

Edna's 13th Age 2e Gamma Playtest Introduction

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Special Thanks to

Exocist for being a player, and for refining much of this feedback.

Overall Impressions on 13th Age 2e Gamma

I think that 13th Age 2e is a clear improvement over 1e in terms of class balance (yes, my player and I [wrote a tier list for 2e](#), but the rifts were much worse in 1e), monster design (yes, I have [complained about 2e's monster design](#), but it was worse in 1e), and guidance for both players and GMs on how characters should be able to benefit from their icon connections. **I would definitely, unquestionably play 2e over 1e.** However, it has been well over a decade since 1e first released, and I do not think that 2e is improving on **enough**.

There are still plenty of mechanics that are ambiguous in one way or another. I think that it would be more convenient for players and GMs alike for these to be cleared up, thus leaving more time at the metaphorical table to focus on other elements of playing the game.

After having GMed 115(+18) battles and 13(+3) noncombat sequences, I have personally found that the [optimized combat metagame](#) is much too polarized towards alpha-striking on rounds #1 and #2 (plus oddities such as instant PC death, multitargeting, and interception), [some class builds have more generous math over others](#), there are still [virtually no rules for complex skill challenges](#), [permanent magic items offer too many ways to increase alpha-strike accuracy and damage](#), and [the monsters are too simplistic, luck-based, and RNG-gated for my liking](#).

What Do I Like About 13th Age 2e?

I think that 13th Age's greatest strength is its ability to provide tactical combat without a battle map. Sometimes, whether I am a player or a GM, I want to be able to run tactical combats without having to worry about preparing a map, outlining boundaries of terrain and cover, and creating tokens.

Similarly, I recognize that this is a niche preference, but I am an immense fan of the level-based numbers scaling. It is JRPG-like in a manner that I find very pleasing and exciting. I love how a 1st-level Twin Arrows ranger shoots for 1d6+4; and then, at 10th level, with a vanilla +3 longbow, hits for 10d6+6+6+6+30+3, average 92, around ~12 times as much. It is goofy, **but in a good way**, and I like that.

I also like magic item power management at higher levels, though I recognize that this is heavily dependent on the magic items that the PCs actually have. I would like it if magic item powers were more internally balanced, with magic item power management becoming a core part of decision-making, though I understand that this is also a very niche preference.

How My Player and I Playtest

I have been playtesting various RPGs that feature some element of tactical combat. These usually involve a grid, but some do not. Most use traditional rolled initiative; other systems prefer alternating, nominative, semi- "popcorn"-type initiative. Some have traditional attrition of character ability resources over the course of a workday, while others have no character abilities that are ever expended in a workday. I am familiar with a number of schemes.

I playtest these RPGs by, essentially, stress-testing them. There is one other person with me. Sometimes, I am the player, and sometimes, I am the GM, but either way, one player controls the entire party. The focus of our playtests is character optimization (e.g. picking the options that we think will be most effective for a desired playstyle), tactical play with full transparency of encounter stipulations and statistics on both sides (e.g. the player knows enemy statistics and takes actions accordingly, and the GM likewise knows PC statistics and takes actions accordingly, to focus fire on an ideal target and avoid immunities), and generally pushing the game's math to its limits.

Here, doing the "cool thing" is of virtually no importance whatsoever. Much higher on the priority list is trying to undertake tactically efficient courses of action. The only truly forbidden tactic is for a monster or NPC to target a dying PC when other, non-dying PCs could be targeted instead; this is easy enough to concretely identify and adjudicate, and it ensures that combat is not just a race for the enemy side to execute a single PC.

If the playtest includes clearly math-spiking options, I consider it important to playtest and showcase them, because I do not find them particularly good for a game's balance. I am under the impression that most other people will test the game "normally," with minimal focus on optimization, so I do something different.

Under my own, specific mindset, I think that gameplay-balance-stretching options are inherently unfun, because I think that they make the optimized metagame gravitate towards them.

Rigor

I have very high standards for mechanical rigor in grid-based tactical combat games. I am firmly in the camp of removing rules ambiguities and reducing reliance on GM fiat.

Why RPGs?

I prefer tabletop RPGs to wargames, board games, and video games because, at the end of the metaphorical day, I still like to roleplay. I prioritize mechanical, tactical concerns over roleplaying, but I genuinely enjoy the opportunity to portray characters and settings.

Non-Playtest Campaigns?

My non-playtest campaigns, whether as a player or as a GM, have been one-on-one, too. Sometimes, I control the whole party, even as (especially as) I play out combat on a grid. Here is [the conclusion of one campaign](#) I was very honored to have played in.

Opening Fiction (Optional)

[Transferred to a separate pastebin.](#)