The Burning Wheel
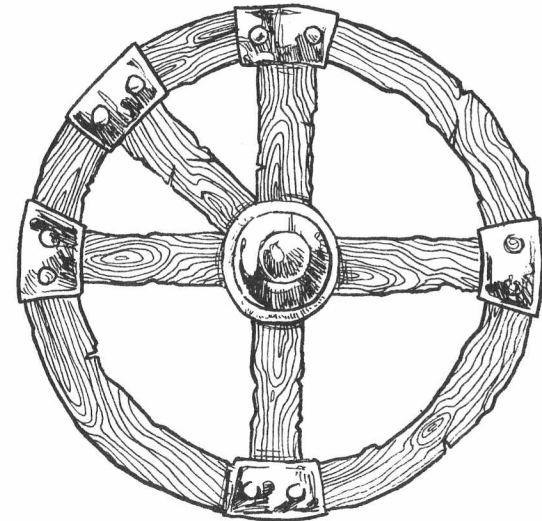
Fantasy
Roleplaying
System

the Burning Wheel

Fantasy Roleplaying System
Revised Edition

Credit Due

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E
...the spotlight in which I shine and by which I am guided

Extra Thank You On Top
To Ken Hite who, I believe, has impeccable taste. His warm and lugubrious support has been a balm to soothe the spirit during the many wearying hours of revising this game. If you like this game, and you see Ken at a con, say a polite, "Thank you."

A Special Nod
...to Barbara Tuchman, who has shown me how to be a historian (of sorts) and still have an opinion; and also to Ursula K. Le Guin for continuing to inspire me. She has spoken as if she were a medium of my very voice: "It's been a joy for me to go back.... What I thought was going to happen isn't what's happening, people aren't who—or what—I thought they were, and I lose my way [where] I thought I knew [the path] by heart. ...things change: authors and wizards can't be trusted: nobody can explain a dragon." —from the introduction to the *Tales of Earthsea*.

Burning Wheel on the Web
www.burningwheel.org
www.indie-rpgs.com
www.nerdnyc.com
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Once again, this book is dedicated to my brother, Hart. This time for different reasons: In hopes that you one day see fiction—whether written or created ad hoc at the table—as vital to understanding who we truly are: our past fears, our present needs and our dreams of the future.
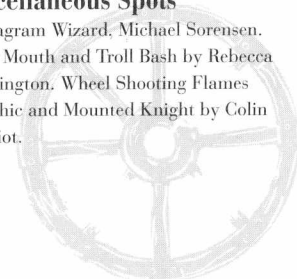
Contents

the Hub of the Wheel

Spokes

the Rim

the Hub of the Wheel

But need alone is not enough to set power free: there must be knowledge.

—Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wizard of Earthsea*
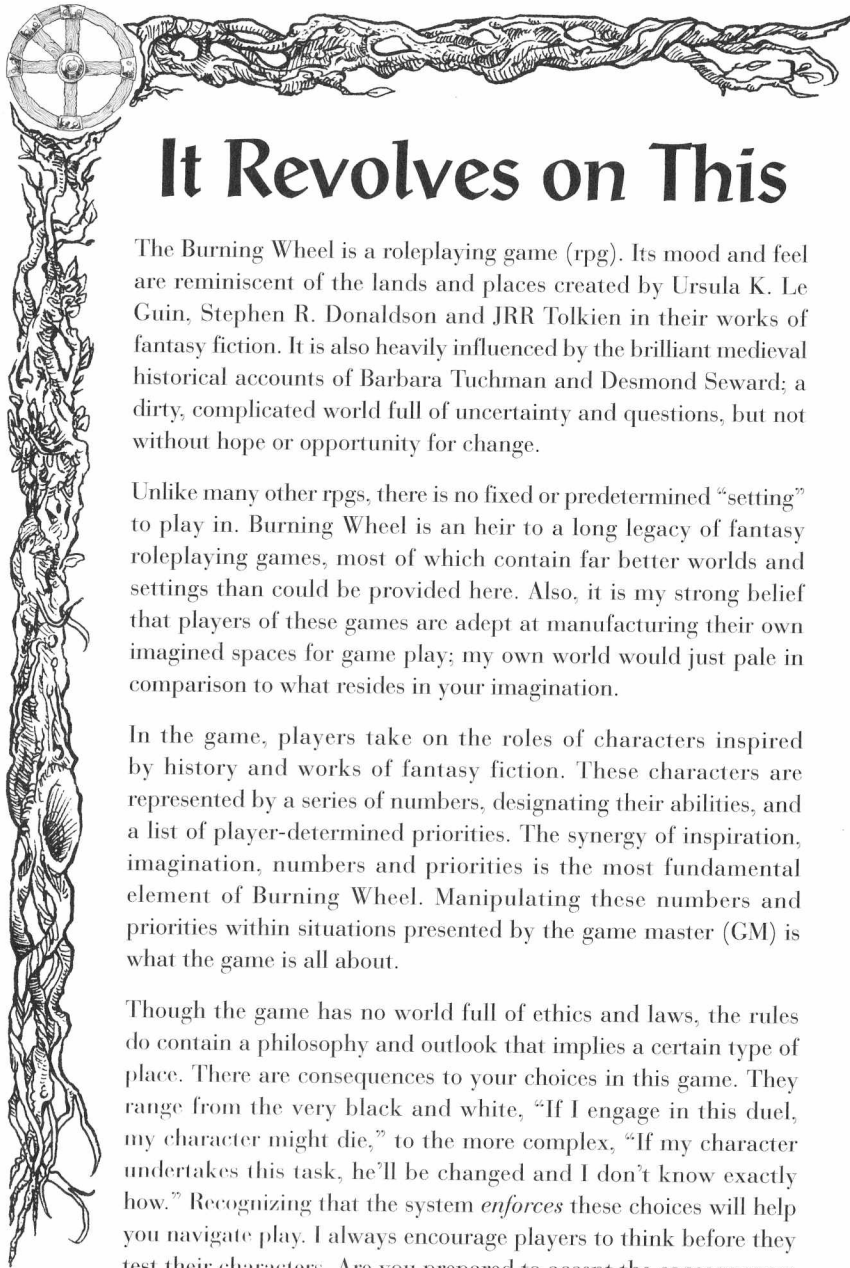
It Revolves on This

The Burning Wheel is a roleplaying game (rpg). Its mood and feel are reminiscent of the lands and places created by Ursula K. Le Guin, Stephen R. Donaldson and JRR Tolkien in their works of fantasy fiction. It is also heavily influenced by the brilliant medieval historical accounts of Barbara Tuchman and Desmond Seward; a dirty, complicated world full of uncertainty and questions, but not without hope or opportunity for change.

Unlike many other rpgs, there is no fixed or predetermined "setting" to play in. Burning Wheel is an heir to a long legacy of fantasy roleplaying games, most of which contain far better worlds and settings than could be provided here. Also, it is my strong belief that players of these games are adept at manufacturing their own imagined spaces for game play; my own world would just pale in comparison to what resides in your imagination.

In the game, players take on the roles of characters inspired by history and works of fantasy fiction. These characters are represented by a series of numbers, designating their abilities, and a list of player-determined priorities. The synergy of inspiration, imagination, numbers and priorities is the most fundamental element of Burning Wheel. Manipulating these numbers and priorities within situations presented by the game master (GM) is what the game is all about.

Though the game has no world full of ethics and laws, the rules do contain a philosophy and outlook that implies a certain type of place. There are consequences to your choices in this game. They range from the very black and white, "If I engage in this duel, my character might die," to the more complex, "If my character undertakes this task, he'll be changed and I don't know exactly how." Recognizing that the system *enforces* these choices will help you navigate play. I always encourage players to think before they test their characters. Are you prepared to accept the consequences of your actions?

The game mechanical consequences of the players' decisions are described in the following sections and in the Character Burner. The ethical and moral ramifications are left to you.

Voices in My Head

As you read through the rules, you will encounter three little imps. These imps represent the author's voice and disposition in certain parts of the text.

Basic rules text is not preceded by any of the imps. This "rules voice" is used to convey most of the information in the game. The imps offer comment on the rules.

This character indicates that I am asking the reader to take note. The text following him is written in my voice, rather than the rules voice. I call this guy the *Instructor*. You can call him "Luke" if you want to. For example: "Thanks Luke, that was very helpful!"

This is the *Ranting Imp*. He rears his ugly head whenever I am yelling about something. This usually comes in the form of harsh advice or warnings regarding the limits of Burning Wheel. Take what he says with a grain of salt. For example, "I wish Luke would shut up!"

The *Weeper* is a strange one, prone to outbursts of tears at the oddest times; sometimes tears of sadness, sometimes fear, and sometimes tears of joy. He frequently squirts when death or something else very scary is near. "What's he carrying on about now?"

The Flow of the Game

Burning Wheel is played by people sitting around a table in a group—face to face with your friends. It is, inherently, a social game. The players interact with one another to come to decisions and have the characters undertake actions.

One of you must be the GM and play the roles of all of those characters not taken on by other players. The GM also guides the action and pacing of the events of the story at hand; he arbitrates rules calls and interpretations so that play progresses smoothly.

Everyone else plays a protagonist (aka, "a character") in the story. Even if the players decide to take on the roles of destitute wastrels, no matter how unsavory, their exploits are the main focus of play. The conflicts of the characters' aforementioned priorities creates situations for the players to resolve, and resolving conflicts (and creating new ones) is what play is all about.

As conflicts develop, the players use their characters' abilities to overcome and survive. To do this, dice are rolled and the results interpreted via the rules presented in this book.

Sheets of Paper

Each player is required to keep a written record of his character. Character sheets are provided in the Character Burner and on www.burningwheel.org for just this purpose. Characters in Burning Wheel evolve and grow as play progresses, so I recommend using a pencil to mark the sheet. There are a few other sheets used in play to keep track of moment to moment stuff, but they'll be discussed later down the line.

The GM has the task of keeping notes on a series of characters that he is using in play. These don't need to be fully fleshed out—a few numbers usually suffice. But there are certain characters that will need to be described fully in order to give them their due in play.

Dice

D6

Burning Wheel uses common six-sided dice for all rolls. From here on out, these dice are referred to as D6. (Which is gamer-talk for "six-sides.") Groups of them are referred to as 3D6, 4D6, 5D6 or 3D, 4D, 5D for short. How's that for confusing gamer parlance?

Dice in Burning Wheel are rolled in handfuls (or pools) of usually three to six dice. In each roll, every die is counted as its own result, either a "yes" or a "no." The more "yeses" the better. Any die that comes up as a "no" result is a traitor to your cause and doesn't count toward success.

For the purposes of explaining the rules, a "yes" result is a 4, 5 or 6 on a die. A "no" result is a 1, 2, 3. (Traitors!) There are only two instances where this changes, and these will be discussed later.

"Yes"/Successes "No"/Failed Dice (traitors!)
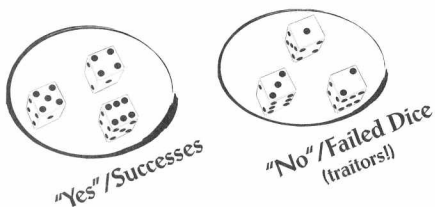
Difficulty Number

The number needed for the die to achieve the "yes" result is called the target number or *difficulty number*.

Successes

When a die comes up a 4 or higher, we call it a success. After the dice are rolled, count up all your successes.

Rolling a handful of five dice, my dismal luck gives me a 1, 2, 2, 4, 5 result. Two of the dice came up 4 or higher, thus I rolled two successes.

When a player rolls dice, he needs successes so that his character passes the tests set before him in the game.

Ability Ratings

Exponent

The number next to your character's stats, attributes and skills indicates how many dice to roll when that ability is called upon. We here at BWHQ call that number the *exponent* of the ability because it is the representative of the character's actual ability in that area (not because it stands for X to the Nth power). Throughout the text you'll see me refer to an ability as exponent 3. That's just me saying, "You roll three dice for that, bub."
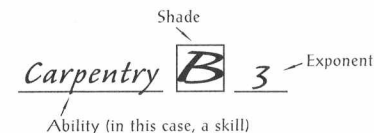
Carpentry **B** *3*

When I want to test my character's Carpentry skill—my character has got to reinforce this door before the Orcs come!—I roll three dice.

Expertise by Exponent

Below is a list of exponents (exp) in Burning Wheel and what they imply about the ability they represent. Hopefully, this will help you get a feel for the system:

Exp 1 is naturally disinclined, crippled or utterly incompetent
Exp 2 is untrained, raw, weak or unpracticed ability
Exp 3 is nominally trained and practiced
Exp 4 is competent; everyday stuff doesn't pose a challenge
Exp 5 is expert
Exp 6 is near mastery
Exp 7 is excellence defined
Exp 8 is total mastery, complete understanding
Exp 9 is uncanny; incomprehensibly good
Exp 10 is as near perfection as the system allows
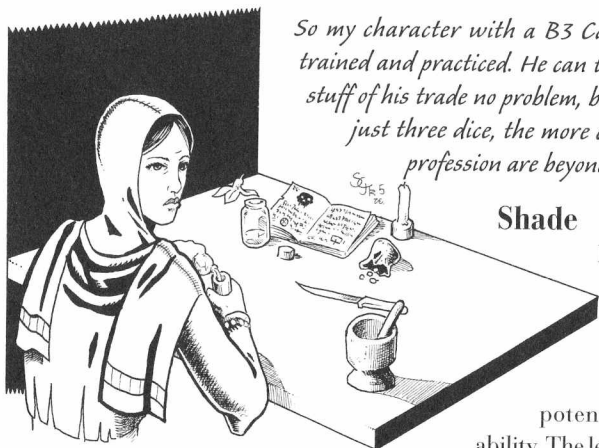
So my character with a B3 Carpentry is considered trained and practiced. He can take care of all the basic stuff of his trade no problem, but, as you will see, with just three dice, the more complex practices of his profession are beyond his reach.

Shade

Every ability number in Burning Wheel is accompanied by a letter. This letter indicates the "level of potential," or *shade*, of that ability. The letters, in turn, correspond to both a color and a number. B is black shade and means the player rolling for that ability needs 4s or better for successes. G is gray shade and needs 3s or better for successes. W is white shade and needs 2s or better.

Having a G or W shade ability is the only time the difficulty number for a roll varies from 4 (or B shade). Changing an ability's shade is discussed in the Character Burner and in the Artha section of this book.

When to Roll

Burning Wheel is very much a game. While players undertake the roles of their characters and embellish their actions with performance and description, rolling the dice determines success or failure and, hence, where the story goes.

Tests

When a player takes an action with his character where the result is uncertain, an ability is tested. When we need to know how well, how much or how quickly a character performs in game, we roll the dice.

I need to know how well I reinforce the door. How much of an impediment does it provide against the onrushing Orcs? I roll my character's Carpentry dice to determine that result.

These instances are called tests, and they are the teeth in the gears of this game. Without tests, nothing catches and moves forward. In fact, in a situation involving conflict, a test is *required*. A player cannot narrate an act in the game that will affect another character without testing an ability to back it up.

Testing abilities is a good thing! Not only do they drive the story by providing tangible results for our embellishments and performances, they allow the character a chance to improve his abilities and attain greater heights.

Obstacles to Overcome

So now we know how to test an ability—roll the number of dice indicated, 4s or better count as successes, the more successes the better. Why is that?

Players need to generate successes in order to pass more difficult tests—tests that require multiple successes to overcome. The number of successes needed to pass a test is called the *obstacle (Ob)*. It is the GM's role to assign appropriate obstacles based on the inherent complexity of the task at hand.

The GM determines that reinforcing a door is a Routine task for a carpenter. Therefore, it's an Ob 2 test. I need to roll two successes on the three dice of my character's Carpentry skill.

The higher the obstacle, the more difficult the test, and the more skilled and lucky the character will need to be to pass it:

Difficulty by Obstacle

Ob 1	Easy
Ob 2	Routine
Ob 3	Difficult
Ob 4	Extremely Difficult
Ob 5	Master-level
Ob 6	Heroic Effort
Ob 7	Ludicrously Difficult
Ob 8	Nearly Impossible
Ob 9	Phenomenally Difficult
Ob 10	Miraculous

Obstacles can be increased (but never decreased) by extenuating circumstances—like carrying a baby in a papoose on your back in a sword fight. That's +1 Ob.

You might have noticed that one can't roll 4, 5 or 6 successes on three dice. It is the philosophy of the system that some tasks are either too complex to accomplish without help, or simply too difficult to accomplish at all. Sometimes, high obstacles will force players to think of another way around.

Open-Ended Tests

Certain tests in Burning Wheel are described as "open-ended." This means that any *6s* rolled allow the player to pick up *another* die and roll it to try to generate another success.

Tests for Perception, Steel, Faith, and any ability considered "magical" (Dwarven Arts, Elven Skill Songs and Sorcery, for example) are all open-ended. Anything can happen.

Basic Dice in Brief

- We roll dice when a conflict arises.

- The number of dice rolled is determined by the character's ability that applies to the conflict. You don't often use Cooking to win a brawl, know what I mean?

- The number of dice thrown is equal to the number next to the ability. This is called the exponent.

- For the majority of tests, 4s and better are *successes*. 3s and lower are *traitors*. This number is determined by the ability's shade.

- The obstacle is the inherent difficulty of the task being attempted. You need successes equal to the *obstacle* to pass the test.

- Open-ended rolls— 6s on Perception, Faith, Steel and magic-type tests allow you to pick up another die and roll it again, hopefully adding more successes. ⊕
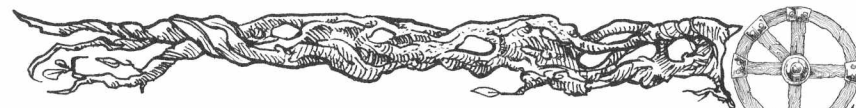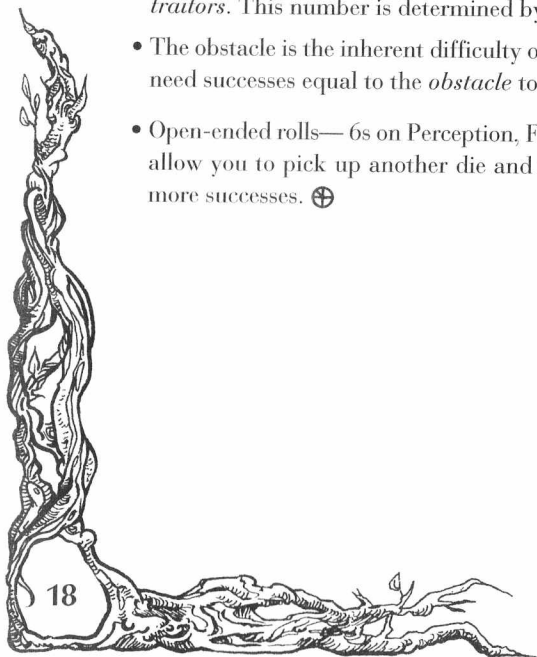
Elements of Character

Burning Wheel is a gritty game. It is designed so the characters appear and "feel" like human beings (or a similar analog). They bleed, strain and sweat—they have limitations, but are also lucky and miraculous.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, characters are the most important part of Burning Wheel. They are the players' incarnations in the game, and nothing happens in the game world that doesn't involve a player character. I won't bore you here with rpg theory, though. Instead, let's take a look at what comprises a character in this system: He has *stats*, *attributes* and *skills*; *Beliefs*, *Instincts* and *traits*; *Resources*, *relationships*, *reputation*, *affiliations* and *Circles*; and of course, he's got his *gear* and stuff that he totes around with him.

All of these elements affect how the character is played, and thus how the game is shaped by the character's actions. To help you get a feel for the system, these aspects are described in general terms in the following section. Individual uses of the abilities are described in detail in later sections.

Stats

There are six stats to describe a character's basic mental and physical composition in Burning Wheel: Will, Perception, Agility, Speed, Power and Forte.

Will

Will is the social stat—it represents the character's strength of mind, empathy and social intelligence. It's not often rolled directly in game, but it does factor heavily into a number of skills and attributes.

Perception

Perception is the awareness and mental acuity stat. It's rolled all the time in game. Players always have their characters searching for information or clues, and this is the stat tested in those situations.

Agility

Agility represents the hand-eye coordination of the character. It is tested when a character must keep hold of something, snatch something or toss an object. It is also the basis for nearly all martial skills.

Speed

This quirky stat represents the "body control" of the character—how fast he moves and how coordinated he is overall. It's rolled all the time in game, from fleeing your enemies to ducking a blow. It is also the basis for a number of skills.

Power

Power is the inevitable "physical strength" stat. It's rolled in game when the character has to push something over or grapple with someone. It is also the basis for damage in melee attacks.

Forte

Forte (pronounced "FORT") represents the character's physical mettle—how tough and durable he is. Forte is rarely rolled in game, but it is a part of two crucial attributes, Health and Mortal Wound.

Attributes

Attributes are derived from stats in various ways, and are used for more subtle tests than the raw instances described above. They can also be avenues to additional abilities, available only to certain characters.

Health

The Health attribute is derived from Will and Forte. It is used in game to recover from injury and resist the effects of pain and fatigue.

Reflexes

The Reflexes attribute is factored from Perception, Agility and Speed. It is used to determine how often a character acts in a Burning Wheel fight. Reflexes isn't tested like other abilities, it is simply a marker.

Steel

Steel is a complex attribute that combines factors from many different stats and elements of the character's background to determine how steady a character's nerves are. Steel has its own section and is discussed in detail there.

Emotional Attributes

Many characters possess an additional ability tied into their emotional makeup: Faith, Grief, Greed and Hatred are a few examples. These attributes are factored by answering questions about the character, and are tested in special circumstances in game. Emotional Attributes have their own section in the Burning Wheel and are further detailed in the individual lifepath chapters in the Character Burner.

Mortal Wound

Mortal Wound combines Power and Forte to set the point at which the character dies in the injury mechanics. Mortal Wound is never tested; like Reflexes, it is just a marker.

Skills

In Burning Wheel, a skill is a specialized field of knowledge or particular technique known by the character. A skill allows a character to achieve his goals more easily than using stats. Examples of skills include: Animal Husbandry, Mending, Sword, Sorcery and Ugly Truth.

Characters tend to have many skills—from four to twelve is normal. Twenty is not unheard of.

Beliefs

A player must determine the three top priorities for his character. These are fundamental ideas important to the character. They are a combination of the outlook of the character and the goals of the player.

"There is nothing to life but brutality" is an example of a Belief.

Using Beliefs is discussed in their own chapter in this book. Creating them is described in the Character Burner

Instincts

Instincts are similar to Beliefs—they are player-chosen priorities and reactions for the character. They are based on the character's pre-game experiences and have a very tangible game-mechanical function.

An Instinct is essentially an "if/then" statement for the character's behavior. "If surprised, I draw my sword." The player is allowed to program these actions and reactions into his character. Therefore, he can be assured that his character will react within certain parameters whether the player explicitly states it or not at.

