to name a few.

- Pillars and Paths had the fat taken out of it. Those of you who remember Second Edition will remember that a step to add a stat mod to your melee weapon damage roll as a minor action was split between one-handed and two-handed weapons. This and other such steps were excised from Third Edition to keep the system lean. ~~Is it really lean when you just added in as many new steps as were lost?~~

- Classpects, hailed as a sacred cow within the community some years ago, finally have some concrete rules. Not many rules, but this is deliberate; it didn't need many, so why have many?

Design Philosophy

Our design philosophy is one of experimentation and squeezing as much out of as little as possible.

Experimentation

RPGStuck's First Edition was flat out Dungeons and Dragons 5th Edition. Second Edition branched out a good deal, but was still clearly mostly of DnD stock.

Third Edition, while it iterates on its DnD roots (and keep in mind iteration as a concept ~~it's a surprise tool that will help us later~~), takes cues from other tabletops.

It takes influence from Shadows of the Demon Lord, itself an iteration of 5e DnD made by Robert Schwalb, one of 5e DnD's writers.

And Blades in the Dark by John Harper, one of the Forge's own, an evolution of the Powered by the Apocalypse style tabletops which has hilariously given birth to its own Forged in the Dark style groupings of tabletops. ~~Long since cold, the Forge's flames burn on.~~

But then there's Adeptus Evangelion, which itself was a fanmade tabletop using the Dark Heresy system of Warhammer 40k fame.

There was the likes of Dishonored ~~Yes I know Blades in the Dark was already basically Dishonored but they insisted on another, blame the game devs or something~~ made with the same 2d20 system Modiphius Entertainment uses in its other games like Conan and Star Trek Adventures.

~~Those are two things, not one. I feel like I have to specify that. Gene Roddenberry and Robert Howard did not approve a crossover.~~

And even oddballs like Genesys, from the Star Wars RPGs by Fantasy Flight Games.

This influence-taking will continue, as the industry evolves, new games come out, and we keep a finger on the pulse of the tabletop scene. We've come far enough, and RPGStuck has developed enough of its own identity, that we have no interest in keeping to our DnD roots at this point. It's not the be-all end-all of games, why limit ourselves?

In practice this means we'll probably still take from DnD. Having no interest in staying like DnD is different from recognizing parts of it that work and assimilating them. There are other worlds than these.

More For Less

The end goal of the experimentation. The system's got a lot of weight to it. A lot of moving parts, and it's not easy to SM. Given the split nature of Sburb, it's inevitable that SMing as many separate threads as you have players is going to be far more difficult than SMing one party in one place like other tabletops. But this is no reason to pile on the complexity, and all the more reason to chip away at complexity.

We've taken subtle steps and not-so-subtle steps towards this end. Take the bestiary, for example. Recently, people weighed in on removing the dice roll portion from non-adversaries to

speed up strifes. Reception was very positive. But there are others, subtler ones we've already done. Merging stat bonuses with skill bonuses. Doubling down by having monster abilities modify basic abilities like Dash, Grapple, and Help.

The prime example of this line of thought is exemplified by the Empower ability, the first classpect power. Simply adds 2d8 bonus dice and advantage. Enough to serve every aspect and be universally useful to everyone, but straightforward in its execution.

Lingering Problems, Tricky Considerations

That said, there are still lines yet to be crossed. For example, the majority of sessions don't use gridded maps for strifes. They use theater of the mind and relative distances; since the player is often solo, you really only need to measure relative distances between them and everyone/thing else. Does this mean we're going to get rid of or abstract range such that maps aren't necessary?

Realistically impossible, for Third Edition. Too much of the system relies on this framework of feet ~~because the lot of us refuse to accept metric~~ that can't be replaced. A lot of the nuance in the system gets lost that can't be replicated. Not all nuance is worth keeping, but it already exists. Players are used to this. They've made builds that play around with it. ~~I'm not bringing back 2e Gravity Well, though a similar ability is in the works for alchemy.~~ The majority of the community does not use battle maps, yet the system is still built in a way that supports them. And frankly for most of us, it'd feel really weird. However, bear in mind this section's name. Housebuilding is hardly used, yet it was a part of canon.

The community knows to ignore canon where necessary or desired; many SMs don't run Time players because they don't wish to deal with time loops, canon gates are a laughingstock and there are return nodes everywhere and the risk of falling to one's death falling through a co-player's gate is waived, and death isn't nearly as common as canon would imply when every player character has an actual player behind them.

Also making the Genesis Frog. Practice shows that just doesn't get done in great detail. ~~Genetic manipulation is for nerds and we're most certainly not nerds.~~ Frog breeding, among others, just isn't enough of a focus of the system or the community to justify some elaborate mechanic by which it becomes the only way it can be done. It's far simpler for everyone involved to abstract the process.

This begs the question, where should canon be ignored and where should it be maintained?

For the SM, this is easy. You are the SM. You are the writer. You decide what is canon.

But every campaign is necessarily shaped by the system in which it gets played. Every choice of what to add or remove affects what sorts of stories and experiences get told through it. The lack of rules for maiming, dismemberment, and mental breakdowns, it tells you that this system doesn't lend itself to playing violent bloodfests or gritty, Darkest Dungeon style crawlers. That the consequences of dropping to zero hit points are left to the SM, instead of death saving throws, or just death, tells you that the system chooses to focus on narratives ~~despite falling down those stairs I warned you bro~~ and eschews punitive stakes as the default.

A good GM can make any tabletop work. But we can't see it that way. We strive to lower this threshold for what constitutes a good GM as much as possible, make it easily manipulable in the hands of as many SMs as possible.

~~Merc you didn't actually answer the question of when to decide what is canon and what isn't.~~

By judging the community's current practices, the long-term outlook, our needs at the time and in the future, what already exists in the system, etc. It's judgment calls. They won't always be right, but well, Third Edition's in beta for a reason.

A Personal Note

And the attitudes and tastes of the people at the helm can't be ignored, they play a role in the shape of a system.

Personally? I like to experiment. Push the limits. See what works out, what doesn't. Knowing what doesn't work is as important as knowing what does, and if A doesn't work for X, maybe it might work for Y.

Also shonen political thrillers, according to Jerry, with a healthy dose of bones and gloom. He's the mouse; he says the thing, I repeat the thing.