

“A critical hit!”
—Kenneth Hite, author of *Tour de Lovecraft*



HAMLET'S HIT POINTS

ROBIN D. LAWS

UNLOCK THE GAME-MASTERING POWER
OF THREE CLASSIC TALES



Praise for *Hamlet's Hit Points*

A critical hit! Whether you approach *Hamlet's Hit Points* as a writer, as a critic, as a film buff, or as a gamer, you'll find that Robin Laws is there ahead of you, pointing the way. An unparalleled game designer and best-of-breed game master, Robin reminds us that narrative is worth it: worth creating, worth studying, and worth nurturing in any format, with or without dice.

—Kenneth Hite
Author, *Tour de Lovecraft*

In skilled hands, roleplaying games are powerful lenses through which we can see our world and our lives in fresh ways. Robin Laws applies a lens to the lens, zooming in with Hubble-like intensity to expose the rich relationship between interactive stories and their participants.

—John Scott Tynes
Game Designer, *Puppetland* and *Unknown Armies*

Robin Laws cannot see a game-box without thinking outside it.

—James Wallis

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Things We Think About Games
by Will Hindmarch & Jeff Tidball

The Bones: Us and Our Dice
edited by Will Hindmarch

HAMLET'S HIT POINTS

**What Three Classic Narratives
Tell Us About
Roleplaying Games**

ROBIN D. LAWS

with Illustrations by Craig S. Grant



GAMEPLAYWRIGHT PRESS

A NOTE ABOUT THIS PDF'S FORMATTING

This PDF edition of *Hamlet's Hit Points* is formatted—and thus, paginated—differently from the book's print edition. Specifically, in the three story analyses here, beat maps that graphically depict several beats in succession have been eliminated in favor of single icon-and-arrow combinations per beat. We've done this because on many PDF readers viewing an entire two-page spread at once is impractical, but to do so is necessary to make easy sense of the print edition's multi-beat maps. However, because you may want to have it, a separate PDF that is identical to the print version, formatted in spreads rather than single pages in order to preserve the print edition's exact appearance, has been made available in parallel with this version. In addition, a third PDF presents all of each story's beats as single, massive, one-page maps.

If you acquired this PDF from a legitimate source, all three files should have been provided as a bundle. If you did not receive all three PDFs, please contact service@gameplaywright.net or your PDF's vendor.

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Illustrations © 2010, 2015 Craig S. Grant
Design © 2010, 2015 Gameplaywright LLP

The icons that identify the beat types described in *Hamlet's Hit Points* have been released under a Creative Commons license. We hope you'll use them to create beat maps of your own. For more information and to download these graphics, visit gameplaywright.net/hamlets-hit-points.

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HOW TO PRETEND YOU'VE READ THIS BOOK

Hamlet's Hit Points creates a system for analyzing stories tuned to the needs of roleplaying gamers. As such it assumes a basic familiarity with roleplaying terms and techniques.

With its system of beat analysis, you can track a narrative's moment-to-moment shifts in emotional momentum. Beat analysis builds itself around the following very basic fact:

Stories engage our attention by constantly modulating our emotional responses.

As observations go, this one is glaringly obvious, once stated. Yet we in the roleplaying community have paid it surprisingly little heed over the nearly forty years of our form's existence.

The opening essay, "Surprised By Story," finds a historical explanation for our collective neglect of narrative fundamentals.

The "Beat Analysis" section lays out the building blocks of our story breakdown system. It divides stories into a series of separate moments, or beats. Beats fall into nine categories: two primary types and seven less common ones. Each beat resolves in a way that alters or reinforces the audience's responses. Most move us either toward hope or fear, with the odd beat resolving ambiguously.

"Robin Laws cannot see a game-box without thinking outside it."

—James Wallis



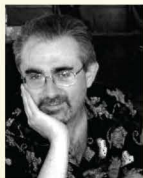
SEE YOUR STORIES LIKE NEVER BEFORE

Hamlet's Hit Points presents a toolkit that helps make storytelling in any RPG easier and more fun by classifying story beats and letting you track their ups and downs from hope to fear and back.

Armed with these tools, you'll be equipped to lay compelling track for an emotional roller-coaster that will keep everyone at your game table involved, excited, riveted.

In these pages, you'll find definitions of nine critical story beats. You'll read about the relationships between those beats. You'll also find complete analyses of three stories you know already—*Hamlet*, *Casablanca*, and *Dr. No*—to show you how the system works.

Written with roleplayers in mind, *Hamlet's Hit Points* is an indispensable tool for understanding stories, in games and everywhere else.



Robin D. Laws wrote *Robin's Laws Of Good Game Mastering*; designed *Feng Shui*, *The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game*, *HeroQuest*, *The Esoterrorists*, and *Skulduggery*; and contributed to both the third and fourth editions of the *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*.

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