Think of them as a hardwired reaction from training and experience (and a little insurance the player takes out against the GM).

Instincts have their own section in this book. Creating them is discussed in the Character Burner.

Traits

Traits are quirks and odd abilities that the character acquires through the course of his "life." A player starts by purchasing traits in character burning, but they will also be earned in play.

Traits can affect a character's personality, his appearance, or even grant special abilities. Where Beliefs and Instincts are relatively loosely defined, the role of traits in game is mechanically fixed.

Using traits is discussed in the Burning Wheel, creating and purchasing them is talked about in the Character Burner.

Resources and Circles

Resources

Whether wealthy or destitute, every character is assigned a Resources ability. Its starting rank is determined by how the player spent his character's resource points in character burning. Thereafter, it is used like a skill in game. Its function is to determine how economically and financially viable a character is: Can he afford to buy property? Can he keep his equipment in repair? Is he forced to beg for food and lodging? The Resources ability allows all of this to be determined by a roll of the dice. No need to keep track of pennies unless you really want to!

Circles

Who does the character know from his days as an apprentice? Can he call on his former gang mates for help? Such questions are answered using the Circles ability. It's a measure of the character's social influence, and its scope is shaped by the character's lifepaths.

Gear and Stuff

No fantasy roleplaying game would be complete without *stuff*. Swords, armor, books, spells, clothes, shoes, lanterns, etc. All of the bits and pieces to make it feel right. In the game, gear augments an ability or reduces (or increases) a penalty. Swords augment Power when a character is trying to kill something. Lanterns obviate penalties for Perception tests in darkness. Clothes keep those social skill test obstacles down.

Gear is initially acquired in character burning. Once in game, it can be purchased via a Resources test, or even just granted by the GM during appropriate scenes. A knight is granted a new sword and suit of armor by his liege, or a magic helmet is found in the burial mound of a long-dead god, for example.

Mostly though, gear and stuff are bits of window dressing that add spice and detail to the shared imagined space.

Magic

The last element of the game that needs to be mentioned is magic. In Burning Wheel, it comes in many forms.

Magic makes possible what could not normally be done by human physical means or ingenuity. Not simply building the pyramids or preserving bodies for thousands of years, but sealing the tombs with unbreakable spells and cursing those who penetrate the depths to die inexplicable deaths.

It's the unexplainable and the potent—mystical power over the elements. In game, this process is represented by Emotional Attributes—Faith, Grief, Hatred and Greed—and various magical skills like Summoning, Enchanting and Sorcery.

When tested, these abilities have some weird effect in game. The mechanics of these various bits are discussed in their individual sections. But before we discuss that madness, we've got to look at some of the more mundane mechanics. ⊕
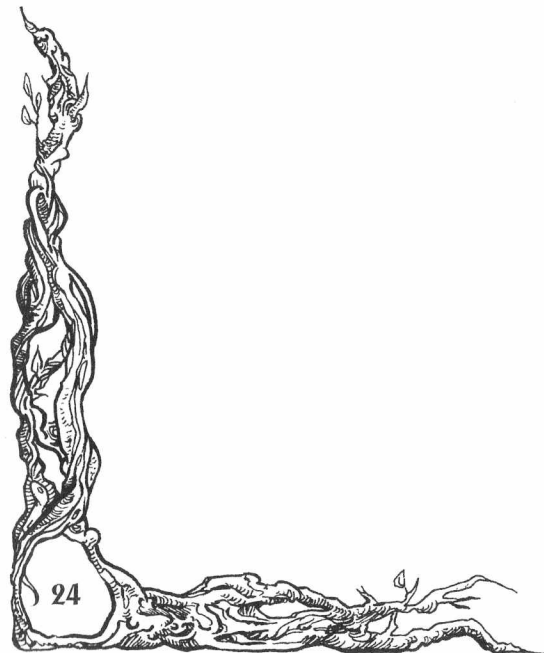
the Spokes
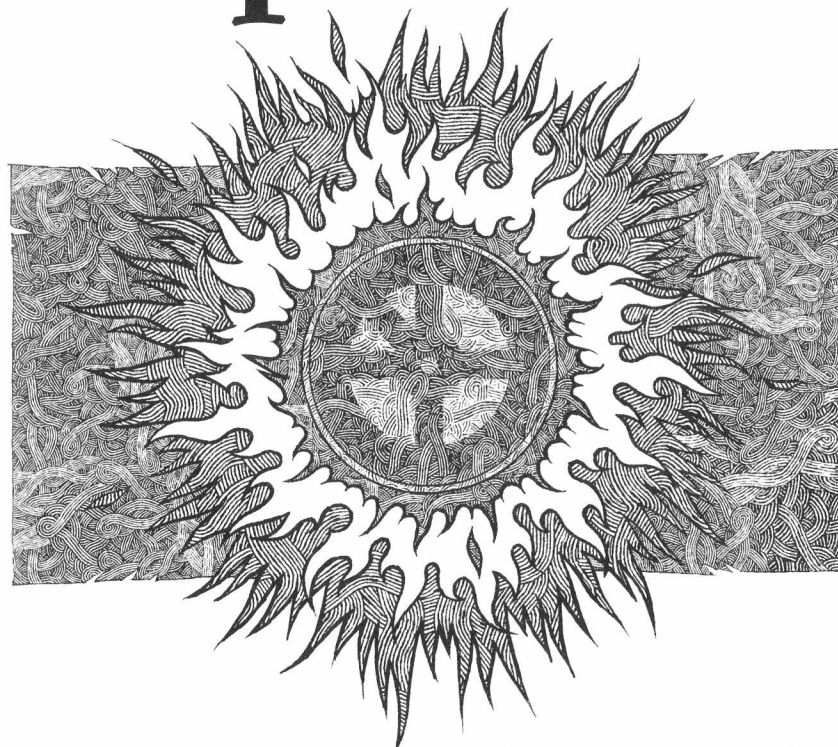
Who then may trust the dice at Fortune's throw? Who joins in worldly struggles such as these will be, when least prepared for it, laid low.

—Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

Testing Your Abilities

Burning Wheel is very much a *game* to be played and manipulated for fun (and profit, sort of). Dice rolls called for by the GM and players are the heart of play. These are tests. They determine the results of conflicts and help drive the story.

Invariably, a test involves one of a character's abilities. Whether it's a Health test to recover from an injury, a Sorcery test to learn a new spell or a Perception test to spot a pursuer, these are the very fabric of the game. Characters + Tests = Game.

In the context of the system, there are a few ways to roll dice to overcome obstacles. How the successes are counted depends heavily on the outcome desired and the type of conflict involved. The following section discusses the basic test mechanics, plus the other ways we manipulate the dice pools and obstacles.

Tasks

In Burning Wheel, tests revolve around the characters trying to complete tasks. A task is a measurable, finite and quantifiable act performed by a character: Attacking someone with a sword, learning a spell or recovering from an injury are all applicable tasks for abilities.

Inappropriate tasks are: "I kill him!" or "I convince him." After such pronouncements, the first question any Burning Wheel player asks should be: How? By what means? The answer, "I stab him with my knife," is an appropriate task description for a murderous character. "I persuade him to take my side by explaining the affair with his wife" is appropriate in the second case.

Intent

You see, "I kill him" isn't a task, it's an intent. When declaring an action for a character, players must state both the *task* they are undertaking and the *intent* of the act.

When a player states "I kill him!" we know his intent. By describing how his character will undertake this intent, he defines the task. Clearly stating and linking the task and intent allows player and GM to quickly determine what ability needs to be tested.

The results, whether or not the target actually dies from the blow—as desired by the attacker—is determined by the results of a die roll. Roll well, and the character comes closer to accomplishing the stated intent.

Descriptions of the task are vital. Through them we know which mechanics to apply; acknowledging the intent allows the results of the application to be properly interpreted.

What Ability do I Roll?

Once the description of the task and intent has been stated at the table, the ability needed to complete that action is usually pretty obvious. Stabbing someone is going to require a Brawling or Knife test, convincing another character requires a Persuasion or Falsehood test.

The general bounds of a character's abilities are described in the previous section, Element of Character. Use those descriptions to judge under which ability a test falls.

If it is ever unclear what ability to roll, the GM should question the player. Get him to describe his actions in detail, until what needs to happen is clear to both parties. Once the ability to be tested is established, then the dice are rolled.

Standard Tests

In a standard test, *the GM sets the obstacle* based on how difficult he feels the test is. A player rolls his character's ability and needs to come up with a number of successes *equal* to the obstacle. Meeting the obstacle passes the test.

The player wants his character to pick a lock. The GM thinks this is a tough lock. Therefore, he sets the obstacle at 3. The player needs to roll three or more successes on his character's skill in order to successfully pick the lock.

Versus Tests

When two characters come into opposition, a *versus test* is made—one ability against the other. The character with *more* successes wins the contest.

Moqtada is haggling with a shipwright. I test his G5 Haggling against the shipwright's B5. I roll four successes on my dice, the GM rolls three successes for the shipwright. My character, Moqtada, wins the test.

If one character is an aggressor by intent and one is a defender, ties go to the defender. If both characters are aggressors, a tie means that neither side has gained an edge and they are deadlocked. Either the tie must be accepted as the result or a trait must be called on to break it.

If an assassin is sneaking into a compound, he tests his Stealthy skill. A night watchman tests his Observation skill to spot him. If a tie results, the watchman wins the test—he is the "defending" character.

If, on the other hand, a burglar is caught in a raid at his favorite local bar, the player tests his Inconspicuous versus the watch's Observation. If a tie results, the burglar is the passive character, therefore he wins the test.

Open Tests

Occasionally, a test has no fixed obstacle. It is simply a matter of testing an ability and noting *how many* successes are generated. This is often the case for research, searching an area or other knowledge-based skills. The amount of information distributed by the GM is directly dependent on the number of successes generated.

Thor asks the GM what his character can remember about the layout of his home village. Can he find the doctor's residence in the dark? He tests his character's Village-wise skill and comes up with two successes. This is pretty routine knowledge, so the GM nods the affirmative and describes the residence.

The information available in open tests is rated and judged along the standard obstacle difficulty paradigm. One success is obvious stuff, five successes is expert knowledge, and ten successes is a miraculous understanding.

Linked Tests

Once in a while, the player characters will find themselves in a long-term or complex operation that requires many skills or abilities to overcome.

Sneaking out of a harbor and sailing through pirate-infested waters to a remote island, for example.

Linked tests can be performed by a single character with many skills, but more often they are undertaken by multiple characters complementing each other.

Note that in linked tests, the *task happens across time*—each test of skill comes at a certain juncture and leads to the next. It doesn't all happen at once.

Failure Behind, Success Ahead

When rolling for a linked test, if the character who tested before your character merely *met* his obstacle, you gain no benefit. If he *exceeded* his obstacle, your character gains a +1D advantage for his portion of the test. If the character who tested before you *failed* his test, then the obstacle for your portion is increased by one.

The characters are sneaking a ship out of a harbor and sailing through pirate-infested waters to a remote island. The GM determines that this stated intent is going to require three tests: The Orc pirate must pass a Piloting test, the Priest Navigator must then pass a Navigation test and the Temple Guardian will test his Observation as he watches for pirates. In this case the Orc-player barely meets his obstacle. This doesn't affect the Navigator, who fails anyway. Luckily, the aged Temple Guardian passes his test, despite the increased obstacle.

The final result is that the ship finds its way to the island (success) but approaches from the wrong angle (failure)—she's spotted by pirates in the bay at the same time she spots them (success). The chase is on!

Time and Linked Tests

As you can see, linked tests are also a device that allows players to use the task resolution system to accomplish goals of a broader scope. Rather than just maneuvering a ship, a linked test can be used for a whole journey—which can be resolved within just a few minutes play.

Advantage and Disadvantage

The conditions surrounding a test can modify the base obstacle. Trying to shove someone off a roof is a versus Power test. If the roof is slippery, this is an *advantage* to the pusher. Such advantages give a bonus to the attacker.

Or, conversely, it's pretty easy to spot someone sitting quietly in the corner of a room. But if the room is dark, and there is a howling wind blowing through the windows, these conditions make it harder to spot that person. In Burning Wheel terms, the darkness and wind are *disadvantages* for the spotting character.
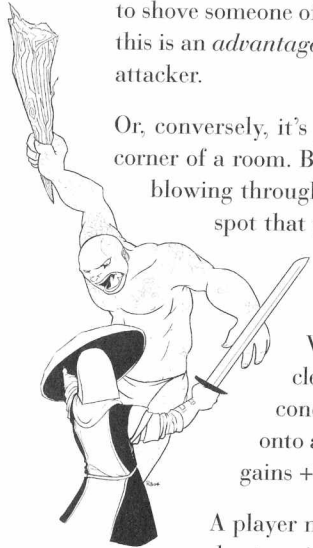
Advantage

Whenever a player can claim his character has a clear *advantage* over his target—definitely favorable conditions like higher ground, pushing your opponent onto an ice patch or a weight advantage in wrestling—he gains +1D to the ability being tested.

A player may only lobby for one +1D advantage per test. In order to gain this advantage, he must state how and why he deserves such a boon in one clear sentence—no situation lawyering.

A player wants his character to throw a rock and hit a soldier nearby. The character has an Agility of B4. The player declares: "I've got a good advantage standing on this cart, it's much easier to hit him." The GM agrees to this +1D advantage. Thus the player rolls 5D (4D+1D) vs Ob 1 (he needs one success to hit the soldier).

In the case of social skill tests, good roleplay, keen description or just good timing can earn the advantage die.

The GM has final say over what is and isn't an advantage. If he thinks the target of such a leveraged attack has equally beneficial advantages, then no bonus need be granted. The GM can also add additional advantage dice if he thinks the character is in a strong position. If he disagrees with the player regarding the nature or benefit of an advantage, then no bonus is granted.

Disadvantage

Anytime the GM feels that conditions put a character at a *disadvantage*, he must increase the obstacle of the test. Disadvantage comes from myriad sources—moving quickly, the light is dim, the air is smoky, the

ground is slippery, the character doesn't speak the language well or he's dressed inappropriately. All disadvantages are cumulative—each one increases the obstacle by one.

Normally, hitting someone with a rock at such close range is an Ob 1 test. But there is smoke from funeral pyres partially obscuring the character's vision (+1 Ob). This disadvantage bumps his obstacle up to 2 (Ob 2).

The final test would be Agility of B4 +1D (5D total) vs an Ob 2 from the smoke disadvantage.

Mixing Advantage and Disadvantage

As you may have noticed in the example above, advantage and disadvantage can be mixed. In fact, they should be. For each test, let players state their case for advantage. At the same time, the GM should lay out all the disadvantages present.

Also, advantage does not cancel disadvantage. They are both added into the test before the dice are cast. Obstacles go up to make tests harder, dice are added to make it easier.

Carefully, Patiently, Quickly: Allocating Successes

There are four methods a player may use when testing abilities: a test may be made *carefully, patiently, quickly,* or, by default, a test may be taken normally. Testing normally uses the standard rules described above. The other three methods each have a different effect on the roll or obstacle.

Carefully

Working carefully increases the time for a test by half, but it grants a +1D advantage. If a player wishes his character to work carefully, he must state this before the dice are rolled.

What this really means in game terms: In a time-sensitive test, the player may state he is working carefully. If he fails the test, the result indicates he has run out of time—the bomb goes off, the guards burst in, the old man dies, etc. By working carefully, the player is allowing the GM to introduce a *serious* time-based complication.

Patiently

Working patiently allows a player to allocate extra successes to the quality of the finished product. Extra successes can be used to embellish a description or add a flourish. They are largely a narrative device. However, many skills have their own rules for allocating extra successes and their effects. These are described in their individual sections.

Extra successes may be allocated to working patiently after the dice are rolled.

Quickly

Working quickly allows a character to complete a task in a shorter amount of time. Successes over the obstacle allocated to working quickly reduce the overall time by 10% each. Time for tests is discussed a little further on in this chapter.

Successes may be allocated to working quickly after the dice are rolled.

Mixing Methods

Players may have their characters work carefully, patiently and quickly all at once. To do so, they must describe their actions and inform the GM of how extra successes are being allocated. (Remember, if a player desires his character to work carefully, this must be stated before the dice are rolled.) Each extra success can be applied to either patiently or quickly.

Success

Now we have a grasp on a variety of ways to manipulate the die pools for a test, but what happens after the dice have come to rest and the successes are counted? If the successes equal or exceed the obstacle, the character has succeeded in his goal—completed the task at hand in the manner that the player described in the Task and Intent sections.

This is important enough to say again: Characters who are successful complete actions in the manner described by the player. A successful roll is sacrosanct in Burning Wheel and neither GM nor other players can change the fact that the act was successful. The GM may only embellish on or reinforce a successful ability test.

"I kill him!" Rich shouted. The GM responded, "Test your Sword skill. That's what you're using, right?" Rich rolled his B5 Sword skill and produced an amazing five successes. The GM momentarily consulted the Weapons Mechanics and Anatomy of Injury chapters. "Yep, that does it. He's a

goner. Describe it for us, please!" Rich jumped from his chair, "I decapitate him like so and then stand rigid while making Bruce Lee noises."

Or: Pete announces, "I want to poison the wizard." The GM arches his eyebrow, "How so?" Pete's got a plan: "Sneak into the kitchen disguised as a Hound Sergeant, then I'll Intimidate one of his slaves to take him poisoned tea in the guise of herbal medicine." The GM considers for a moment, "That's pretty good. You'll need to make a linked test with: Disguise, Inconspicuous and Intimidation, plus Hound-wise, I think." Pete nods and gets ready to burn some artha. If his rolls are successful, the wizard will be poisoned even though he didn't drop the poison directly in his mouth. Why? Because Pete stated his intent and described his task. The GM agreed and now the results hang in the balance. Pete's intent is the successful result.

The most important criteria for passing a test is that play moves in the direction of the success, even if only momentarily.

Intent and Success

Is the *intent successful*? That's another matter, largely left to the results of the roll.

"I want to humiliate him. They can't ignore me!" shouted Andy, enraged.

"How?" inquired the GM.

"I raise my voice and insult him in front of the entire party. I use my Conspicuous skill."

"Roll. Your obstacle is 3 to gain the attention of the crowd and be heard. Extra successes will go toward incensing them with the spectacle."

"Four successes."

"Your insults are heard flung across the room. Some eyebrows are raised. He stops walking away from you and turns, red in the face. It seems you have a moment in which you are the center of attention."

In this situation the player stated his intent and how he wanted his character to accomplish that intent. The GM set an obstacle and the result of success. The degree of success determines how much of that intent is translated into play. Had the player rolled three extra successes, the effect of his intent would have been more pronounced—perhaps the room would have fallen into an embarrassed hush. Processing success versus intent is a delicate and varied process, and is one of the prime duties of the GM.

Failure

When the dice are rolled and not enough successes are generated to meet the obstacle, the character has failed at this task. What does this mean? First and most directly, *the stated task goal and intent do not come to pass*. However, in failure, intent is more important than the task goal.

"I pick the lock quickly, before the guards come!" This is an easy intent to judge a failure for: The character doesn't get the lock open. Simple, right?

But what if that's changed a bit. Failure doesn't have to mean the lock doesn't open. Look at the intent: "before the guards come." What if the character opens the lock as the guards arrive? Suddenly, you have trouble—drama and action!

Two Directions

When a player sets out a task for his character and states his intent, it is the GM's job to inform him of the consequences of failure *before the dice are rolled*.

"If you fail this…" should often be heard at the table. Let the players know the consequences of their actions. Failure is not the end of the line, but it is complication that pushes the story in another direction.

Failure Complicates the Matter

The only time we should ever hear "Don't fail this roll or else!" at the table is when a character's life is on the line. When we've arrived at the very last chance and there are only two results: Live or die. However, in other situations, that dread phrase should not be uttered. It indicates a finality and a lack of options. In a medium as imaginative as roleplaying games, we rarely lack options. In less dire situations, the GM must present the players with the possible ramifications of their tests.

"You can try to pick the lock, but you don't have much time. It is highly likely that the guards will return before you finish."

Once that is said, everyone knows what's at stake and play can continue smoothly no matter what the result of the dice is.

Death is the Final Complication

Every so often the outcome of a failed test is going to result in the death of a character. While I don't love locking the fate of a character to a single die roll, if such a situation should arise, be sure to state precisely what will happen due to failure and why.

Let it Ride

One of the most important aspects of ability tests in game play in Burning Wheel is the Let it Ride rule: A player shall roll once for an applicable test and shall not roll again until conditions legitimately and drastically change. Neither GM nor player can call for a retest unless those conditions are met. *Successes from the initial roll count for all applicable situations in play.*

A GM cannot call for multiple rolls of the same ability to accomplish a player's stated intent. Nor can a player retest a failed roll simply because he failed. Tests must be distilled down to as few rolls as possible. The successes of those rolls ride across the entire situation, scene or session.

If a player failed a test or generated no successes, *this result stands.* If he was hot and got seven successes, *those* stand for the duration.

This is a hard, fast, fixed rule and is non-negotiable. If a player finds a GM calling for unnecessary retests, he is free to call him on cheating.

Thor rolls two successes for his character's Tracking skill. This allows him to track his quarry easily across the snowy ground. He tracks his quarry to the edge of town. Once he reaches the cobbled streets, the obstacle technically would jump above two (it's harder to track on windswept stone than on snow-covered paths). This increase in difficulty requires more successes than Thor currently has for Tracking, but the ability is not retested. Thor's character simply loses his quarry when he reaches town.

The Let it Ride rule is designed to protect players from GMs who constantly call for rerolls until a test is failed, and to reduce the overall number of rolls at the table. It means that sometimes your character is going to be hot hot hot, and other times he's going to be Mr Dunce. Roll with it; we've found the rule to work very well in play.

Danny wants his Strider to sneak up into the hills and spy on the wizard's bizarre experiment—an action that's going to take a couple of days of game time. The wizard has guards that'll need to be ducked. One Stealthy test is made. The ranger will have to find his way there and back. One Orienteering test is made. And of course the player needs to glean some info from the surrounds. One Perception test is made. The

results of each test ride across the whole scene; they determine just how successful this particular foray is.

GMs may not call for a test of the same ability every time they get an itch: "You reach the foothills, test your Stealthy. Ok, you reach the limits of the crater-basin, test your Stealthy. Ok, you reach the wizard's private compound, test your Stealthy. Ok, you climb the wall, test your Stealthy." No. No! NO!

Time

How long does a test take? Whatever the precise answer is, the time required for a test must be stated before any dice are rolled. Either the GM must inform the player of how much time is needed, or a player must state how much time his character is willing to spend.

Length of Time

Tests in Burning Wheel often mimic real world counterparts. The game is meant to evoke a living, breathing reality, so there are hours, days, nights, seasons and years to account for as characters' lives are played out. Using real world analogies for tests is good place to start. Listed below are some guidelines for judging time.

Length of Stat Tests

Most stat tests are instantaneous affairs like catching a ball, leaping a ditch or noticing a shadow. Some stat tests are longer affairs—climbing a cliff face, escaping from bindings, moving a boulder. Generally, the latter type takes minutes to hours to accomplish. The exact interval of time is up to the GM.

Academic

Time for Academic skill tests falls into two categories—either instantaneous recall of a subject based on a successful skill test representing character knowledge, or time spent on research. Research requires days at minimum, but more often spans months and years.

Artist

Artistic skills like Painting and Sculpture require time in weeks. Sometimes they can expand into years for particularly ambitious tests.

Craftsman

Time for tests of skills like Blacksmithing, Weaver and Carpenter are measured in days and weeks. It takes a day to make a batch of horseshoes, it takes a few weeks to make a mail shirt.

Forester

Forester skill tests—Stealthy, Tracking, Hunting, Orienteering, etc—are measured in minutes, hours and occasionally days.

Martial

Martial tests are nearly all instantaneous, sudden and quick actions.

Medicinal

Medicinal skill tests—Surgery, Field Dressing, Herbalism, Bloodletting, etc—are measured in minutes and hours. These times are described in detail in the Anatomy of Injury section.

Military

Military skills—Strategy, Tactics, Logistics, Skirmish Training and Formation Fighting Training—generally follow the same guidelines as the academic and physical tests to which they are cousins.

Musical

Musical composition takes weeks and months to perfect. Musical performance takes as long as it takes.

Peasant

Peasant skills are varied and complex—from Animal Husbandry to Farming. One thing they all hold in common is that they take a while. Farming is a seasonal affair. Animal Husbandry tests span a few hours to a few years.

However, in play, peasant skills can be used in the short term—to determine why a crop died or to calm a frightened animal. These tests usually take just a few minutes.

Physical

Physical skills like Swimming and Climbing are very situational. Usually the time of the task is based on how far the character has to go. Common sense reigns here.

Schools of Thought

Doctrine and Philosophy tests obey the same rules as academic skills.

Seafaring

Seafaring skills—Rigging, Knots, Navigation—obey the same rules as peasant skills. Some tests take days or weeks, others only a few moments.

Social

In Burning Wheel, a social skill test is made for a single interaction. This is heavily dependent on roleplaying, but these tests can require but a moment or up to a number of hours of negotiations or banter.

Sorcerous

Times for sorcerous skill tests are discussed in the Sorcery section.

Special/Miscellaneous

For skills that fall in the *Special/Miscellaneous* category, use the closest analog from the list above.

Breaking up a Test

If the GM feels a test is going to take an inordinate amount of time, but that bits and pieces can be accomplished separately, he can break up the *results* of the test. Only one roll is made, but the GM then parcels out the results across the allotted time. The character may leave and return to the test as appropriate, each time gaining the next set of results.

For example, a young lady has found an ancient Elvish text. The GM tells the player that it will take many months to read. The player passes her Reading test and digs into the tome. Each session, the GM gives the player another clue to the content of the volume—describing facets of Elvish history and lore.

Time and Failure

A character must spend the same time failing a test as succeeding (usually longer, because he can't use extra successes to reduce time). Even when the character fails, he doesn't always know. If he missed by a lot—completely messed it up—then he can give up right away and not lose too much time.

Time and Play: Meanwhile

Perhaps the most useful application of in-game time during play is in the service of "cutaways." A player undertakes a test that's going to occupy his character "for a couple of hours." Now each player has a few hours to kill with his character. The GM turns to the next player and says, "What are *you* going to do?"

Keep going around the table like this. Allow players to fill up the gaps of "downtime" with stuff like research, exploration, scouting, practice, etc. Tests that can be resolved with a roll or two and that can be narrated to have occupied the in-game time frame.

Help

Players may have their characters help one another in the game. When two or more characters are acting together, only one player rolls. His character is considered the primary character for the test. He accepts much of the risk, though he shares the reward.

The Social Contract of Help

In order to help, there must be three social conditions met at the table. First, the acting, primary player must willingly acknowledge and accept the help from his compatriots. Help cannot be forced or surreptitious; it must be open and agreed upon. The acting player is free to turn it down. Second, any player who is helping must then physically give the acting player one of his dice to roll. This is so we know if you're helpful or not!

Lastly, the helping player must now participate in the scene: He *must* describe how his character is helping the other.

How Can I Help?

Once help has been accepted, we have to determine if and how other characters can help. First: Skills may help skills and stats. Stats may help stats. Stats may not help skills.

Second, the ability must be related in some way—similar skills are the best candidates for help. Often this is situational, but the help must make sense to the players. The FoRK listing for skills is a good guide, but not the definitive source. The GM is the final arbiter on who and what can and can't help. See the next page for more on FoRKs.

Helping Dice

If the exponent of the helping ability is 4 or lower, one die is given to the acting player as help. If the exponent of the ability is 5 or higher, two dice are granted.

A soldier with Field Dressing is helping a midwife with Herbalism treat his wounded friend. They are trying to treat a Severe Wound to the leg, (Ob 5 for Herbalism). The two players decide that the midwife is the primary for this test, and the soldier will help. The soldier has a Field Dressing skill of B4 and thus adds one die. The helping die is handed over to the midwife and added to her Herbalism skill of B5 for the purposes of the test.

Fields of Related Knowledge

A player may have his character use his varied experience to help himself. We call this using your Fields of Related Knowledge or FoRKs.

When testing a *skill*, each related skill the character possesses can be used like *help* to add an additional die to the roll. If the related skill happens to be exponent 7 or higher, he may add +2D.

For example, Meg is testing her Elven Loremaster's History skill. She's looking for information about Dwarven culture, so she can add a die from her character's Dwarf-Wise skill.

Or Rich's Orc Great One is laying waste to his inferiors with his Axe skill. Rich wants to fight dirty, so he adds in a die from his Brawling skill—he describes his Orc throwing elbows and knees and generally being a bastard.

FoRKs are situational. The players suggest them, and the GM arbitrates which are applicable and which are not. Also, just to be clear, stats and attributes may never FoRK.

Beginner's Luck

Every skill has a stat on which it is based. We call this its *root*. If a character does not have an appropriate skill for a test, he may test the root stat instead. However, the obstacle for such a test is doubled. Easy stuff won't be too much of a problem, but more complex tasks will be all but impossible. When testing the root stat, double the base obstacle and then add disadvantages to that.

Instructions

Occasionally, a player character will stumble across a set of instructions in game—an item or some information designed to aid him in his quest.

All instructions must be given a complexity obstacle by the GM: Simple and clear stuff that can easily be transmitted through text and illustrations is Ob 1 or 2. More complex instructions, like those that teach a martial art or how to build a trebuchet, are Ob 3-5. Really arcane stuff only goes up from there.

The character reading the instructions must pass a Reading or Research test against the obstacle. If successful, the instructions grant a helping die to an applicable skill test (+1D). If unsuccessful, the instructions confuse and give a +1 Ob disadvantage to the skill test they refer to.

Testing Abilities in Brief

- Task—Indicate how you want your character to act. Incorporate a skill or stat into your description.
- Intent—Announce the goal of the action.
- Standard test—An ability rolled against an obstacle set by the GM. Meet the obstacle and pass the test.
- Open test—A test with no fixed obstacle; more successes means more information/results.
- Versus test—A test where two characters are pitted against one another. Highest number of successes wins the test.
- Linked test—A series of tests where, if the character before you exceeded the obstacle, you get +1D. If he failed, you get +1 Ob.
- Advantage—A favorable condition present in the game that benefits a character. +1D to the test.
- Disadvantage—Unfavorable conditions that raise the obstacle of a test.
- Carefully—+1D advantage, adds +50% of time; introduces time complication.
- Patiently—Extra successes go into quality.
- Quickly—Extra successes reduce time by -10% each.
- Success—The character completes the task laid out by the player in the manner of the stated intent.
- Failure— The character either does not complete the task or completes the task but new conditions presented by the GM interfered with his intent.
- Time—GM sets the time of the test. If the test is successful, time can be reduced by extra successes applied to *working quickly*. Marginal failure indicates the character realizes his error right away and may quit. Total failure indicates the character is stuck banging his head against the wall for the total time of the test.
- Let it Ride—One test per ability stands for the situation/scene.
- Help—Exponent 4 or lower gives +1D. Exponent 5 or higher gives +2D.
- FoRKs—+1D for related, applicable skills. Exponent 7 or higher gives +2D.
- Beginner's Luck—Use root stat in place of skill; double obstacle penalty.
- Instructions—Test Reading or Research against Instruction obstacle. Success grants +1D to appropriate test. Failure gives a +1 Ob disadvantage. ⊕

Advancing Abilities

This advancement system gives the feeling of a living, sweating, breathing, bleeding being in the game. It is vital that characters in Burning Wheel grow and change as they are played. As players and GMs call for tests for characters, marks are made on the ability's experience log. Mark enough tests of varying difficulty, and the ability advances.

Routine, Difficult and Challenging

Each test falls into one of three levels of difficulty for advancement: Routine, Difficult and Challenging. The difficulty of a test is found by comparing the obstacle against the number of dice rolled. And it's not just about a skill exponent compared with the obstacle. Advantage, helping and FoRK dice all influence advancement.

Difficulty of Test by Dice Rolled

Test for Adv.:	Routine	Difficult	Challenging
1D	Ob 1*	Ob 1*	Ob 2+
2D	Ob 1	Ob 2	Ob 3+
3D	Ob 1-2	Ob 3	Ob 4+
4D	Ob 1-2	Ob 3-4	Ob 5+
5D	Ob 1-3	Ob 4-5	Ob 6+
6D	Ob 1-4	Ob 5-6	Ob 7+
7D	Ob 1-4	Ob 5-7	Ob 8+
8D	Ob 1-5	Ob 6-8	Ob 9+
9D	Ob 1-6	Ob 7-9	Ob 10+
10D	Ob 1-7	Ob 8-10	Ob 11+
11D	Ob 1-8	Ob 9-11	Ob 12+
12D	Ob 1-9	Ob 10-12	Ob 13+
13D	Ob 1-10	Ob 11-13	Ob 14+
14D	Ob 1-11	Ob 12-14	Ob 15+
15D	Ob 1-12	Ob 13-15	Ob 16+
16D	Ob 1-13	Ob 14-16	Ob 17+
17D	Ob 1-14	Ob 15-17	Ob 18+
18D	Ob 1-15	Ob 16-18	Ob 19+

Total Number of Dice Rolled (left axis) / *Obstacle of Test* (bottom axis)

*For an Ob 1 test on one die, the player may choose whether the test is routine or difficult.

An obstacle 2 test counts as Routine for exponent 4 abilities. Obstacle 3 tests are Routine for exponent 5 abilities.

For an exponent 4 skill, obstacles 3 and 4 are Difficult tests.

Ob 5 tests are Challenging for exponent 4 abilities.

"Wait a minute," you're saying, "I can't roll five successes on four dice! My character is automatically going to fail that test." To this I say: "You're correct, but read on, read on. The Artha chapter will show you some tricks."

Obstacle vs Number of Dice Rolled

It is important to always use the *number of dice rolled* for a test, not just the ability exponent. Extra dice are a boon that makes the test *easier* for the character. In this game one learns less when using such crutches.

Number of Tests Required for Advancement

To advance an ability exponent one rank, a player must accumulate a certain number of Routine, Difficult and Challenging tests.

Advancing Skills

Exponent 1-4

Advancing an exponent 1-4 skill requires a number of Routine tests *equal to the exponent*. Also, for exponent 1-4, a character needs Difficult tests equal to half the exponent, *or* Challenging tests equal to his exponent divided by three (rounded up).

Exponent 5+

For skill exponents 5 and higher, a character needs Difficult tests equal to half of the ability exponent *and* Challenging tests equal to one third of the exponent rounded down. *Routine tests can't be used to advance a skill exponent of 5 or higher.*

The table below does all the math. See how nice I am?

Tests Required to Advance Skills

TYPE OF TEST: Skill Exponent	Routine		Difficult		Challenging
1	1	and	(1	or	1)
2	2	and	(1	or	1)
3	3	and	(2	or	1)
4	4	and	(2	or	1)
5	—		3	and	1
6	—		3	and	2
7	—		4	and	2
8	—		4	and	3
9	—		5	and	3

NUMBER OF TESTS REQUIRED

In order to advance Carpentry B3, I'd need three Routine tests (Ob 1-2) plus either two Difficult tests (Ob 3) or one Challenging test (Ob 4). To advance a B6 Sword skill, I'd need three tests at Ob 5 or 6 to meet my Difficult test requirements, and two tests at Ob 7 to get my Challenging tests. This is not easily done! Tests of that difficulty don't come along very often, and when they do they are usually life and death.

Advancing Stats

Routine tests don't count for the advancement of stats. Players must get high obstacle tests in order to advance them.

Tests Required to Advance Stats

TYPE OF TEST: Stat Exponent	Routine	Difficult		Challenging
1	—	1	and	1
2	—	1	and	1
3	—	2	and	1
4	—	2	and	1
5	—	3	and	1
6	—	3	and	2
7	—	4	and	2
8	—	4	and	3
9	—	5	and	3

NUMBER OF TESTS REQUIRED

Pass or Fail

With few exceptions, tests for advancement are earned whether the character was successful or not. *Pass or fail, a test is earned.*

Perception, Resources and Faith: The Exceptions

Perception, Resources and Faith tests must be *successful* to count toward advancement.

Advancing Attributes

Reflexes and Mortal Wound advance as their parent stats increase the applicable average. Health, and Steel advance as *skills* and are not dependent on their parent stats. See the individual chapters in the Character Burner for rules on advancing Faith, Greed, Grief and Hate.

Advancing Circles and Resources

Circles advances like a skill. Be sure to count all the affiliation and reputation dice rolled, but only to advance the base Circles. Resources advances like a skill as well, but only successful tests count.

Experience Log

Listed with each ability on the character sheet is an experience log. Use this to note the tests earned for advancement for individual abilities.

Handing Out Tests

The GM and players are both responsible for remembering tests. However, sometimes things get hectic during the game. It's often best to take five minutes to review the session after it's over and make sure that players noted their tests.

Applicable Situations

Tests are only awarded to players when their characters act in appropriate and applicable in-game situations. Everything else just counts as practice.
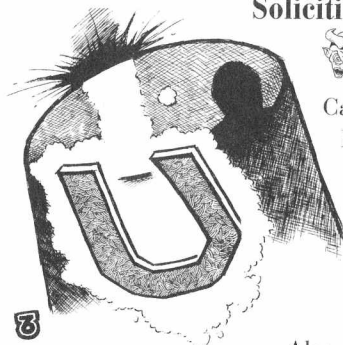
Soliciting Tests (Test Mongering)

Tests are very important to the game, but badgering the GM for them is very bad form. Can I test? Can I? Sometimes, a player will wish to have his character roll dice for something at an inappropriate juncture in play. It is the GM's role to pace events and keep play flowing evenly, therefore he may have a player hold off on making a test until the appropriate time (or have him stay his hand entirely).

Also, test mongering involves pestering the GM for a particular test. "I need a Routine. Can I make a Routine test?" "Dude, it's a *dragon*. I don't think there are going to be any Routine tests." The GM's job here is to say flat out: "No." Let the difficulty of the tests arise organically, not at the player's request so his character can advance. It makes for a much more interesting game.

Series of Rolls = One Test

Occasionally in game, we have situations where players are testing the same ability over and over again—martial and social conflict being the prime examples. In any instance where an ability is tested multiple times to determine the outcome, only one test is earned toward advancement. Do *not* note a test for every punch thrown.

A player generally takes the highest obstacle test from the encounter. However, if the character is in need of a particular test to advance the ability, a test for advancement should be noted as soon as the appropriate obstacle comes up. This is *only* done for "series tests" during which the character would advance (one test away from going up).

I Just Learned Something!

When the requirement is met, the exponent immediately advances. Doesn't matter if it's in the middle of a sword fight or while researching a new spell. Once the test is earned, the ability increases one rank. There's nothing more pleasing to my ears than a player crowing, "I just learned something!"

Wipe the Slate Clean

After the ability has advanced, all extra tests are discarded. It doesn't matter if the character had nine Challenging tests; once the requirements to advance are met, you start over with a clean slate.

Converting or Substituting Tests

What if my character is one Routine test from advancing his skill, but has tons of Difficult tests? I can just convert a test, right? *No.* Hard and fast rule: Players *cannot* convert or substitute tests, ever.

Advancement for Open and Versus Tests

When logging open tests for advancement, the obstacle is always 1. These tests always count as Routine. (Not abilities that used open-ended dice, but rolls that have no fixed obstacle.)

For versus tests, use the number of successes your opponent generated as the obstacle for the test when consulting the Dice vs Obstacle table at the beginning of this chapter.

Helping and Advancement

Helping dice add to the dice total for the acting character, making it harder to earn higher level tests for advancement.

For example, my character's got to patch up this hole in the cistern before all the water drains out. The GM sets the obstacle at 2. I want to get this done as quickly as possible and ensure success, so I ask one of the other players, "Can you help?" His character has Engineering B2. The GM agrees that this is an applicable skill. I add +1D to my skill.

Without his help, the test would have counted as a Difficult for advancement—3D vs Ob 2. With his help, the test counts as a Routine—4D vs Ob 2.

Helpers Learn

Though he doesn't roll any dice or risk himself, a character who helps earns tests for advancement. The level of the test is the same as if he had tested against the obstacle with his own skill.

FoRKs and Advancement

Like helping dice, FoRKs can reduce the difficulty of a test for purposes of advancement. FoRKs count toward total dice when consulting the Obstacle vs Dice Rolled table. Relying on FoRKs all the time can stymie the growth.

FoRKed abilities *do not* earn tests toward advancement. Only the primary ability earns the test.

Advantage, Bonus Dice and Advancement

Advantages and bonus dice from equipment count toward the dice total when determining the difficulty of tests for advancement.

For a skill of B4, Obs 1-2 are Routine tests. Obs 3-4 are Difficult. Ob 5 and higher are Challenging. If I add a +1D advantage, Ob 1-3 become Routine, Ob 4-5 is Difficult and Ob 6 and higher become Challenging.

My superior quality crossbow gives me +1D to my skill tests. Firing at a target in optimal range in cover is Ob 3. I've got a B4 skill. Normally that's a Difficult test, but a bonus die bumps my skill up to B5, and thus the test difficulty drops to Routine. (Ob 3 vs 5D is a Routine test.)

Artha and Advancement

You don't know what artha is yet, but there needs to be a mention here about it for clarity: Bonus dice from artha *never* count toward the total dice rolled for purposes of advancement.

If you have a skill of B4 and add three dice from artha, the test still counts as if you rolled four dice.

Social Skills and Advancement

Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our *performances* we neglect the dice. Well, this heading is here for the sole purpose *to remind you to roll the dice*. After an impassioned speech, set an obstacle and test a skill. Then note the test for advancement! Roleplaying performance is part of this game, but not a part independent of the die mechanics.

Advancement Is Lifeblood

Advancement is the lifeblood of Burning Wheel play. It allows players to shape their characters in a variety of ways. Therefore, it is imperative that the GM understand and use the obstacle system. Why? Because adjudicating appropriate obstacles challenges players while giving characters the tests they need to advance.

Doling out Ob 1 tests, makes for a very boring game. It's too easy, and characters never advance, whereas flinging out Ob 6 tests all the time is no fun either. It's too hard; characters will fail all the time and never advance. In order to create a rich tapestry of play for the game, throw

in a variety of tests—routine stuff at Ob 2, mixed with an occasional whopper of an Ob 5 or 6. Most tests should fall in the 1-3 obstacle range, but don't be afraid to push it once in a while.

Conversely, don't just hand out the tests a character needs to pump his skills up. Instead, give what the situation demands. Allow the players to tailor *their characters' actions* to their advancement needs. They can be cautious when they only need low obstacle tests; elaborate, dangerous or risky when they need high obstacle tests.

Practice

In Burning Wheel, players may have their characters undertake a practice regimen in order to polish their skills. Mechanically, this serves one purpose: To aid characters in advancing their skills. Practice helps fill in the gaps in a character's active experience. The drawback to practice is that it requires substantial in-game time investments.

Practice time comes in many forms: Exercising, studying and even trying out your skills on your friends. Listed below are the necessary practice cycles for the different categories. The *Cycle* is the length of time that a character needs to practice in order to earn one test. *Hours* indicates the actual time per day that the character must spend practicing during the cycle.

Practice Times

Skill Category	Cycle	hours per day to earn a test…		
		Routine	Difficult	Challenging
Academic	6 months	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
Artisan	1 year	4 hours	8 hours	12 hours
Artist	6 months	3 hours	6 hours	12 hours
Craftsman	1 year	3 hours	8 hours	12 hours
Forester	6 months	3 hours	6 hours	12 hours
Martial	1 month	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
Medicinal	1 year	4 hours	8 hours	12 hours
Military	6 months	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
Musical	1 month	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
Peasant	3 months	1 hours	4 hours	12 hours
Physical	1 month	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
School of Thought	6 months	3 hours	6 hours	12 hours
Seafaring	3 months	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
Social	1 month	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
Sorcerous	1 year	5 hours	10 hours	15 hours
Special/Misc	3 months	3 hours	6 hours	12 hours

Stat/Attribute	Cycle	Routine	Difficult	Challenging
Will	1 year	4 hours	8 hours	16 hours
Perception	6 months	3 hours	6 hours	12 hours
Agility	3 months	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
Speed	3 months	3 hours	6 hours	9 hours
Power	1 month	2 hours	4 hours	8 hours
Forte	2 months	4 hours	8 hours	16 hours
Faith	1 year	5 hours	10 hours	20 hours
Steel	2 months	1 hours	3 hours	9 hours

If a character maintains the daily hours time requirement for one practice cycle, he earns the listed test for that skill for the purposes of advancement.

For example, if my character practices his Carpentry (a Craftsman skill) for 3 hours every day for a year, he earns a Routine test for advancement at the end of a year. Being a craftsman is hard!

Rich has his knight character work out every morning and practice doing hand drills to test his Agility. He'll need four hours a day for three months of game time in order to earn a Difficult test for advancement.

Maximum Practice

A character may only be forced to practice for hours equal to four times (4x) his Will exponent per day. For most people, that's 16 hours a day maximum. The most a character can practice in a day, no matter the Will exponent, is 20 hours in a day. Most people, due to their lives and needs as individuals, can only bear to practice eight hours in a day.

Doing other stuff—adventuring, healing, sleeping—cannot be used for practice time.

Using Practice in the Game

Sometimes a player will indicate that his character is undertaking some long task—usually narrated for color or roleplaying sake—like wandering the countryside, working on the farm, meditating in the hills. These periods count as practice for applicable skills and abilities.

Any time a player indicates some action for his character that is cool but otherwise has no direct effect on driving the game forward, the in-game time should be logged toward practice for the applicable abilities.

Practice can also help bridge time for a character when a player has been absent from the table and wishes to reintroduce his character. "Ok, you've been gone for about a year of game time. Why don't you

spread a year's practice among your skills. Nothing can advance more than one exponent rank." Alternately, a character might only get a week or two to practice—not enough time to earn a test. Log the segments of time practiced. Once they equal a full cycle, take a test toward advancement.

Learning New Skills

Root Stats

Every skill has a stat or combination of stats on which it is based. This is called its root. Skills are listed with their roots in the Character Burner.

The root for Sword is Agility.

Beginner's Luck

As mentioned in the Testing Your Abilities section, when a character doesn't have an appropriate skill, he may test against his Beginner's Luck at a *double obstacle* penalty. Beginner's Luck dice are equal to the root stat of the skill (not half the stat, the full dice). For skills with two roots, choose which stat to take the test on.

Double Obstacle Penalty

The GM determines the base obstacle for a task. Double that and then add on any situational modifiers (e.g. don't double the modifiers).

Aptitude

Aptitude, in Burning Wheel, indicates the number of tests a character needs in order to gain a new skill. Aptitude is equal to 10 minus the *root stat.* If it's a combination of two or more, the root is 10 minus the average of the root stats rounded down.

A character with a B4 Agility has a 6 Aptitude for learning the Sword skill (10 minus his exponent 4 Agility).

Every time the player tests against Beginner's Luck when trying to use a skill, he notes a test toward earning it whether he's successful or not. After he has accumulated a number of tests equal to his Aptitude, he opens the skill. See the next heading to determine the new skill's starting exponent.
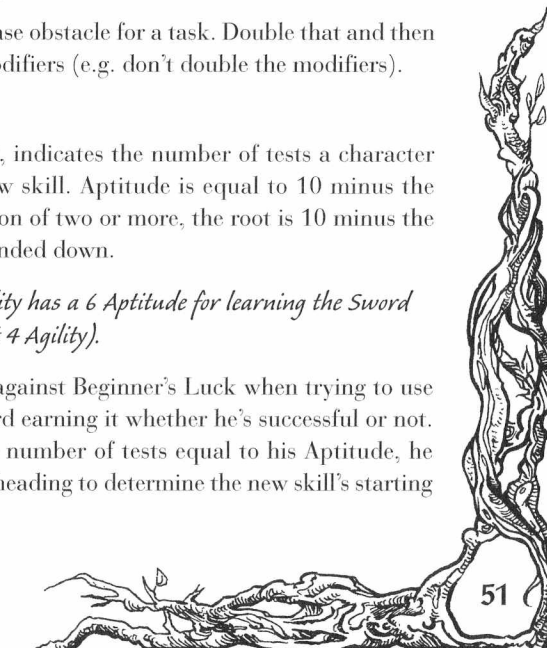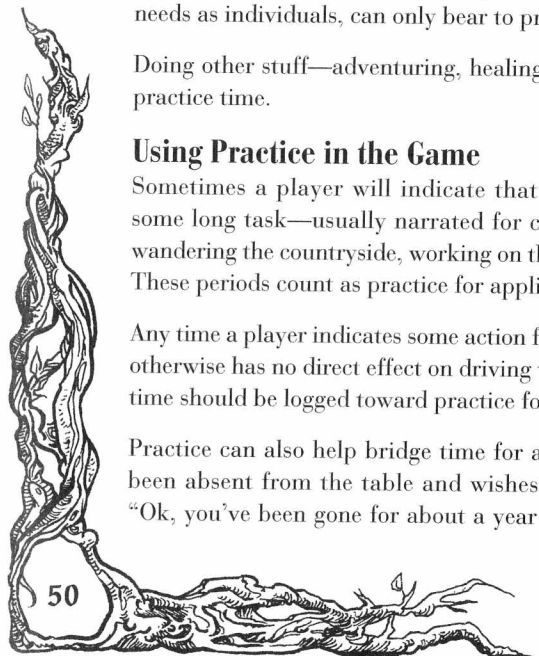
Opening the Skill

Once the Aptitude requirement is met, the character automatically and immediately opens the skill. It is now written on the character sheet in the skills section. The starting exponent for all skills is half of the root, or the average of two roots, rounded down.

With a B4 Agility, after six Beginner's Luck tests, I open a Sword skill. The skill opens at half of the root stat. That's a B2 Sword for my character.

After the skill is opened, it advances normally like any other ability.

Shade and New Skills

A new skill is opened with the same shade as its root stat. If the root has two shades, the skill opens at the darker shade, and you add two to the total before factoring the root. The Monster Burner chapter, Gray and White Math (pages 367–368), is the definitive source for all things shaded. See also the Heroic and Supernatural chapter in this book.

Double Obstacle Penalty, Stat Tests and Learning New Skills

When the base obstacle (before doubling) for a Beginner's Luck test would count as a Routine for the *stat*, the test is logged toward learning the *new skill*. If the test (before doubling) would count as a Difficult or Challenging against the stat, it's logged as a *stat test* for advancement.

I've got a B4 Agility. Trying to hit a target at optimal range with a bow is a base Ob 2 test, doubled to 4 due the Beginner's Luck rules. An Ob 2 test counts as a Routine test toward Agility, so the test is logged toward learning the Bow skill. If the test had been Ob 3, that'd be a Difficult test for Agility. I'd take that toward advancing the stat.

Learning from Another

Instructors

Characters may learn from each other in game. To begin the process, the instructor must pass an Ob 2 Instruction test. If successful, the instructor may teach as described below. If the test is failed, then time spent with the instructor merely counts as practice.

Test Me

Instructors give their students tests for advancement. The time for each test is days equal to 10 minus the instructor's Will plus 10 minus the student's Will plus the obstacle of the test on offer. The instructor can offer his student obstacles for a test equal to or less than his skill level.

An instructor with a Will B5 (5 days) can teach a student with a Will of B4 (6 days) one test in 11 days plus days equal to the obstacle of the test. If he was schooling his student's B4 Sword skill, and wanted to give him a Difficult test (Ob 3), the total time would be 11 days plus the 3 from the obstacle: 14 days altogether.

After the required time, the student earns a test for advancement. This can be put toward advancing the skill in question, or learning a new skill if the student didn't already have it.

All Day, Everyday

Instruction eats up all of the character's free time. He may not practice other skills during that time.

Learning Training Skills

A character may learn Training skills, such as Armor Training or Formation Fighting, in the course of his life. Aptitude requirements are the same as for normal skills, but *tests can only be earned via practice or instruction*. In-game tests against a Training do not count.

Advancement in Brief

- Obstacle of the test vs the number of dice rolled determines the difficulty of the test for advancement. Consult the table for details.

- Skills exponent 1-4 must be advanced by filling up the Routine tests requirement. Then, meeting either the Difficult or Challenging test requirement will push the skill to the next exponent level.

- Exponent 5+ skills only advance via Difficult and Challenging tests. Routine tests no longer count.

- Stats only advance via Difficult and Challenging tests regardless of their exponent.

- Attributes— Steel and Health advance as skills.

- Experience Log— Note the level of the test on your experience log.

- A series of rolls in a single scene/conflict equals one test for advancement.

- Open Tests— A test with no fixed obstacle counts as a Routine test.

- Versus Tests use your opponent's number of successes as the obstacle.

- Help and Advancement— Helping dice count toward the total number of dice rolled for a test (thereby making the test easier to pass, but less significant for advancement).

- FoRKs and Advancement— FoRKs also count toward the total dice rolled. They make the test easier and usually lower the difficulty.

- Advantage and Advancement— Advantages also count toward the total dice rolled and potentially reduce the difficulty of the test.

- Social Skills and Advancement— Be sure to set obstacles and roll dice after a good performance.

- Practice— Time per day devoted to a skill nets a test after a number of months or a year. Any character actions that don't count as a test, count as practice.

- Learning new skills— To learn a new skill, a player must get a number of tests equal to his aptitude for the skill. Aptitudes are 10 minus the root stat of the skill. Once the required tests are earned, the new skill is opened at half the root stat (rounded down).

- Instructors can aid a character in learning a new skill or practicing one he currently has. To teach, the instructor must pass an Ob 2 Instruction test. If successful, the teacher can provide tests for his student at obstacles less than or equal to his skill exponent. The tests take a number of days equal to 10 minus the instructor's Will plus 10 minus the student's Will plus days equal to the obstacle of the test. ⊕
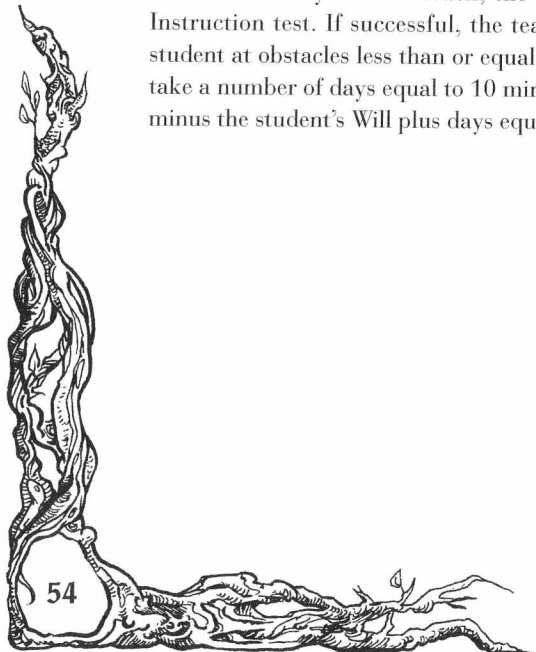
Beliefs, Instincts and Traits

In the introduction to the game, I mentioned that each player is obliged to set out a series of priorities for his character: priorities that describe the player's goals for the character and how he means to achieve them.

These are guidelines, but they are both crucial to game play and mandatory. There are three sets of player-chosen priorities: Beliefs, Instincts and traits. Each has a different effect on the game mechanics of how a character is played and grows.

Beliefs

When a player brings to life a new character in Burning Wheel, he furnishes that character with three Beliefs. In essence, these are the top three priorities for the character in play.

These are not general beliefs, like "God" or "Country"; rather they are explicitly stated drives that tie directly into the world and setting of play. Examples of Beliefs are "I serve and protect the Etharch," or "Prince Vost is evil in nature and never to be trusted."

When sculpting your character's Beliefs, think: What do *I* want out of this character and this situation? How can my character's Beliefs reflect that? Then bend your character's Beliefs to reflect those priorities.

Creating Beliefs for your character is discussed in detail in the Character Burner.

Anchored Beliefs
Beliefs are not arbitrarily chosen. Each one must relate to the situation at hand when the character joins your world. These tie him to events and thereby create drama as Beliefs cross and conflict with other Beliefs.

Beliefs in Play

By openly and honestly setting down their top three priorities, players are helping the GM and the other players get the most out of the game. Now they all know what you're after, and they can help you get it.

Stating a Belief for a peasant, "I'm the true king of this land," does not make it factual in game. But by getting that out in the open, you are letting other players know you want situations revolving around that theme—a mad peasant rebel rising to challenge the established order. You might not even succeed, but playing out that struggle is what the game is all about.

Beliefs are meant to be conflicted, challenged, betrayed and broken. Such emotional drama makes for a good game. If your character has a Belief, "I guard the prince's life with my own," and the prince is slain before his eyes in the climax of the scenario, now's your chance to play out a tortured and dramatic scene and *really* go ballistic.

Conversely, using the above example, if the prince is killed right out of the gate, the character is drained of purpose. Note the player stated he wanted to defend the prince in play, not avenge him. So killing the prince in the first session sucks the life out of the character. He really has no reason to participate any longer. But if the prince dies in the grand climax, c'est la vie. The protector must then roll with the punches and react to this new change. Even better, if the prince died due to the actions or failures of his own guardian—now that's good stuff.

Another example: We once had a character with the belief: "I will one day restore my wife's life." His wife had died and he kept her body around, trying to figure out a way to bring her back. Well, mid-way through the game, the GM magically restored his wife to the land of the living. I've never seen a more crushed player. He didn't know what do! He had stated that the quest and the struggle was the goal, not the end result. "One day!" he said. But the GM insisted, and the whole scenario and character were ruined for the player.

Beliefs are best laid out in the open. If they are, other players are in on both the irony and drama, and they can help you achieve it. Of course, this doesn't mean the *characters* are aware of each other's Beliefs. We're talking about a strict separation of player and character here.

Lastly, there is more to Beliefs than just melodrama. In fact, they are used the most in combination with the artha mechanics. Players manipulate their character's Beliefs and the situations of game play in order to earn artha. Artha is discussed in detail in the next chapter.
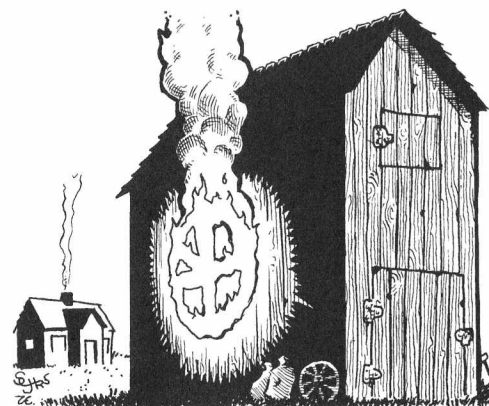
Changing Beliefs

A player may change his character's Beliefs as he sees fit. Characters are meant to grow and change through play. Changing Beliefs is a vital part of that growth. However, the GM has absolute final say over *when* a Belief may be changed. If he feels the player is changing a Belief to wriggle out of a difficult situation and not as part of character growth, then he may delay the change until a time that he sees as appropriate.

Danny's Strider has the Belief, "One man can make a difference." At the end of the adventure, Danny realizes his character spent all of his time helping his friends and holding the group together. He announces that his character's outlook has changed and so has his Belief. He changes it to, "Only together shall we be victorious over our enemies."

Another example: Pete's and Chris' characters had an argument in the game. Pete's smuggler character was ensorcelled by an enchanted bell. He asked Chris's wizard to destroy the device. Chris refused, intimating that the bell could be useful in the future for controlling the smuggler! Pete's character had the Belief, "The sorcerers who ruined my life must pay—with their lives!" He was so livid after this argument, he turned to the GM: "I'm changing my Belief; I'm expanding it. 'All sorcerers are evil, foul creatures. They must be purged from the earth.'" That included Chris' wizard. Sweet!

Instincts

Instincts are also player priorities for a character, but they have a different mechanical application than Beliefs. Rather than reflect who or what the character is, Instincts help define *how* the character acts.

What's been drilled into the character's head? What life lessons has he been forced to learn? What has he taught himself in order to survive? These are Instincts in Burning Wheel. Players choose three for their characters.

Always, Never or If, Then

The best Instincts are defined as clear statements—either "Always do X," or "Never do Y," or as "If this condition arises, then take this action."

What an Instinct does is set a condition and a reaction to that condition for the character. *And this reaction/behavior of the character is sacrosanct: So long as the conditions are met, the action is done*. The player doesn't even have to announce it. It either happens behind the scenes or instantly, without hesitation.

A common Instinct is something like "When on patrol, always have my bow ready and an arrow nocked." Even if the player never states this, so long as it's written on the character sheet, it is fact.

Instincts allow players to set conditions for their characters that might otherwise break the rules. Do you have a "draw sword" Instinct? Well then, *your* character's sword is drawn at the start of combat without having to spend actions. Instincts cannot allow you to bypass a test, but they can assume you made the test at some time *before* trouble started.

Insurance

Instincts can also be described as player character insurance vs GM onslaught. They are a mechanical way to ensure that your character behaves in a certain manner which can't be contravened by the GM.

But they don't need to be adversarial. In fact, they work better when the player and GM cooperate, using the Instincts to drive the character in play.

Like Beliefs, Instincts can be used to earn artha. See the next chapter, The Artha Wheel, for more on that.

Changing Instincts

A player may change his character's Instincts as he sees fit—as the character's experience in play changes him.

Rich's insurrectionist watched his friend's mind get warped and twisted by a foul wizard until he was nothing more than a drooling thrall. As soon as the scene ended, Rich turned to the GM: "I'm changing one of my Instincts. I'm losing 'Always scrounge for weapons after a battle,' and changing it to 'If I am ensorcelled by a wizard, I plunge my sword into my throat and kill myself.'" Quite a brutal Instinct, but it's something he felt very passionately about.

However, the GM has absolute final say over *when* an Instinct may be changed. If he feels the player is changing an Instinct to be a munchkin and powergamer and not as part of character growth, then he may delay the change until a time that he sees as appropriate.

Traits

Beliefs and Instincts are personality and behavior priorities for characters. Traits are also a kind of priority. By choosing traits, a player is stating to the world, "This is what's most important to me about my character; these are his most prominent aspects."

There are three kinds of traits, *character* (including cosmetic traits), *call-on* and *die* traits. Each type affects the game in a different way.

Character Traits

A character trait illustrates a prominent aspect of a character's psychological or physiological make-up—something that affects how the character will be roleplayed at the table. Something that says, "You're not just someone, you're *it*." Anyone can say his character is hairy, but unless he pays the trait point, it's hairy with a lower-case "h." Pay the point, and he's the hairiest guy around.

These are guide posts that help the player navigate play with the character. By choosing these traits, the player is stating that he is going to do one of two things: Either he's going to play those traits to the hilt—he's going to exemplify them—or he's saying that his character is starting with these traits, but he's about to change. In the second case, character traits are used as the crux for creating all sorts of problems for his character in game. He's going to use his traits to get his character

into situations where he has to make hard decisions. Do I go with my nature, or do I fight against it? This is fuel for some very fine play, and the system supports this behavior.

Flighty, Determined and Brutal are examples of character traits.

Character traits also serve another important role: They add necessary color to the game. Color is vital to capturing our imaginations and further involving us in the story at hand. Which is precisely the role of these traits.

Cosmetic Traits

Cosmetic traits are character traits that describe how a character looks. Not every character needs to have cosmetic traits to describe his appearance. Without them, we assume the character is normal-looking within typical variations. A cosmetic trait is used to describe something on the character that really stands out.

Call-On Traits

This type of trait is powerful and subtle. When its conditions are met, traditional game mechanics are set aside either to break a tie (in the call-on-trait-having character's favor) or to allow the player to reroll failed dice on one test.

Revered is a call-on for Oratory. When delivering speeches to the faithful or gullible, the player may call on this trait to reroll failed dice once per session.

Players decide when and how they'll "call on" this type of trait (hence the name). Call-ons may only be invoked once per session. They are a powerful aid, meant to represent an unpredictable edge the character possesses.

Die Traits

Die traits modify an ability in the same way every time they are used. Either they add a die or two, change a game mechanical number—an obstacle, or hesitation—or grant a new ability/new way to roll dice.

Mechanical Reward

Traits are more game mechanical in nature than Beliefs and Instincts, which is a reward in and of itself. However, they too can be used to leverage artha. And, as you know, that's all discussed in the next section, The Artha Wheel.

Changing Traits and Earning New Ones

It is important that characters grow and change through play. Burning Wheel uses a system where the outward perception of how the character was played is just as important as the player's inward perception of what he thinks the character is all about.

Trait Vote

The way the character is *played* changes him. This can be a deliberate effort on the part of the player—to change his character via his roleplaying—or an unintended side effect.

At the end of the campaign or extended adventure, the GM and the players nominate characters to receive new traits. Going around the table, players discuss each character who participated in the adventure. Possible traits are suggested for all the characters. After all characters have been discussed, the players vote on the traits suggested for each character. Unanimous decision grants the trait. Character, call-on and die traits can be awarded.

For short adventures/scenarios, I recommend that characters be allowed only one new trait from the vote. For longer, epic-type stories, two or three traits is a fair limit.

Characters can be awarded traits that change their bodies—scars, limps, or even missing digits—to reflect their in-game experiences. They can (and should) be awarded character traits according to how the other players perceived their personalities in the course of play. This shouldn't be a punishment, but an honest outward reflection of what's been happening at the table.

More powerful call-on and die traits can be earned as well. This process is discussed in the next chapter, Artha. However, even though artha is involved in the process, these traits are still subject to trait votes like everything else.

Voted Off the Island

In addition to voting for new traits for a character, the GM or owning player may propose that a character lose a trait. If the GM proposes the loss of trait, a unanimous result is required for the trait to be voted off. If the owning player suggested it, a simple majority will do.

Evolving Beliefs and Instincts

Beliefs and Instincts are meant to evolve into traits throughout the course of play. Beliefs tend to become character traits, while Instincts are likely candidates for call-on and die traits. However, since this process involves spending artha, it's discussed in the next chapter.

Rate of Change

The group can change the rate of development for their characters by increasing the frequency of trait votes. The default setting is to vote after 6-12 sessions. Voting after every goal is accomplished, rather than after a series of goals, causes the characters to grow quickly and potentially become more powerful. If the group wishes to play like this, it should be discussed and announced before characters are burned so everyone can tailor their play style to this mode.

Beliefs, Instincts and Traits in Brief

- Belief— A short statement of ethical or moral priority the player assigns to the character.

- Instincts— An if/then, always, never or when statement that the player assigns to his character to dictate a reaction or course of action.

- Character traits— Guideposts for roleplaying that announce to the group, "This is what is important to me about my character."

- Call-on traits— Break ties or allow for a reroll on a failed test.

- Die traits— Add dice, add/reduce penalties or allow access to additional abilities the character would not otherwise have.

- Trait Vote— At the end of the adventure, all players vote for traits for the other characters based on how they were played. ⊕
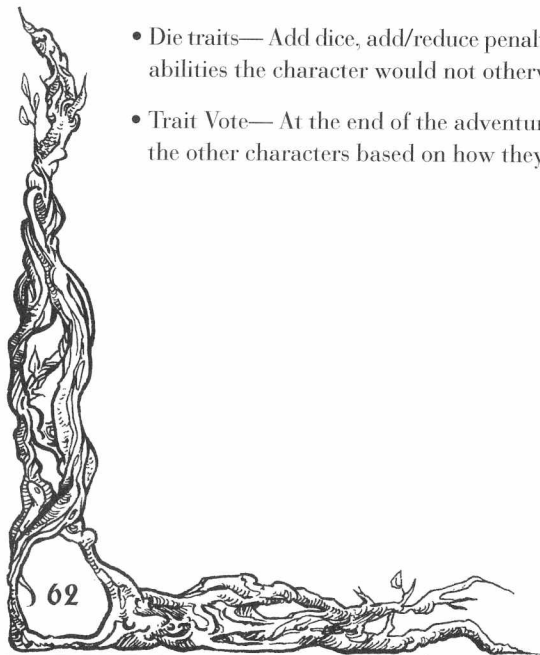
The Artha Wheel

You've heard so much about it, and here it is: *artha*. If the mechanics are the fuel, players are the fire, and artha is the spin on the wheel and the coruscation of the flames. It's an interface and interaction between GM, player and system. GMs reward players for driving the story forward, and players reward themselves by using their characters to further complicate and dramatize the story at hand.

Spiritual Rewards in a World on Fire

Burning Wheel uses a point-based system. Most often, the points are awarded for creating interesting situations by playing out, on and off a character's Beliefs and Instincts.

Artha

The points awarded are called *artha*. It's a Sanskrit word. It means something equivalent to a person's power and success in his community/immediate surroundings. It is the middle ground between obsession with self, enlightenment and transcendence. In the game, it helps the character overcome obstacles and eventually hone abilities to heroic and mystical levels of excellence. There are three types of artha—Fate, Persona and Deeds—each with their own effect on the game.

Interface

While it's cool to be rewarded by the GM for doing something neat, there is another, more important level to that exchange. The flow of artha creates a connection between player, character and GM based on themes and issues important to their game.

Beliefs, Instincts and traits (BITs) are the primary conduit between the player, his character and the artha system. Setting out BITs for his character, a player states to the GM and the group what his goals in play are for this character. He lets everyone know *how and when* he wants to be rewarded for playing his character.

For example, a player creates a rebellious peasant character with a Belief that "Class is meaningless." When this character encounters his "noble betters" everyone can expect trouble; he's going to create it! And because it's one of his Beliefs, he'll be rewarded for creating interesting, meaningful and difficult situations in this vein.

GM's Role

The GM has a heavy role in the artha game. He's got to stay aware of all the character's BITs and award artha on the spot to players who drive the story along. He also is allowed to create his own parameters for the story. Players that work with the GM and accomplish these great deeds earn even greater rewards.
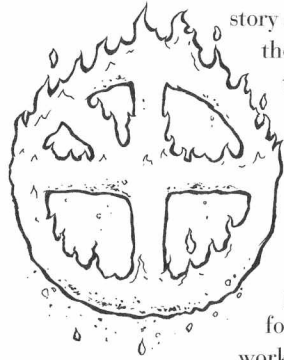
At first, the arrangement may seem a little too carrot and stick. But I think it is more subtle than that. *Players state their goals and how they want to be rewarded.* They can earn these awards without ever moving for the carrot. But the GM also has the power to provide greater rewards for epic deeds. All in all, we've found this interface—this revolving wheel, if you will—to work very well.

Fate, Persona and Deeds

As mentioned above, there are three types of artha: *Fate, Persona* and *Deeds*. Fate is earned simply by walking the character's destined path. It can be spent on minor boosts and aids. Persona is earned by idiomatic roleplaying, breaking out of the mold of the aforementioned destiny and by accomplishing personal goals. It can be spent to modify die rolls. Lastly, Deeds artha marks a character's accomplishments beyond his immediate and personal goals—going beyond what is *desired* to what is needed. Deeds points are the hardest to earn and can be spent to heavily modify die rolls.

Onward and Upward

As the player spends the various artha to improve his character's chance of survival, he moves toward an *epiphany*. Every time a player tests one of his character's skills or stats *and spends artha on the test*, that ability gets one step closer to the next shade. When the requisite number of artha-enhanced tests are completed, the ability automatically and immediately *shade shifts* one step lighter. See the Epiphany section toward the end of this chapter.

Earning Artha

Artha is awarded by the GM at appropriate moments in the game. Rather than distributed at the end of an "adventure" or even a session, artha is earned on the spot as the situation demands.

Players may also nominate one another for artha awards—specifically Fate and Persona points, not Deeds. Also, players may nominate the GM's NPCs for artha awards as they see fit. The GM is obligated to accept.

Fate artha is rather common—a few points are earned every session. Persona points are gained as personal goals are accomplished, so their frequency of award is entirely up to the game play—but usually only one per session. Deeds are awarded at the end of a long series of personal goals that result in the character accomplishing "the really big thing."

Fate

Beliefs

Fate points are earned for manifesting the character's Beliefs in a convincing and entertaining manner. Entertaining doesn't only mean funny—we all enjoy a good dramatic performance now and again. *This award is given when playing a Belief serves a purpose and drives the game forward.* It is a very open condition, so there's a lot of room to get a character's Beliefs involved.

Andy's crime lord, Omi-yori, has the Belief, "It is always better to smooth wrinkles than ruffle feathers." At the table, Pete and Ian are having a row between their characters. Andy interposes his character and, making conciliatory gestures to both parties, diffuses the situation. Play continues and Andy earns a Fate point.

Instincts

Fate points are earned for playing Instincts *when such play gets the character in trouble or creates a difficult or awkward situation.*

A character with the Instinct "Draw my sword at the first sign of trouble" is at court pleading his case. Suddenly, in walks his nemesis! The player doesn't have to draw his sword. He can resist the Instinct, because it's going to cause trouble. But if he plays it out, he gets a Fate point.

If the GM (and other players) feels a player is being obstructionist or disruptive with his Instincts, then artha does not have to be awarded. However, if you're playing your game for humor, by all means grant the reward.

Traits

Fate artha can be earned for using traits, but *only if invoking that trait alters the direction of the story in an unforeseen way or makes life difficult for the character.*

If a player's character has the Clumsy trait and he opts to fumble the MacGuffin at the absolutely "wrong" time, that's worth a Fate point.

Humor

A Fate point is earned if a player can stop the table dead with humor *while in character.* Dramatic play gets even greater rewards. See Embodiment and Moldbreaker below.

Right Skill, Right Time

Lastly, if a character has the right skill (when no one else does) to keep the story moving, he should be rewarded with a Fate point. Consider it a reward for clever character burning. Keep this award rare.

Persona

Embodiment

When a player captures the mood of the table perfectly and further drives the story onward, one Persona point is awarded. Moments of great speeches, desperate decisions or gruesome revenge fall into this category. This is a tough award to get, as a player really must go above and beyond in his roleplay of his character.

Moldbreaker

If a player comes to a point in the story where his Beliefs, Instincts and traits conflict with a decision he must make—a direction in which he must go—and he plays out the inner turmoil, the conflict within his own guts, in a believable and engaging manner, then he earns a Persona point.

Other players, as well as the GM, may nominate each other for this award. A majority vote at the table awards the point. Again, this is a tough award to get as a player must *really* push the roleplaying of his character.

Personal Goals

Characters who accomplish personal goals—revenge, promotion, seduction, victory, etc—earn a Persona point. These goals should either be clearly described in a character's Beliefs, or an explicitly stated goal for the group. This is the award for accomplishing all the various bits of an adventure—the assassinations, the betrayals, the kidnappings, recovery of lost artifacts, learning of ancient secrets, etc.

Workhorse

Being the workhorse character—the most relied upon in a given scenario—is worth a Persona point. This is for the mundane stuff—having that piece of gear to make a scene go, having that skill to get the other character safely through danger and just generally slaving away behind the scenes to make it all work.

MVP

Being voted the "most valuable player" for a scenario earns a Persona point. MVP is for the character who drives the story to its conclusion, the character who shines in the last moments and about whom everyone agrees, "Damn, we couldn't have done it without him!"

Voting for Workhorse and MVP

These awards are generally given at the end of a scenario, "adventure" or campaign, and they are not granted by the GM. Once a scenario is concluded, all participating players vote for who the Workhorse of the scenario was and who the MVP was. The GM gets one vote like all the other players.

Deeds

These artha points are rare and are reserved solely for accomplishing goals larger than a character's personal agenda. The most loose qualification for a Deeds point is doing something that benefits more than just the character, and doing it for reasons other than personal gain. Such an accomplishment must come with some cost or sacrifice—it's got to hurt a little to attain this level. Exacting revenge on your enemies through a brilliant plan is great, but it's only worth a Persona point. Thwarting your enemy and simultaneously going along with the GM's "Big Thing" is worth the Deeds. Also, helping another character accomplish goals—even though they distract from or perhaps are anathema to your goals, Instincts and Beliefs—can earn a Deeds point.

My players all had personal reasons to infiltrate this particular city, foment a rebellion and overthrow the government. Accomplishing that task, however grand, is worth a Persona point. In the end, they not only overthrew the slaver-tyrants ruling the city, but they handed control back to the rightful government when they could have taken power themselves. That's worth a Deeds point.

Obstructionism and Clowns

Artha is meant to encourage players and GM to work together to create fun, interesting and intense stories at the table. If ever a player or GM feels another player is being an obstructionist pig or a clown, the player should be informed of his perceived behavior in the most non-confrontational way possible.

Thereafter, the GM has the power to withhold artha if he feels a player is being seriously disruptive. It's not an ideal situation, but the well-being of the entire group is more important than tip-toeing around an intractable player. Ultimately, a disruptive player that can't be persuaded with the carrot/stick method or an earnest plea to join the group's style of play should just be politely asked to leave.

Spending Artha

When spent at appropriate junctures in game, artha modifies the outcome of dice rolls, and thereby allows characters to perform heroic acts they otherwise would not be able to perform.

Artha must always be spent on a roll. It cannot just be dumped into a skill or stat. Something dramatic has to be happening. The dice have to roll, then the artha can flow.

Warning: Some of the artha expenditures explained below contain mechanics yet to be discussed. Skim them for now and come back to them later after you've read through the Rim of the Wheel section.

Fate

Luck— A player may spend a Fate point to make the dice of a single roll open-ended (6s rerolled as new dice). If the roll is already open-ended—Perception, Steel, Faith, Sorcery—then the player may reroll a single traitor (*which is not open-ended*). Luck is purchased *after* the dice have been rolled.

Shrug it Off — Faced with the pain and discomfort of cuts and scrapes, a player may choose to have his character Shrug Off +1 Ob of wound penalties. Basically, this temporarily mitigates the effects of a single Superficial Wound. This is exactly the same as the Shrug it Off rules in the Injury, Treatment and Recovery section, except that no Health test is necessary, and the time required is reduced to one action.

Persona

Boon— A player may choose to spend one to three Persona points on a skill or stat test. Each point spent grants a bonus die (+1D) to roll on the test. A Boon must be announced *before* the dice are cast.

Grit Your Teeth— For a Persona point, -1D of wound penalty can be temporarily shrugged off. This is exactly the same as the Grit Your Teeth mechanics in the Injury, Treatment and Recovery section, except that no Health test is required, and the time is reduced. *Gritting Your Teeth during a script costs two actions.*

Focus— A player may spend a Persona point if he fails his test when using the *working carefully* rules. This doesn't pass the test, but it does counteract the effects of any time complications the GM might want to throw in.

Will to Live— Players whose characters have been struck down with a Mortal Wound must spend a Persona point in order to earn the Will to Live. The player decides whether or not he wants to continue on with his character. If the player does not spend the Will to Live point, then no art nor magic can save the character from the Mortal Wound—he has exhausted his life. If the Will to Live point is spent, then the character is allowed to attempt a Recovery test against the Mortal Wound after being tended to. See the Anatomy of Injury.

Deeds

Divine Inspiration— One point of Deeds artha may be spent to double the exponent of a single stat, skill or attribute test. Reflexes and equipment dice may *not* be doubled in this manner. When doubling a test that uses additional dice from FoRKs, helping, stances or other means, only double the base skill/stat and then add in the bonus dice. When doubling Sorcery, Summoning or Enchanting, choose either Will or the skill. *Divine Inspiration must be announced before the dice are cast.*

Saving Grace—A Deeds point may be spent to reroll all dice that failed to come up successes on any given test. This *may* be used for equipment dice like armor, shields and guns. Obviously, Saving Grace is announced after the dice have been rolled.

Spending Limits

Players may only spend 1 Fate, 1-3 Persona points and 1-2 Deeds points per roll. (2 Deeds would come from doubling your dice and rerolling traitors.)
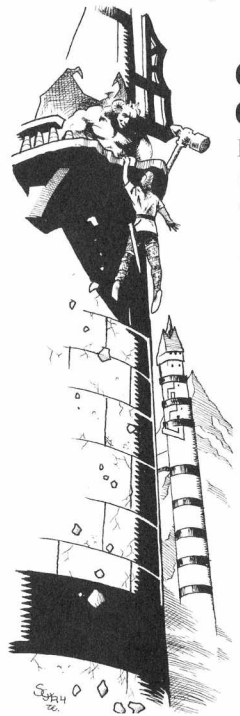
Optional Artha Expenditure: Persona Point Complications

In a discussion on our forums, Kaare Berg, Alexander Cherry and I proposed an optional Persona point feat called "Complications."

The concept is simple, and the execution can be as elaborate as your group prefers. If a character has just failed a test and gotten himself into deep trouble—killed, captured or something similarly horrible—the player can spend a Persona point on that failed test to redirect the narrative from "certain death" into further complications. As a rule, the *player* may choose his new fate. It's got to be bad and/or costly, though. Otherwise, the GM can simply declare that the initial failed test result stands.

A ranger sneaks into a bandit camp to investigate. His player fails the roll miserably and thus his character will surely be caught. To mitigate his failure, the player spends a Persona point on a Complication. As the bandits come out to investigate, they find a bow and quiver hanging curiously on a thin branch! Convinced that they are being spied on, they search the area around camp, forcing the ranger to take refuge in the cesspit in order to avoid detection.

Complications must have a tangible cost. For martial or physical tests, that cost should be material, as in the ranger's bow in the above example. Or, for example, a player can spend a persona point on a failed Block test to ward off a Superb blow. The blow is deflected, but his sword snaps.

Or it can be even more complicated: A player's knight is about to be crushed under the weight of a troll's hammer. He's failed his Avoid miserably. "Can I spend a Persona point to duck the blow, but to have stumbled back and nearly fallen from the ledge? My character would have dropped his sword, and he'd be hanging on for his life as the troll advances. How's that?"

The GM raises his eyebrow. "Sure!"

For social or academic tests, the relationship to the subject must change—it must get *complicated*. Remember, the test is still a failure; the player does not get what he's after, but he mitigates disaster by

spending a Persona point. He may then narrate the complication. The purpose of this mechanic is to give the player a little more control over his miserable fate.

There can only ever be one complication per roll per player.

Aristeia

An *Aristeia* is slightly different and much more significant than the other artha feats. In order to enter Aristeia, a character must spend 5 Fate points, 3 Persona points and 2 Deeds points. Once the artha is spent, choose the final form of the Aristeia from the choices below:

Minor Epiphany—A player may choose to shade-shift one of his stats or skills one shade lighter for the duration of an *entire scene*—a fight, a goal, a gauntlet, a Duel of Wits, etc.

Divine Aura (Aristeia)— By calling on this divine favor, a character may ignore all wound or other subtracted die penalties while he accomplishes one simple goal. The goal must be defined when the Aristeia is summoned. "To escape," "To win this battle" and "To sway the court to my side" are all fine and appropriate goals. Goals like "To kill my enemy" last only so long as the opponents are locked in combat. If the enemy manages to disengage, the Aristeia is lost.

Artha and Advancement

Just a reminder: Dice from artha never count toward the "total dice rolled" number when determining the difficulty of tests for advancement.

Evolving

The character sheet lists each Belief and Instinct with an "F/P/D." If artha is spent in a scene revolving around a Belief or an Instinct, note the type used. During the trait vote, Beliefs or Instincts which were used in conjunction with Fate points are eligible to be evolved to character traits. Those that were used in conjunction with Persona points are eligible to become minor die traits (3 pts and lower) and call-ons. Those that were used in conjunction with Deeds are up for major die traits (4 pts and higher).

This does not bypass the trait vote mechanic. This rule simply highlights how invested, during a story arc, a player becomes in aspects of his character. *Traits still must be voted on to be earned.*

Epiphany

By embodying his persona, truly fulfilling his destiny and moving beyond his bounds, a character may undergo an Epiphany—a permanent shade-shift of one of the character's stats or skills.

In order to earn this fantastic boon, a player must push and test one of his character's abilities past its limits. Not only must the ability in question be used at critical junctures in the story, *but the player must spend artha on those tests*.

To shift to the next lighter shade, a player must spend: 3 Deeds points, 10 Persona points and 20 Fate points (Aristeia do count toward the previous totals). If a player spends this much artha on one of his character's abilities, then the ability immediately and permanently takes on its new shade.

Artha and Game Play

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, artha is the game play interface for Burning Wheel. You act and are rewarded; you choose which actions are important enough to be rewarded. Not only does it mediate the relationship between player and GM, but it also helps set the tone for the game as a whole. When a player sets out a Belief or purchases a trait, the GM and the other players are now obligated to frame scenes and complications around it so it can be brought into play and challenged.

How Much?

If players want a more heroic or cinematic feel to their games, artha should be distributed liberally during the sessions. This will enable players to always have artha on hand, possibly for every roll! The characters will accomplish amazing feats and quickly soar into the heroic or even supernatural realm.

Personally, I like a tighter artha game. I want players to really consider how they spend these points, and spend them on crucial tests when success is a must. I give out one or two Fate points to each character every session, and a Persona point every other session or so. Deeds points only come at the end of a long campaign (10 or 12 sessions), and I only ever grant one or two at the most. However, I usually throw in another two or three Persona points on top of the Deeds points at the end of a campaign.
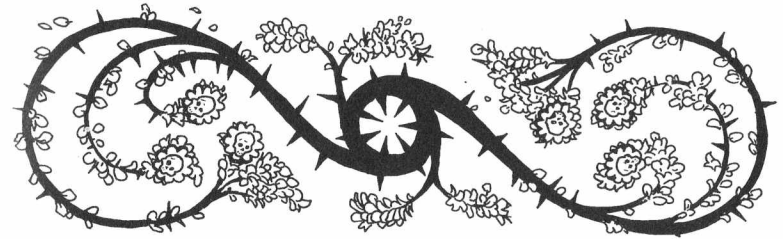
Starting Artha

The desired level of heroism and fantasy in your game determines how much artha to distribute to players before the game begins. I recommend that every character start with 1 Fate point. This gears the game toward long-term play and development. But I prefer gritty and struggling games, with a lot of room for advancement. You may prefer otherwise.

For a faster jump-start and more heroic characters, one point of artha can be given for each lifepath walked by the character. The first two paths are worth Fate points, the second two are worth Persona points, and the fifth is worth a Deeds. The sixth and seventh are worth Fate, the eighth and ninth are Persona, etc.

The above method really kicks the game off in high gear. For a lesser effect, and a medium-term game, give each character one point of each type of artha to start.

For high-voltage, one-shot scenarios, I like to give the characters 3 Fate, 2 Persona and 1 Deeds point. This gives players wiggle room without breaking the game.

Villains, NPCs and Artha

I strongly recommend giving villains and other NPCs the same starting artha as the PCs (if not a little bit more). However, I also advise against giving villains Deeds points. Burning Wheel is meant to be a player driven game, and Deeds points are rewards for actual game play. No matter what we'd like to think, those villains haven't played the game. And there's little more demoralizing to the players than hearing the GM announce, "The Giant King doubles his G6 Hammer skill."

Converting Old Artha

If you're converting from the old system to the new, each point of old artha equals one Fate point, two points of old artha buys one Persona, and three points buys a Deeds.

Allow players to distribute artha for their characters as they see fit, and never look back.

Artha in Brief

Spending

Name	Cost/Type	Effect
Luck	1 *Fate*	Open-ends 6s
Shrug it Off	1 *Fate*	Temporarily negates Sup. wound penalty
Boon	1 *Persona*	+1D to a stat or skill for one test; max three points per roll
Focus	1 *Persona*	Counter a time complication
Grit Your Teeth	1 *Persona*	Temporarily negates Light Wound penalty
Will to Live	1 *Persona*	Allows player to test Health so their character may recover from a Mortal Wound
(Complication)	1 *Persona*	Cheat death!
Divine Inspiration	1 *Deeds*	Double dice for one test
Saving Grace	1 *Deeds*	Reroll failed dice from one test
Aristeia	5 F, 3 P, 2 D	Gray skill/stat, or ignore wound penalties

Earning

Name	Earns/Type	Description
Belief	1 *Fate*	Driving the game forward with a Belief
Instinct	1 *Fate*	Playing an Instinct that makes the character's life difficult
Trait	1 *Fate*	Invoking a trait that sends the story in an unforeseen direction
Humor	1 *Fate*	For an in-character game-stopper
Right Skill Right Time	1 *Fate*	For having a skill to make the story go
Embodiment	1 *Persona*	For really good or distinctive roleplaying
Moldbreaker	1 *Persona*	For going beyond the bounds of character
Workhorse	1 *Persona*	For doing all the work for the scenario
MVP	1 *Persona*	For being the crucial element of success
Personal Goals	1 *Persona*	Revenge, triumph, seduction, victory
Greater Goals	1 *Deeds*	Accomplishing goals bigger than you!
Beyond the Call	1 *Deeds*	Helping, no matter the cost

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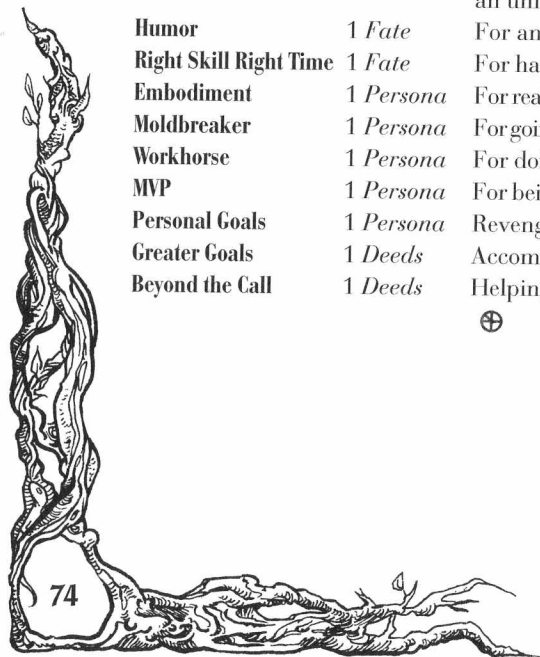
The Spokes in Play
Vincent's Admonition

In his game, *Dogs in the Vineyard*, Vincent Baker articulates a convention of Burning Wheel so well that I'd rather use his words than my own. He says:

Every moment of play, roll dice or say "yes."

If nothing is at stake, say "yes" [to the player's request], whatever they're doing. Just go along with them. If they ask for information, give it to them. If they have their characters go somewhere, they're there. If they want it, it's theirs.

Sooner or later—sooner, because [your game's] pregnant with crisis—they'll have their characters do something that someone else won't like. Bang! Something's at stake. Start the conflict and roll the dice.

Roll dice, or say "yes."

Vincent's advice is perfect for Burning Wheel. Unless there is something at stake in the story you have created, don't bother with the dice. Keep moving, keep describing, keep roleplaying. But as soon as your character wants something—needs something—that he doesn't have, that he doesn't know, that someone else has, roll the dice.

Flip that around and it reveals a fundamental rule in Burning Wheel game play: *When there is conflict, roll the dice.* There is no social agreement for the resolution of conflict in this game. Roll the dice and let the obstacle system guide the outcome. Success or failure doesn't really matter. So long as the intent of the task is clearly stated, the story is going *somewhere*.

Setting Obstacles

It is the GM's role to set obstacles. By presenting obstacles where he sees fit—by calling for tests—he builds the mood of the game. For example, making even the simple things difficult can give the game an air of oppression and weight. This isn't a bad thing, and

sometimes that's the mood necessary for conveying the situation. Setting obstacles low, or only asking for tests at moments of high drama, gives the game a "heroic" and grandiose feel.

The players have some role in setting this mood, but by far it is the GM's job to sculpt, pace and nudge the atmosphere in a certain direction. And not just through beautiful descriptions, but by using the game mechanics to reinforce those descriptions.

Versus Tests Revisited

Whenever there is a contest between two characters, make a versus test. This is the method of solving disputes in Burning Wheel: We roll for it. Two players want their characters to grab something? We roll to see who gets it. One player wants his character to hurt another? We make a versus tests—attack vs defense. Attacker gets more successes, he injures his target. Defender gets more successes, and he protects himself. *Now* what's he going to do? Want to remain hidden in a crowd? Roll, and I'm going to roll to spot you. Want to win an argument? We roll after we've each stated our case.

By using Versus tests to resolve any and all conflicts, we keep the game fair, the action moving, and allow the players a chance to legitimately influence events. Players can spend artha on rolls, they can call for help, use traits, use FoRKs and just plain do the unexpected. All of this is necessary for an evolving, engaging game. The players are both the actors and the audience, so they need to be involved in, and enjoying, the events as they transpire. Versus tests go a long way toward all of that.

Why roll at all? Why not just agree on what's happening? We're all fair-minded adults, right? Well, social agreement is a fantastic ideal, but it is subject to bullying, blustering, intimidation, manipulation, cajoling, persuasion and lying: all things that are separate from the characters—part of a social dynamic that is apart from the game. By relying on the dice, everyone is on a level playing field. Burning Wheel is a game, not acting class. The versus tests get everyone playing the game, and besides, your characters only advance if you roll the dice!

Roll, and you'll find that dice in Burning Wheel actually support and bolster the players' actions—even if they fail! Dice here help you get what you want, not frustrate your goals. There's a process to it, sure, but I'm confident that the mechanics of this game drive dramatic, intense play. Roll the dice. You'll see.
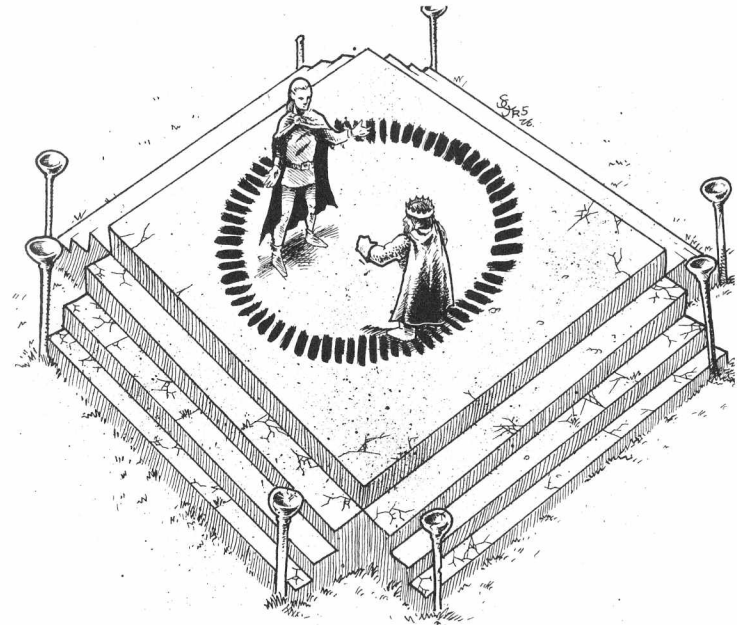
Make Characters and Play Now

At this point, if you haven't read the Character Burner I recommend you do so. And I strongly urge you to make a character. Get a friend or two together, and take the system you've just read for a spin. Nothing big; a small, one-goal scenario would be best. Play out social and physical altercations using the versus tests rules. Get some tests for advancement and some artha from the stingy GM. As questions arise about detailed resolution, make a few notes and, after the game, start reading through the chapters in the Rim of the Wheel.

Specific Systems

In the next chapter of the book, I outline various individual systems in the game. These are detailed ways to manipulate the die pools and tests in order to get a variety of different results. There are a number of extended conflict resolution mechanics—the Duel of Wits, Range and Cover, Fight!, etc—but the most fundamental is, and shall remain, the versus test. ✠
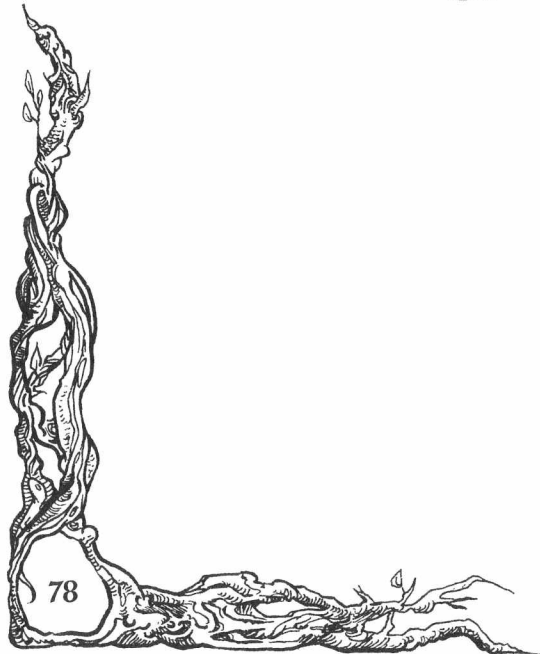
the Rim of the Wheel

Therefore he willed that the hearts of Man should seek beyond the world and have no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their life, amid the powers and chances of the world...

—JRR Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*
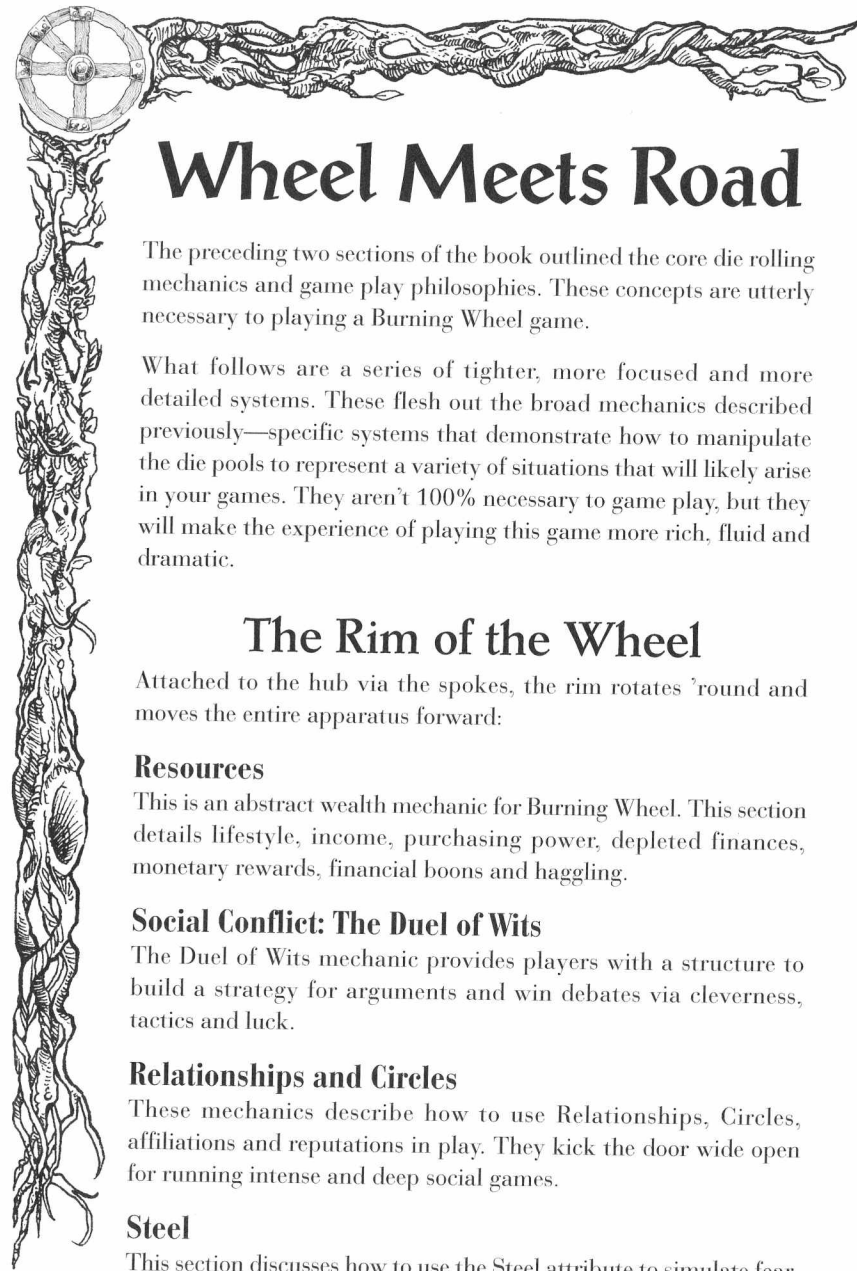
Wheel Meets Road

The preceding two sections of the book outlined the core die rolling mechanics and game play philosophies. These concepts are utterly necessary to playing a Burning Wheel game.

What follows are a series of tighter, more focused and more detailed systems. These flesh out the broad mechanics described previously—specific systems that demonstrate how to manipulate the die pools to represent a variety of situations that will likely arise in your games. They aren't 100% necessary to game play, but they will make the experience of playing this game more rich, fluid and dramatic.

The Rim of the Wheel

Attached to the hub via the spokes, the rim rotates 'round and moves the entire apparatus forward:

Resources

This is an abstract wealth mechanic for Burning Wheel. This section details lifestyle, income, purchasing power, depleted finances, monetary rewards, financial boons and haggling.

Social Conflict: The Duel of Wits

The Duel of Wits mechanic provides players with a structure to build a strategy for arguments and win debates via cleverness, tactics and luck.

Relationships and Circles

These mechanics describe how to use Relationships, Circles, affiliations and reputations in play. They kick the door wide open for running intense and deep social games.

Steel

This section discusses how to use the Steel attribute to simulate fear, surprise and hesitation in a character.

Range and Cover

Using mechanics similar to the Duel of Wits, Range and Cover describes how to run a conflict between two knife-throwing assassins or a gang of murderous hunters stalking stragglers of a defeated army.

Martial Conflict: Fight!

Expanding on the positioning and maneuver of Range and Cover, martial conflict is broken down into a blow by blow scene where players must choose the best strategy for their characters. It's intense, chaotic and brutal!

Weapons Mechanics

I've got the knife in him, now what? This section details how one character hits another character and how weapons do damage.

Armor and Shields

From leather jerkins and arming jacks to full plate mail, this section describes how armor protects a character from those horrible weapons described above and how it affects his actions.

Injury and Recovery

Should a character become injured, this section describes how that injury affects his future actions and how he can recover from it.

Sorcery

This section describes the basic die mechanics for the Sorcery, Summoning and Enchanting skills. These are the main spoken and written schools of magic in Burning Wheel. Sorcery is discussed as the prime example of spell casting. Summoning and Enchanting are detailed in the forthcoming Magic Burner. Beta chapters can be downloaded at www.burningwheel.org.

Natural Magic

Dwarves, Elves, Orcs and a few other character stocks have access to a special form of magic known as natural magic. This section briefly discusses the basic die mechanics for such magic. Full details on the various natural magics are described in the appropriate sections in the Character Burner.

Emotional Magic

Emotional magic grants characters access to great power, but at a price. Men possess the most powerful emotional magic in the form of Faith, but other cultures have their own manifestation: Grief, Greed and Hatred, to name a few.

Movement and Pursuit

How far do I go when I run and scream? A basic discussion on how characters walk, jog and sprint in Burning Wheel—for the detail-monger in all of us.

Riding and Mounted Combat

No fantasy medieval roleplaying game would be complete without mechanics for riding horses, mounted combat and pursuing your enemies in breathtaking chases!

Materials

Should you ever need to knock down that door or shoot through that wall, the Materials section has what you need.

Heroic and Supernatural

The Heroic and Supernatural chapter shows that not only do characters with these shades get lower difficulty numbers, they get a host of other cool perks too.

Pick and Choose

I strongly recommend *not* reading the next section straight through. These sections are not the same kind of instructional texts as the first two sections. In The Rim of the Wheel, I discuss detailed mechanics for resolution of particular situations in play.

What's best, I think, is to start playing the game slowly. Use the basic resolution mechanics discussed previously to get the game going. Then, as you approach each session, set up the conflict so as to introduce one or two of the following mechanics. For example, the first session might involve gathering men and materials using the Resources and Circles. The next might involve the confrontation with the corrupt ministers on the marble steps of the courthouse—a Duel of Wits! The following session then blossoms into full-blown rioting resolved with the Range and Cover mechanics. Then the climax is a brawl between the surviving royal guard and the players using Fight! ⊕
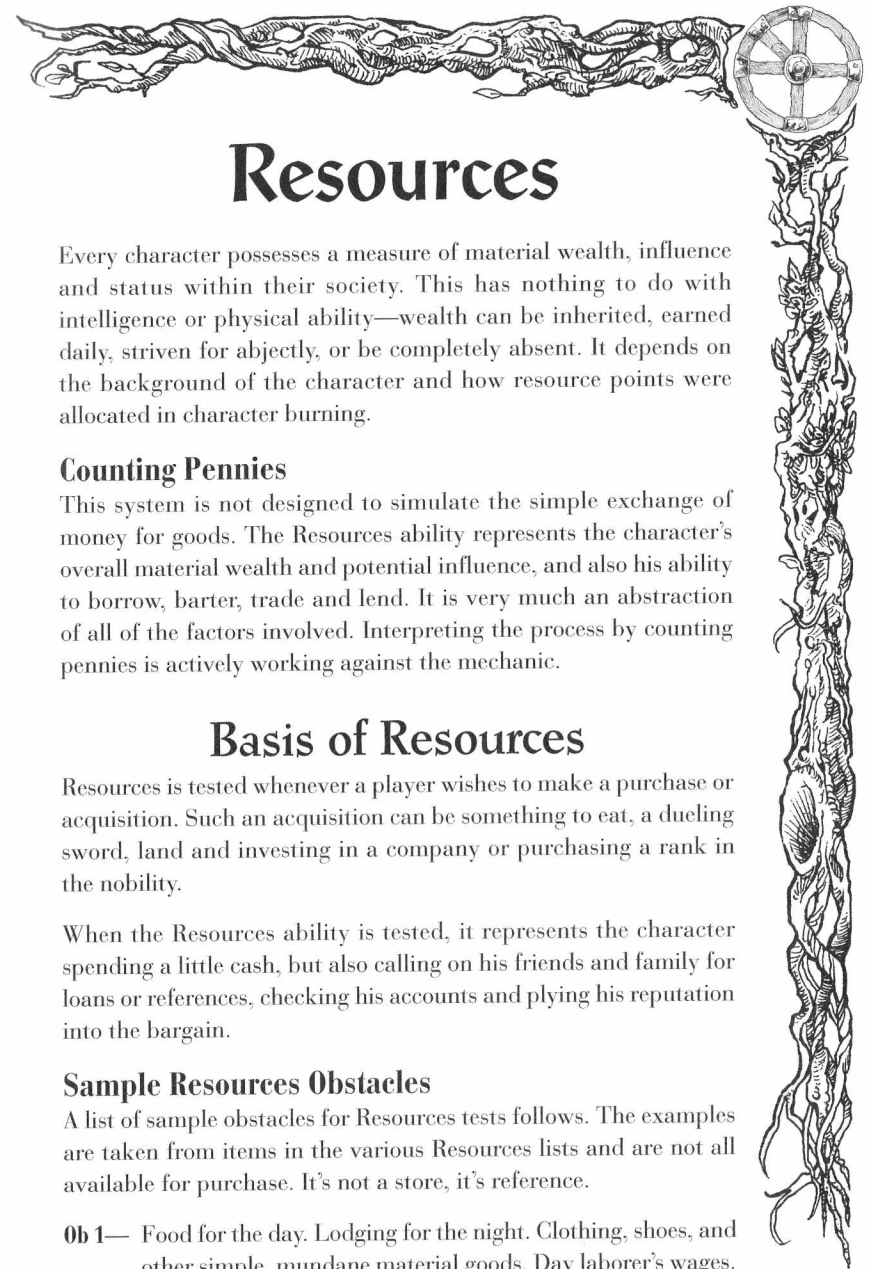
Resources

Every character possesses a measure of material wealth, influence and status within their society. This has nothing to do with intelligence or physical ability—wealth can be inherited, earned daily, striven for abjectly, or be completely absent. It depends on the background of the character and how resource points were allocated in character burning.

Counting Pennies

This system is not designed to simulate the simple exchange of money for goods. The Resources ability represents the character's overall material wealth and potential influence, and also his ability to borrow, barter, trade and lend. It is very much an abstraction of all of the factors involved. Interpreting the process by counting pennies is actively working against the mechanic.

Basis of Resources

Resources is tested whenever a player wishes to make a purchase or acquisition. Such an acquisition can be something to eat, a dueling sword, land and investing in a company or purchasing a rank in the nobility.

When the Resources ability is tested, it represents the character spending a little cash, but also calling on his friends and family for loans or references, checking his accounts and plying his reputation into the bargain.

Sample Resources Obstacles

A list of sample obstacles for Resources tests follows. The examples are taken from items in the various Resources lists and are not all available for purchase. It's not a store, it's reference.

Ob 1— Food for the day. Lodging for the night. Clothing, shoes, and other simple, mundane material goods. Day laborer's wages.

Ob 2— Rent for a small flat or farmer's cabin. A *sumptuous* meal. A fancy pair of shoes. A mule. Padded or leather armor. Poor quality arms. Poor quality plated leather. Passage on a ship. Traveling gear. Servant's wages.
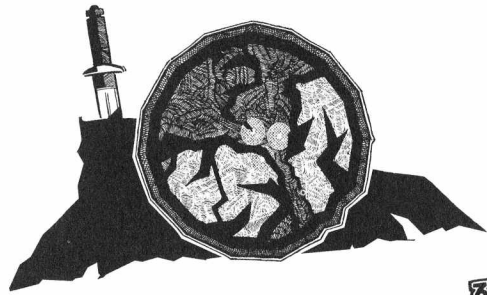
Ob 3— Rent for a townhouse or a country villa. Run of the mill arms. Run of the mill bow. A letter of marque. Pay for household staff or a single professional assistant. Popular books. Riding or draft horse. A small cart. Exotic spices. Quilted or leather barding. A knight's wages.

Ob 4— Jewelry, exotic fabrics, rare antiques and books. A palfrey or rouncy. Run of the mill chainmail. Craftsman tools. A run of the mill long or great bow. A crossbow. A large baggage wagon, small barge or sturdy 18-man longboat. Rare herbs and minerals (wink, wink). Plated leather or lamellar barding. Pay and support for a bodyguard or trainer.

Ob 5— Turcoman warhorse. Run of the mill plated chainmail. Superior quality arms. Elven Tome of Lore. Chainmail barding. A lord's or captain's wages.

Ob 6— Destrier. Run of the mill full platemail. Dwarven arms. Elven bow. Plated mail barding. A donation to the court for consideration of baronial rank.

Ob 7— Warhorse of renown. Donation to the royal court to be considered for a viscountyship. Full plate barding. Dwarven shield or mask.

Ob 8— Industrial equipment: a printing press, a forge, a small cargo ship.

Ob 9— A large cargo ship. A legendary warhorse. Elven plated mail.

Ob 10—A warship. Building a castle. Dwarven mail.

Gee, Those Resource Obstacles are Mighty High

Yes, they are. In order to make most high end purchases, even the wealthy will need to secure loans or procure gifts from their dependents. See below for more on that!

Testing Resources

Acquiring material goods—arms and armor are a popular purchase, as are tomes of forgotten lore—hiring bodyguards, pages, scribes and couriers or booking passage on a ship or caravan, all call for a Resources test on behalf of the acting character.

Locating *services* is done via the Circles mechanic described in the Relationships and Circles chapter.

For most purchases—unless it is supremely relevant to the drama of the story—I recommend that when a player asks for his character to go shopping, "I need a small cargo ship," for example, simply set the obstacle and have him test Resources. Then you can get on to the good stuff, like pirates!

Resources vs Obstacle

Test Resources against the obstacle as if it were any other skill or stat. Helping, artha and advancement rules apply. Wounds don't reduce Resources dice.

If the player meets or exceeds the obstacle, he has acquired what he stated he was after. If he fails the test, his Resources are taxed and he either can't find or can't afford what he was looking for.

FoRKs

Players may *not* FoRK their skills into Resources.

Linked Tests and Resources

Players may make linked tests using appropriate skills like Wises or Accounting in order to get a bonus die to a Resources test. See the Scoring a Deal section of this chapter. This is very situational and ultimately up to the GM.

Helping

Characters may *help* one another with Resources as if it were a skill. If the testing player is taxed, then *everyone involved on the test is taxed*.

By the way, both characters do not have to be part of scene when Resources helping dice are used.

A merchant could give his friend a bank note to use to aid his purchase of rare books. The friend tests his Resources when ready, with the aid of the Merchant's helping dice. Meanwhile, the merchant has gone about his business.

Home and Away

Resources are not universal. They reflect the power of the character on his home turf. Trading in foreign markets, with foreign currency or just being without your books and materials, can put characters at a serious disadvantage.

Being away from the wellspring of a character's Resources incurs a +1 Ob disadvantage. Higher obstacles can be applied if your character is really on the other side of the world or something.

Before play begins every player should discuss with the GM the "home turf" of their Resources. This is very much up to the parameters of your campaign, but generally the higher the exponent, the broader the reach. A peasant's resources might extend into the town and countryside, while a Count's resources likely extend across many provinces. Still, use common sense. Exponent 1 and 2 Resources are fairly portable—you carry what you own—while Resources tied into a factory or a local temple are not.

Buying in Bulk

Resource obstacles are high. If characters want to buy in bulk, raise the obstacle by one or two and multiply the material numbers by x10 or even x100. It's an abstract system, after all.

Failed Resources Tests: Tax

Tax represents a loss of fluidity in the character's assets. Perhaps some cash was expended, but more likely is that favors were called or resources tapped that simply can't be called on again for a while. A failed Resources test is an interesting animal. In general, the player does not achieve his intent (just like a normal failed test) and his Resources is temporarily reduced due to the expenditure. We call this *Tax*.

Taxed Dice

On a Routine test, the character loses one die. If it was a Difficult test, he loses two dice. If it was a Challenging test, the character's Resources is reduced by the margin of failure.

The Gift of Kindness

On a failed roll, the GM may choose to grant the player whatever it was he was after on his Resources test. If this option is chosen, the character's Resources is still Taxed, but the player achieves the intent of his roll. The Gift of Kindness may be considered by the GM on a case-by-case basis.

Cutting Your Losses

If a player fails a Resources test and the GM offers him the Gift of Kindness option, the player can decline the offer and opt to Cut his Losses. If he does so, he does *not* find what he was looking for, and his character's Resources are Taxed by only 1D.

Haggled Price

A Resources test follows the Haggling test. However, if the price is too high, the character can still walk away before the dice are rolled. If the player decides to buy at that haggled price, he pays full Tax if he fails the test.

Depleting Resources

If a character's Resources ever drop to exponent 0 due to Tax, his Resources are *permanently* reduced by 1D. Unlike regular *Taxed* dice, depleted Resources may only be recouped through advancement/practice.

Scoring a Deal: Wises

Appropriate wises can be used to aid Resources in the game. When a player wishes to track down an item or service not commonly available, test an appropriate wise to see if the character finds it in a timely manner or finds a good deal.

Set the obstacle for the test: Obstacle 1 tests are for commonly known information in the Wise's area; Ob 3 for uncommon or hard to find details; Ob 5 for something only an insider would know; Ob 6 plus for obscure stuff.

This test abides by the standard mechanics for Linked tests: failing incurs an obstacle penalty, meeting is no penalty or bonus, exceeding grants +1D.

Setting the Price:
Haggling and Bidding

Haggling

Abdul Saddam returned shortly, "He's asking for nearly a talent in gold, master." The GM set the obstacle for the Resources test at 9. Ships were a rare commodity.

"Eh, is he mad? For such a small ship! I'll go have a word with him." Shortly thereafter, Moqtada arrived at the shipyard and had words with the owner.

Within the time it takes a stone to fall from hand to earth, he had the man agreeing that the ship wasn't worth quite that much.

Haggling is the norm in most medieval cultures. Players are free to haggle over Resources obstacles. To do so, test Haggling vs Haggling. FoRK as appropriate.

This is a multi-step process, but it is recommended that only three consecutive Haggling tests be allowed per Resources test in order to keep the game moving.

If the buying character wins the test, he may reduce the price by one step/obstacle point *or* may opt to close the bargain. If he does not close the bargain, another Haggling test is made.

If the selling character wins the test, he may opt to increase the price one step, or close the bargaining and stand firm on his price. The price may not be raised above the original obstacle. If he increases the price, another Haggling test is made.

Once one of the players *closes the bargain*, a Resources test is made for the purchase at the obstacle arrived at via Haggling. The price may never be reduced below half the original offering.

Moqtada greets the shipwright in a friendly manner and eases his way into the bargaining process. His player rolls his G5 Haggling skill and turns up three successes. The GM rolls the merchant's B5 Haggling and comes up with only one success. Moqtada's player opts to reduce the price by one step. Doing so means the negotiations remain open.

In the next round, Moqtada wins again, and reduces the price another step, to an Ob 7 Resources test. Still pretty pricey.

In the next and final round of negotiations, the shipwright wins the test, four successes to three. He opts to use his win to close the bargain and fix the price. Though he could have raised the price back up and kept negotiations open, he felt another few minutes with Moqtada and he'd be throwing his wife into the bargain!

In place of the simplified Haggling rules described above, the players can also use the Duel of Wits mechanics. Use the Haggling skill as the prime social skill in that case. See the next chapter, Social Conflict.

Bidding

Another method of setting a price (or a Resources obstacle) is via an auction or open bidding. In this case, interested buyers make offers (in the form of a Resources obstacle) to the seller. No skill test is necessary here, but players should consider carefully. They are setting their own obstacles!

Each bid may only raise the price by one obstacle point. Remember, an obstacle point does represent a fair amount of money and influence in this game.

Lifestyles, Obligation
and Maintenance

Resources are about more than just making a single purchase once in a while. They also connote a lifestyle for the character. Listed below are the obstacles for maintaining various medieval lifestyles—the appropriate living quarters, the clothes, the food, etc.

Maintenance Cycle and Lifestyle

The duration of a Resources cycle is determined by the players and GM at the outset of the game. It reflects the interval of time between all your hard work and when you get paid for it.

At the outset of your game, determine what the general Resources cycle will be. The length of most medieval resources cycles would be half a year or a year. Monthly cycles are more amenable to the modern mind, and might reflect urban life better. Or you could set the cycle on the same schedule as the royal tax collectors. If they come once a month, test against this obstacle once a month. If they come twice a year, then twice a year it is. This choice is going to affect the pace and feel of play—the shorter intervals lend a more frenetic and "modern" feel; longer cycles lend the game a seasonal, languid mood.

Lifestyle Maintenance Obstacles

Once every cycle, each player must test his Resources against his lifestyle obstacle.

Ob 1— Peasant day laborer; no home, property or possessions to speak of.

Ob 2— Working poor; small family, a rented cottage. Poor knight or adventurer; you and your horse on the road.

Ob 3— Maintaining a family in the city. Maintaining a small business; a cobbler's shop. Maintaining oneself as a knight; horse, armor, weapons and one squire or second.

Ob 4— Lord's manor. Wealthy peasant or well-off merchant. Medium-sized business; a small blacksmith.

Ob 5— Maintenance of a fortress and surrounds. Wealthy merchant lifestyle. Large business; a brewer or tanner. A specialty business like an engraver, gunsmith or silversmith. A poor court.

Ob 6— Maintenance for an appropriately wealthy baronial court.

Ob 7— Viscount's court. Industry like a shipping concern, vineyards or a foundry.

Ob 8— Count's court. A small castle. Big industry like a mining operation.

Ob 9— Ducal court. A large castle, estate or plantation.

Ob 10— Opulent royal court. A palace.

Ob 11— *Fantastic Wealth!*

Recovering Resources

Unlike the body, Resources don't recover on their own. They must be actively replenished.

To rejuvenate his depleted reserves, the character has got to do some work. The player describes how he is going about earning cash, closing deals and refunding his accounts. Such behavior is typically related to the character's lifestyle and maintenance obligations, and must be tied into one (or more) of the character's skills.

In order to replenish his reserves, a poor knight has got to ride circuit with a few caravans. Pay's good, but the work is b-o-r-i-n-g.

Get a Job!

Establish what job/occupation the character is undertaking. Pick a skill to represent this. Test the skill; appropriate FoRKs are allowed. The obstacle is 1 plus the number of dice lost. Meeting this obstacle recovers 1D. Multiple dice are recovered via extra successes over the obstacle. The time for the test is equal to the current Resources cycle (agreed upon in the Lifestyle section). Alternately, time for the test can be reduced by 10% per extra success. This test counts toward the advancement of the "working" skill.

Our poor knight could test a number of skills to represent his job—wises of the local area (or bandits), Riding (if it was a real sleeper) or even Sword if it was a hazardous tour. If the character is -1D to Resources, the obstacle of the test is 2. If the Resources cycle is one month, the knight is busy for about a month. If the player passes the test, then the die is recovered and the Resources are back up to their starting level.
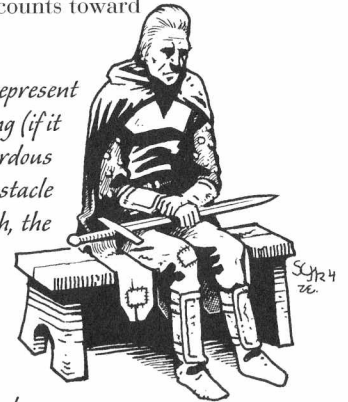
Or another example: Moqtada is a slave trader. He recently lost a bit of clout in a bad deal. His Resources was Taxed by -2D. One of his friends—a Kelvik pirate—mentions to him that he's got a load of slaves to unload. The GM's throwing him a bone, so Moqtada's player asks the GM if he can use this toward recovering his taxed dice. The answer is yes, so Moqtada's player rolls his B4 Slave Appraisal skill FoRKed with his Haggling, Falsehood and Conspicuous skills. The obstacle for the test is 3 (base 1 + 2 Taxed dice). Moqtada gets four successes; one over. The resources cycle for this campaign is based on tax collection, but he gets both dice back before he has to make his next lifestyle maintenance test.

Advancing Resources

As the cliché goes: You must spend money to make money. Resources advance like a skill—the more you push yourself and test your Resources, the more you stand to gain. However (there's always a however, isn't there?), like Perception and Faith, *only successful Resources tests count toward advancement*. Therefore, one successful Resouces test will push a character from B0 to B1 Resources.

Tax only *temporarily* reduces the Resources exponent. Make sure to note the current actual Resources exponent and use that for advancement purposes.

Cash, Goods, Titles and Loans

Cash on Hand

Cash is the most liquid of Resources, but dries up as quickly as water. If ever a player's character is given a substantial amount of cash—either as a reward or payment—then he gains bonus dice to his Resources.

Dice from cash on hand (or its equivalent) may only be used for one test. After the test, the cash is considered spent and the character's Resources returns to normal. Multi-die bonuses may be spent, one or two at a time, across multiple rolls.

Property, Goods, Funds and Caches

Occasionally, a character will come into a substantial infusion of wealth: a *large* sum of cash, property, valuable antiques or even bulk quantities of salable goods. These durable boons provide a bonus to Resources—from one to ten dice. However, if a character is Taxed due to a failed Resources test, the dice must be removed from the boon first and are lost permanently. They cannot be regained via the *Get a Job!* process described above.

Title

Certain conditions that arise in game might benefit a character's Resources: a promotion in rank, popularity or status, for example. An improvement in station can increase Resources by 1D. The GM is the sole arbiter of this increase and it should be given with the utmost care. If a character is already wealthy, the rise in station might mean little or nothing at all. But for a character who starts poor, the same rise can be quite beneficial. More often than not, a rise in station just means more bills!

Thormund begins the game as an adventuring squire. Due to a particularly heroic feat, he is elevated to the rank of lord (skipping past knight altogether!). The GM simply jumps his Resources exponent from B3 to B4. So long as he retains his rank, he keeps the bonus.

Loans

Characters may make loans to each other in the form of Resources dice. The loaning character must make a test at an obstacle of double the number of dice he wishes to give his friend. If the dice are to be used for multiple tests, add +1 Ob for each test beyond the first they are good for. If the test is failed, the loaning player can opt to abort the loan and cut his losses or suck up the Tax and dole out the dice to be loaned.

There is a difference between loans and helping dice. Should his friend make a bad deal and lose Resources dice, the loaning character is shielded from Tax. The loaned dice are now considered to be part of his friend's pool and no longer attached to him.

Loans and Tax

Loaned dice are lost first on a failed Resources test and cannot be recovered.

Debt

In general, loans must be repaid. A loaning player can opt to grant a debt-free loan, or one that must be paid back (with interest). The size of the debt is equal to the *obstacle of the loaning test*. If it must be paid back, raise the obstacle of the indebted character's next lifestyle test by one. A successful test reduces the debt by one. Test once each cycle until the debt is reduced to zero. If a player should fail a lifestyle Resources test and be taxed, the debt is extended another cycle.

If a debt is repaid successfully, it counts as a linked test for the *loaning character's* Resources—no bonus if the obstacle is merely met, but add +1D to the next Resources test if the debtor repaid with extra successes.

Currency

In order to facilitate immersion into the setting, it is important for the players and GM to develop and maintain a monetary language. Haggling for "resource points" is boring and dull. Fighting over talents, sous, funds, florins and pounds is cool!

It's best to set your currencies at the start of the game. Here's an example to help get you started:

Horse	Rps	Res Ob	Laborer Wages	Knight Wages	RW Cost*
Mule	4	Ob 2	~1 month	~less than a day	2-6 sous
Arms	5	Ob 3	~2 months	~1 day	7 sous
Horse	5	Ob 3	~3 months	~2 days	6-12 sous
Spices	5	Ob 3	~8 months	~5 days	20-40 sous
Books	5	Ob 3	~3 months	~2 days	6-12 sous
Tools	9	Ob 4	~6 months	~5 days	20-30 sous
Poison	6	Ob 4	~7 months	~1-3 months	5-34 livres
Plated Mail	20	Ob 5	~20 years	~1-6 months	10-60 livres
SQ Arms	20	Ob 5	~20 years	~3-8 months	30-80 livres
Destrier	20	Ob 6	~22 years	~3-10 months	30-100 livres

*Compiled and extrapolated from *Fief* by Lisa J. Steele published by Cumberland Games and *A Distant Mirror* by Barbara Tuchman published by Ballantine Books

In order to create a scale, I've provided the currency from 13-14th century England and France. Following that are the average wages for various occupations from the period. Monetary units from 13-14th century England and France: 1 livre = 20 sous = 240 dernier (a dernier is a penny).

Wages per month: Laborer, carter, reaper, groom, guard: 60 denier/month. Carpenter: 90 denier/month. Shepherd, swineherd: 100 denier/month. Stonecutter, mason: 615 denier/month or 2 sous per month. Foot soldier: 60 denier/month. Archer: 90 denier/month. Sergeant: 15 sous/month. Squire: 30 sous/month. Knight: 210 sous/month. Duke: 360 sous/month.*

Resources in Brief

- In general, use Wises to track down material goods.

- The GM sets the price (Resources obstacle) based on the listed examples.

- If applicable, players may haggle over the price or use a Duel of Wits to set a price.

- Test Resources. No FoRKs, but linked tests and helping dice are ok.

- Success means you got what you were after. Failure indicates you were taxed and lose Resources dice.

- If Taxed, you must *Get a Job* to recover Resources. Test skill for agreed upon time—Ob 1 + number of dice lost. Success means one die is recovered, extra successes recover additional dice. Failure means the remaining Taxed dice carry over into and through the next maintenance cycle.

- Only successful Resources tests count toward advancement.

- Loans: Test Resources to give dice to other players. Obstacle is double the number of dice being loaned. Add +1 Ob for each test beyond the first which the dice are viable for. Loaned dice are not helping dice and therefore the loaning character is not Taxed every time his deadbeat friend fails a Resources test.

- The GM may call upon players to test Resources in order to maintain their lifestyles. Obstacles are listed. Remember to add any debt as an obstacle penalty to the lifestyle roll. ⊕

*See note supra.

Duel of Wits

The Dwarven prince appeared bored. The Elven ambassador droned on about the need for this agreement, yet he just couldn't see the point. Finally, the good seneschal stepped forward: "Allow me, sire." The prince nodded; now there would be some entertainment!

The Elven delegate frowned as the seneschal turned to address both prince and court. Neatly dressed and subtly ostentatious, the Dwarf loudly and clearly stated his case: The clan had always done right by themselves; there was no need to become embroiled in the internecine politics of outsiders.

Stung by the veiled insult, the Elven ambassador's nostrils flared. His voice swelled and carried clearly over the hall as he once again made his argument: Unless all stood together, all would fall. This was not a problem for one province or one clan, but all of the disparate crowns of the land.

Inwardly, the prince smiled. This was going to be a good fight!

Wits, acumen and elocution are to the world of business, politics and religion what swords, fire and agility are to the world of war. In high stakes political negotiations, a character might find himself caught so his only possible escape is to cut his way free with his tongue!

The Duel of Wits is an extended conflict mechanic used to resolve debate and argument in the game (and at the table). Characters use verbal attacks and maneuvers to overpower and destroy their opponents' arguments and make themselves appear, to all witnesses, *correct*.

The purpose in such a duel is not to reveal the truth, but to put forth your argument in the best light while dismantling your opponent's position—and to convince the audience that you have struck on the truth, while your opponent is mired in half-formed thought and naive delusions.
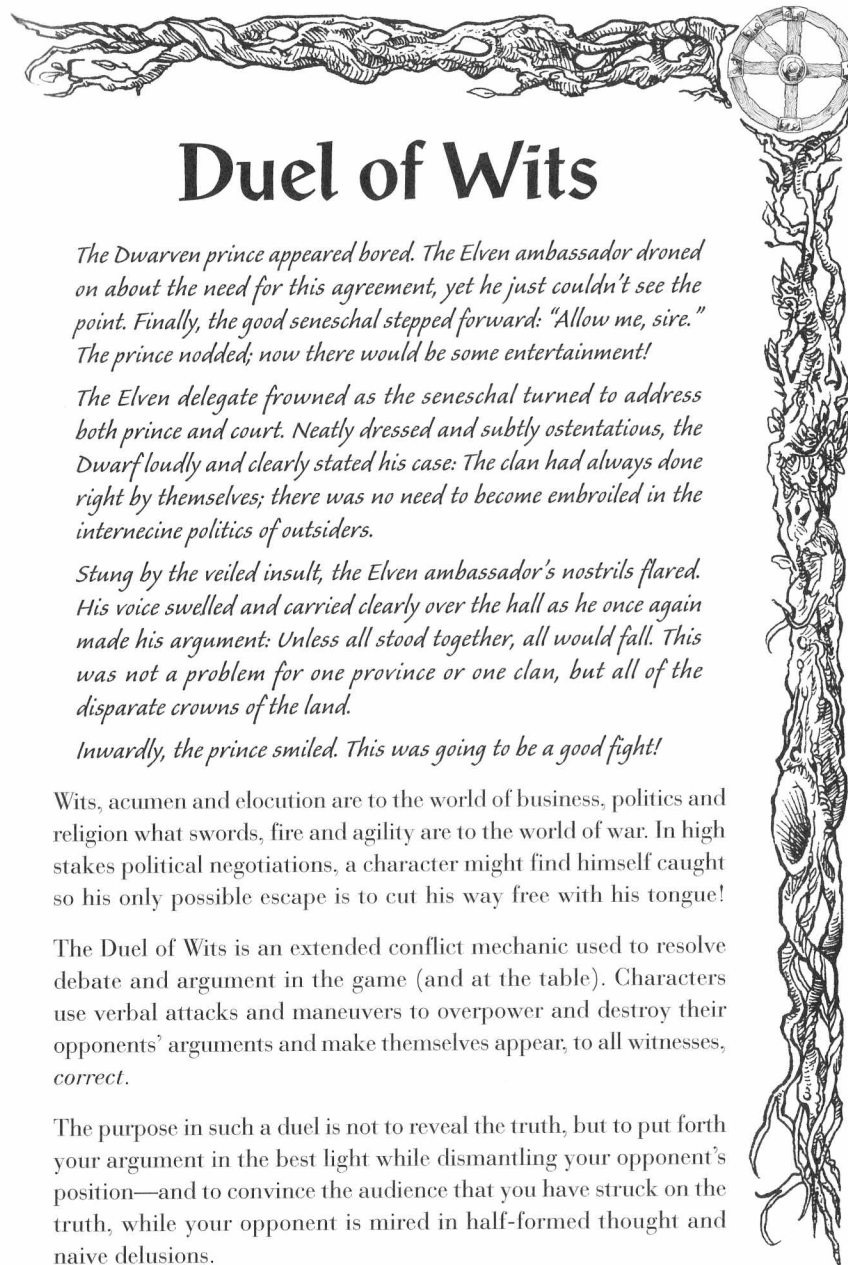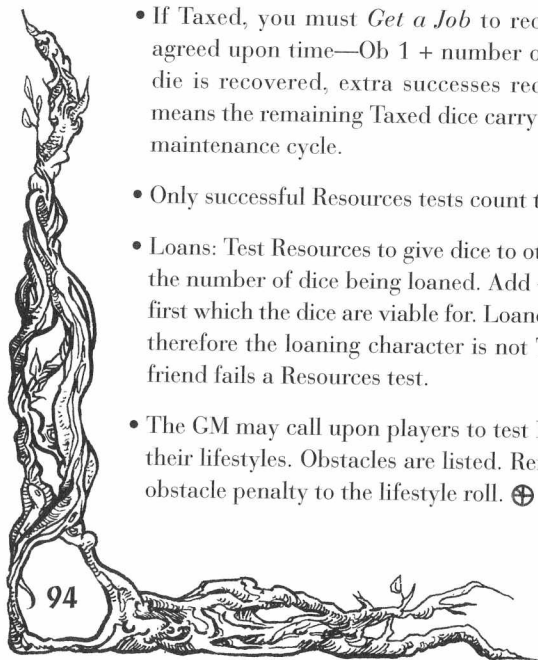
Argument not Mind Control

The Duel of Wits is designed to simulate debate and argument: A speaker convinces an audience of the merits of his point. It is not designed to change a single character's or player's opinion. While this is possible, of course, it is not the goal.

Think of it as something similar to a performance mechanic. Two performers hit the stage, competing for the audience's attention. One might be more skilled than the other, but lack presence or even fail to appeal to the audience's taste. At the end of the performance, the audience is applauding the crass clown, while the virtuoso violinist is sulking in the corner. Neither of the performing characters' opinions has been changed by the event, but the audience thinks that clown is the cat's meow—because, for them, his performance was better.

Though the Duel of Wits cannot make a character like or believe anything, it can force him to agree to something—even if only for the time being.

In the previous example, the Dwarven seneschal and the Elven ambassador are about to argue whether or not it is right to go to war at this time. Should the Elf win, he has convinced the prince and the court that now is the time. The Seneschal obviously still disagrees. However, he has been bested in this verbal sparring match and must look for another opportunity to state his case. If the character loses this extended conflict, all of the rules for failure and Let it Ride apply.

Dueling Skills

A character may engage in a Duel of Wits with any of the following skills: Oratory, Rhetoric, Persuasion, Interrogation, Stentorious Debate or Haggling where appropriate. Etiquette, Falsehood, Ugly Truth, Soothing Platitudes, Conspicuous, Command and Intimidation may be used as FoRKs or be tested themselves at appropriate moments, but they may not be used as the main dueling skill.

The Body of the Argument

To begin a Duel of Wits, there must be at least two characters willing to defend their disparate positions. Each side clearly and succinctly states his case. This is called stating the *body of argument*.

State Your Case

When creating a body of argument, each player must describe his point in brief and why he is right. Players state their cases one at a time.

Body of Argument

Once the cases have been made clear, each player tests the skill which he is going to use in this duel. Add any successes from the skill test to the character's Will exponent. This total is the *body of argument* for this duel.

When presenting his argument, a diplomat with a B5 Oratory rolls three successes, and adds that to his Will of B4. The body of his argument is 7 for this duel.

The purpose of the Duel of Wits is to reduce your opponent's body of argument to zero dice through use of clever strategy and outright attack.

Big Deal

If the GM judges the debate to be very important and deserving of some lengthy discussion, he may set the bodies of argument higher. Instead of rolling, add the Will exponent + the skill exponent.

Not a Big Deal

If for some reason two players are debating a minor point and desire quick resolution, use only the Will exponent as the body of argument.

Traits

There are many traits which affect the Duel of Wits. Be sure to consult any trait descriptions before the duel begins and add bonuses where and when applicable.

The Body of Character Traits Optional Rule

If the GM so desires, he may allow players to add applicable character traits to their body of argument. Stubborn, for example, might apply to certain kinds of verbal sparring. Each trait added increases the body of argument by +1D.

Agree to the Terms

Once the body of argument has been created, both sides must then agree to the terms of this debate before continuing. This is essentially a meta-game condition. "If I win, you'll do *X*. If you win, I'll do *Y*." The players state these terms and agree to abide by them. Keep the demands reasonable and achievable. Break larger issues up into smaller arguments and span them across multiple duels. A war isn't won in a single clash of arms, nor is a court case won with a single battle of words. The point here is to get the argument into the mechanics so it can be resolved fairly. There's nothing worse than two hours of pointless player vs player argument. Bring arguments to the table, set the terms, roll the dice and move on.

Walking Away

A player can never be *forced* to engage in a duel. If he wishes, he may always walk away from a challenge—refusing to debate the point. This is a valid method of preserving the sanctity of one's pride and one's argument, but it may allow your opponent to reign unchecked and control the outcome of the situation. Note, though, if a player chooses to walk away, he must shut up. No more talking about it with him!

The Duel

In a Duel of Wits, players plan their strategies a few moves in advance—they build a "hand" of attack and defense in order to outwit and overpower their opponent's weakling arguments.

Verbal Exchange

In Burning Wheel, we call our "round" the *exchange*. Each player plans *three* actions for the exchange. Each action and the opponent's opposing reaction is contained in a smaller time segment called a *volley*. Players take one verbal action per volley. Their actions are then played against one another.

The Ambassador's Script		
Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Point "Time for action is now"	**Rebuttal** "Nearsighted behavior doesn't win wars!"	**Dismiss** "Surely the folly of such cautious mincing; there's no glory in it!"

The Seneschal's Script		
Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Rebuttal "Let's not be hasty; let's think this through"	**Point** "We have always counselled our own affairs!"	**Feint** "Master Ambassador, surely you're not implying..."

If I have "Volley 1: Point, Volley 2: Rebuttal, Volley 3: Dismiss" scripted for my verbal exchange and my opponent has "Volley 1: Rebuttal, Volley 2: Point, Volley 3: Feint," my Point and his Rebuttal consist of the first volley. My Rebuttal versus his Point is the second. My Dismiss will crush his Feint in the third volley. Also, I wrote in a quick note in each volley to help me remember what I was about to say. You don't have to do that, but I find it useful.

Volley to Volley

Once the actions for the exchange are scripted, the GM calls for each volley of actions to be revealed, one at a time. "First volley!" he says. Each action is spoken and resolved before moving on: All actions for volley 1 are resolved before moving to volley 2; volley 2 is resolved and then volley 3 is revealed.

Action to Action

Points and Dismisses are spoken before a Rebuttal. Maneuvers like Feint and Obfuscate are used to literally interrupt the opponent's flow. If two players are simultaneously throwing Points, Dismissals or Incitements at each other, either let traits decide who speaks first or allow the elder character to proceed. The order doesn't really matter. The results of the tests are tallied after both characters have spoken.

Say It and Play It

Don't write out any speeches, just note your actions; let the oration come organically in play. Include the *intent* of the action in the roleplay. The maneuver chosen is the *task*.

Elements of Elocution

There are seven actions a speaker can take in a Duel of Wits: Avoid the Topic, Dismiss, Feint, Incite, Obfuscate, Point and Rebuttal.

Counters, Countered by, and Defends Against

The Duel of Wits actions are described via a number of smaller qualifications: *Counters* indicates this move has special powers against the listed move(s). Typically this involves a versus test when the two actions are played at the same time. See the individual maneuvers for specific mechanics. *Countered by* merely indicates the opposite of *counters*—the verbal maneuver can be blocked by the moves it is *countered by*. *Defends Against* indicates that the move allows the player to make a versus test for defense against the listed maneuvers when played at the same time.

Avoid the Topic

Tests: Will

Defends Against: All maneuvers except Dismiss

Special Requirements: The speaking player must veer off topic, even to the point of sounding desperate or ridiculous.

Effects: Scripting the Avoid the Topic action allows the player to defend himself against most attacks. Test the character's Will; successes are subtracted from his opponent's Point, Obfuscate or Incite. Avoid automatically beats Feint and Rebuttal; it does not work against Dismiss.

Knowing my opponent is going to come out of the gate blaring away with a Point, I script my first action as an Avoid. Successes from my Will test are subtracted from his Point successes.

Dismiss

Tests: Ugly Truth, Command, Intimidation, Rhetoric, Oratory

Defends Against: Nothing   **Countered by:** Rebuttal

Special Requirements: This maneuver is used for the cataclysmic and undeniable conclusion of an argument. If a character fails to win the duel via his Dismiss action, he must hesitate for his next volley. Either cross off the next action, or skip the first volley of the coming exchange.

Effects: Scripting a Dismiss adds +2D to the dueling skill as the character loudly declares that his opponent knows absolutely nothing about the topic at hand and, furthermore, he's a fool and a dullard and shouldn't be listened to any further! Dismiss successes that are not Rebutted are subtracted directly from the body of argument.

I know I've got him cornered, he's only got 6 dice left in his body of argument. I'm going to gamble and throw a Dismiss into my script. +2D to my B5 Oratory, plus FoRKs for Intimidation and Falsehood, gives me a shot at knocking him out of the game. However, if I don't get six successes, then I hesitate for my next action!

Feint

Tests: Soothing Platitudes, Seduction, Falsehood, Rhetoric

Counters: Rebuttal   **Defends Against:** Obfuscate

Special Requirements: Feint only works against Rebuttal or Obfuscate. If scripted against a Rebuttal, the Feinting player may speak first, offering his dummy point. Once his opponent's Rebuttal is in progress, he may interrupt and state his real point.

Effects: Using a Feint, the speaker leads his opponent on into a trap. He lures him to think he is discussing one point, until his hidden barb is revealed. Feints automatically counter Rebuttals—no defense is allowed, nor is the riposte. No roll is necessary. This is an automatic effect of the Feint. The Feinting character is then allowed to make a Point against the defender. Test the appropriate skill.

If scripted against a Point, Dismiss or Incite, the Feinting player gets no attack or riposte; against an Avoid, the defender escapes unharmed. Scripted against Obfuscate, the Feinter's skill is tested *twice*. Successes are added together from both rolls for the versus test.

My opponent's been playing pretty conservatively. I'll bet he thinks I'm going to come on strong in the first volley. Rather than script a Point, I'll put in a Feint to blast by his predictable Rebuttal. If I'm right and he scripts that Rebuttal, my Feint will ignore it and I'll get a free attack against his body of argument. If not, and he scripts a Point or Dismiss, I'll be in trouble. But I'm prepared to gamble.

Incite

Tests: Ugly Truth, Intimidation, Falsehood or Command

Counters: Nothing   **Defends Against:** Nothing

Special Requirements: The speaking player must pronounce an outright insult to his opponent.

Effects: With an acid tongue and biting wit, a character may attempt to distract or dismay his opponent. Test the skill versus an obstacle equal to the victim's Will. Success causes the victim to make a Steel test. If the victim hesitates, he misses his *next* action. However, if the Incite fails, the margin of failure is added as advantage dice to the *opponent's* next test.

"'Idiot!' I scream and spit at him." I'm testing my character's B5 Intimidation plus a FoRK for Acting. My obstacle is his Will. No matter what he's doing, if I'm successful, he's going to have to pass a Steel test. A very useful maneuver against green characters, but it's risky. I'm vulnerable to Points and Dismissal myself while I insult him.

Obfuscate

Tests: Soothing Platitudes, Oratory, Rhetoric, Falsehood, Ugly Truth

Counters: Everything, but Feint   **Defends Against:** All except Feint

Special Requirements: The player attempting to Obfuscate must present some non sequitur or bizarre, unrelated point in an attempt to confuse or distract his opponent. Obfuscate is spoken while your opponent is speaking.

Effects: This action forces a versus test between the two characters' appropriate argument skills. If the Obfuscator wins, the victim of this tactic loses his *current* action.

If the Obfuscator *exceeds* his obstacle, his opponent is +1 Ob to his *next* action. If the Obfuscator loses the versus test, his opponent gains +1D to his next action.
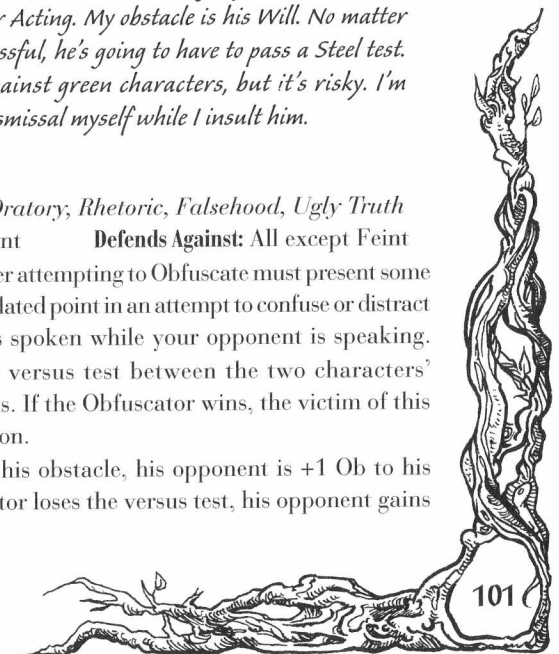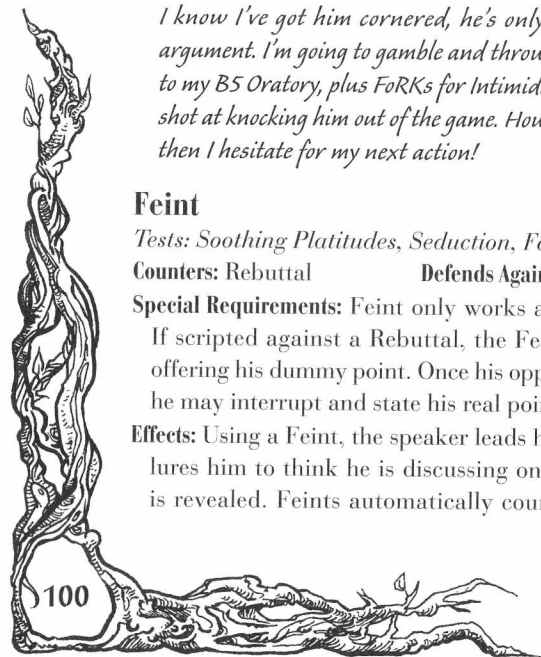
"While my opponent is correct on many particulars, there are areas he's not considering. His viewpoints are shaky, his position weak. Have you considered this? Have you considered the consequences of even considering such a consideration? Personally, this is something I wouldn't consider. And I would advise you not to as well. I hereby warn my opponent to cease considering such a dangerous course!"

Huh? Obfuscate is similar to Incite, but instead it tests skill vs skill. If the Obfuscator wins, he's given his opponent pause for a moment. Note that this maneuver *can* stop a Dismiss action.

Point

Tests: Oratory, Rhetoric, Persuasion, Interrogation, Stentorious Debate
Counters: Feint, Obfuscate, Incite **Countered by**: Rebuttal, Avoid the Topic
Effects: This is the main attack of the verbal duelist. Testing his dueling skill, Point successes are subtracted from the opponent's body of argument. This is the way to win debates! Successes from Avoid and the defense half of Rebut knock off Point successes.

Judd exclaims, "I will not have my progeny remember me as a coward who let the Elves perform his labors for him. I'm coming with you; for glory and honor!" Testing his Oratory, he gets three successes. These are subtracted from the Elven prince's body of argument.

Rebuttal

Tests: Oratory, Rhetoric, Persuasion, Interrogation, Stentorious Debate
Counters: Point, Dismiss   **Countered by:** Feint
Special Requirements: The player first lets his opponent make a Point (or Dismissal). He then refutes the arguments made while making a fresh attack.
Effects: The Rebutting player divides his character's skill between defending his point and attacking his opponent's. Before any dice are rolled, choose how many dice of skill will be used to defend and how many will be used to riposte. The player must put at least one die in each pool. Successes on the defense roll are subtracted from the opponent's Point or Dismiss successes. Successes on the attacking half of a Rebuttal act as a Point.

The Dwarven prince is making a Point; I'm making a Rebuttal. Before he rolls, I divide my B5 Oratory plus my Etiquette FoRK into two pools. In this case I choose two dice to defend with, and four to riposte. The Dwarven prince gets three successes. I test the 2D defense of my Rebuttal and get two successes. His point is reduced to one success. I then roll my riposte and get three successes. These are subtracted from the Dwarf's body of argument. "Come now my good friend, you're being rash and not thinking
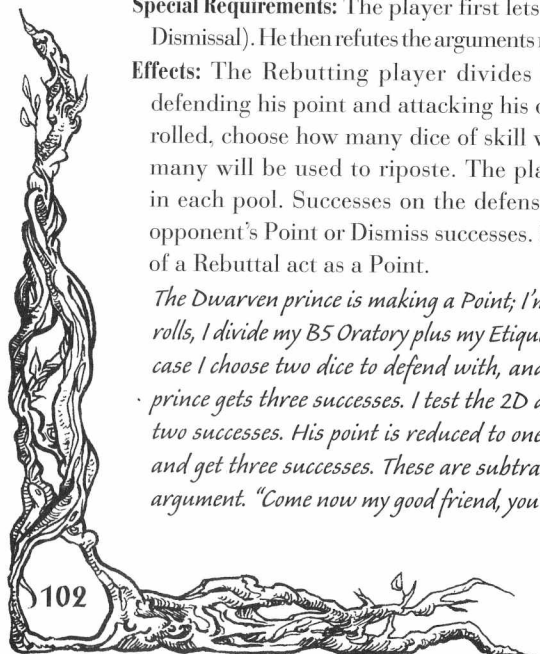
clearly. No matter what happens here today, you'll earn all the glory. It's your heirloom, after all. But don't risk your life on such a foolish gambit!"

Speaking the Part

When scripting these maneuvers, players must speak their parts. Spitting out moves in a robotic fashion is not a viable use of these mechanics. The arguments must be made. Of course, no one expects us all to be eloquent, so just the main thrust or a simple retort usually suffices (but a little embellishment is nice).

Keep it simple and to the point. *Say what you need to in order to roll the dice.* A multipoint statement should be broken down into multiple actions across the exchange.

Baiting Beliefs

Players are encouraged to play on their opponent's Beliefs, Instincts and traits during the exchange. Using these facets of personality against their opponents, they can lead them on and predict their moves. Simply baiting an opponent to Dismiss prematurely can cause the fatal error one needs to pull off a coup!

Resolving the Argument

Winning a Duel of Wits

Reducing your opponent's argument to zero dice while maintaining dice in your body of argument indicates you've won the Duel of Wits. The terms the winning character set forth at the outset of the duel must now be abided by and acted on by all parties involved. The winning character has won this test, and like any other test in Burning Wheel, his intent is made manifest. (But remember, it's not mind-control; it's an agreement between two people.)

These mechanics often refer to audience reaction. This is the true benefit of winning. Rarely is the *opponent* convinced of the merits of the argument, but all those around him now see the advantages clearly displayed against the fallacy of the loser's assumptions.

The ambassador wins his argument against the seneschal. Even so, the seneschal is still against joining his alliance. However, now the prince has
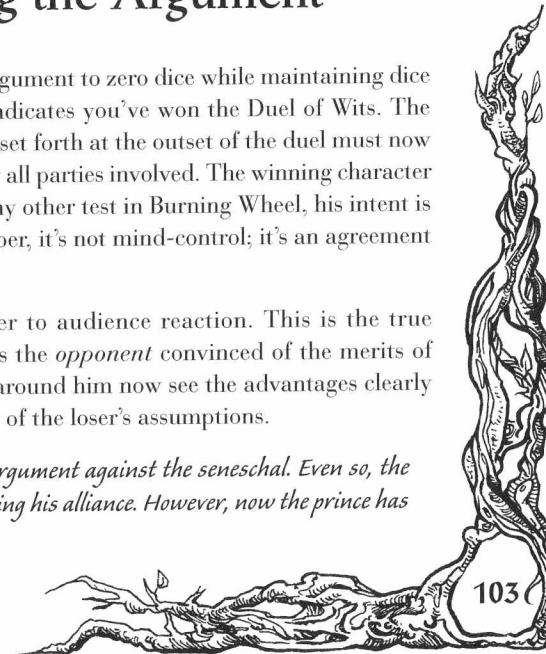
heard both sides. He sees merit in the ambassador's plans. The prince, as the audience, agrees to the winning proposal—in fact, he must.

Compromise

It is a very rare circumstance in an argument when some concessions aren't made by the winning party to the loser. Sometimes it is ceding or validating a point, other times agreeing to disagree and still other times an actual compromise is reached.

When your body of argument is reduced by *any* amount of dice, compromises *must* be made. Victory is unconditional only if your body of argument is untouched.

- If your argument is reduced by just a few dice, only very minor concessions are necessary.

- If reduced by half, a legitimate concession must be granted to the loser.

- If reduced below half or to just a few dice, major concessions are in order.

- If reduced to zero, then you don't have a leg to stand on. See Losing and Tying, below.

The Dwarven prince thinks he's caught the Elven ranger spying. That's a capital offense and he wants his head. He states his case: The ranger must pay for his crimes with his life! The Elven princess disagrees. She states that there is not nearly enough evidence to press such a charge. In the end, the Elves lose, but the Dwarves lost ten dice (out of fourteen) from their argument. They must compromise. The players agree that a short prison sentence for the accused is an appropriate compromise.

Or: Two players are arguing because one player wants to have his character take some rash, adventure-ending action. The player arguing against taking the rash action loses the duel. However, he punched significant holes in his friend's argument. The rash-acting character still won the duel, so he can proceed as he planned, but he must compromise a bit: He agrees to enact his plan later.

Losing

A Duel of Wits is over when one party's body of argument is reduced to zero. The loser must abide by the results of the argument: He's lost and he's agreed to go along with whatever it was his opponent proposed at the outset of the duel—for the time being, of course.

Remember that these rules don't dictate reality or true feelings. They only dictate public performance and acknowledgment of the "truth."

A diplomat may have his proposals denounced in front of the king, but he still believes in them and even may present them again at another time. A shopkeeper who lost a haggling duel will sell the item for the lower price, but he'll regret it later. In fact, he might harbor quite a bit of resentment toward the silver-tongued rascal who bedeviled him. He may even outright refuse to sell to him in the future!

If a player is particularly open-minded, he can, of course, have his character change his mind when and as he chooses. Being convinced of the merit of an argument is an acceptable result of these mechanics, but it is not the hard and fast rule.

Shocking Defeat

A character who has lost a Duel of Wits must immediately make a Steel test. If his argument was reduced below zero, those dice are added to the hesitation obstacle. While the loser hesitates, the victor is free to gloat, run him through or offer a verbal *coup de grâce*.

Tying

If both arguments are reduced to zero in the same volley, the duel is a tie. Neither party is in a position to leverage a victory. Two options are available. The characters can part ways and agree to take up the argument at another time, or they can agree to a compromise.

Tied Compromise

The first rule of a compromise resulting from a tie is *neither* party can achieve the terms he sought at the outset of the duel. Both parties must agree to a point that sits squarely in the middle. It is best for each side to set forth a new offer—one more generous to their opponent than the original—and, if possible, have a neutral party offer a third, middle ground offer. The players then choose the most appropriate one and move on.

Ties are a difficult and tenuous matter. Hard and fast mechanics are too rigid to govern the myriad of situations that will arise in play using these mechanics. *But it is important to remember that neither side has won.* If a solid compromise can be reached, great. If not, perhaps it's time to escalate. See the Honor Besmirched section below.

We found it somewhat useful to count how far below zero each argument was driven. *This isn't to determine a winner*—since both parties hit zero—but to indicate which side had the initiative at the end of the duel. This margin can be used as moral high ground to allow one side to set the terms of the compromise.

Honor Besmirched: I Demand Satisfaction

A character who has lost a duel of wits, but believes he has been slighted or defamed, may call upon his honor and demand satisfaction in a duel to the death or for blood. In this case, the winning character is free to choose to accept the duel or not—or perhaps appoint a champion. If the winner of the Duel of Wits refuses, he loses no standing in the eyes of his peers. He was clearly in the right the entire time and his opponent is behaving in an unseemly manner! If he accepts, perhaps he can put this matter to bed permanently. This kind of duel would be fought with the melee mechanics described in the Fight! section.

If a compromise cannot be reached on a *tied* or near result, either side may choose to escalate the conflict. Challenges to a duel, as above, are acceptable or, if the situation allows, a player may declare war, excommunicate, exile or take some other completely rash, violent and harmful action. *This does not win the duel.* The audience clearly sees who won (or that no one was right in the event of a tie). But it feels good.

Alternate Methods

Group Duels

For group duels, it's best to adhere to the helping rules. One character—the speaker—acts at the primary for his side. He scripts the moves he'll use. As he goes, his allies make comments on his Points, etc, and throw in helping dice when they raise their voices. Once everyone has made their comments on the particular volley, have the primary roll the dice for his maneuvers. Basically, it's the same as a regular Duel of Wits, but with helping dice.

In order to grant helping dice, a player *must* roleplay his character's participation. Failure to speak up or act means those dice may not be used on that particular roll. Also, there's no rule that says you have to help your own side. Players may have their character help the opposing side through disparaging remarks, bad arguments or just plain treachery! Whatever they choose to do, they still must abide by the guidelines and intent of the particular verbal maneuver they are supporting.

I recommend using the Big Deal rules for duels involving two to three characters on a side. For four or more characters per side, you might even consider doubling the body of argument pools. A lot of dice will be rolled in big groups, so the bigger pools help keep the argument from ending abruptly.

Duel of Wits in Brief

- Players (or a player and the GM) come to a significant disagreement in the game. The GM stops play, and asks if the players wish to resolve it with a Duel of Wits. Players can agree to this, walk away from the argument in disgust, or simply draw swords and skip to the Fight! section.

- Players each state their case: What's the problem and why. Keep it short.

- Once the case is stated, roll for the body of argument—test Oratory, Rhetoric, Persuasion, Interrogation, Stentorious Debate or Haggling. Add these successes to the Will exponent. This is how many dice your opponent must knock off in order to win the duel.

- After the body of argument has been established, agree to the terms: *Each player states what conditions he wants if he wins, and what he'll do if he loses.*

- Each player then scripts his first exchange—three actions from the list: Avoid, Dismiss, Feint, Incite, Obfuscate, Point, Rebut. The actions are played out in order, one at a time. Your first action is compared to your opponent's first action. Parts are spoken, dice are rolled. Second action is compared to second action. Parts are spoken, dice are rolled. After the third volley, if neither of the players has been reduced to zero dice, script another exchange and do this step again.

- The first player reduced to zero dice in his body of argument loses. Remember, actions in the same volley happen at the same time, so it's possible for two players to go out simultaneously.

- If the winner lost *any* dice from his body of argument, he must compromise on his terms. ⊕

Relationships, Circles, Affiliations and Reputations

Relationships

When burning a character, a player in Burning Wheel designs a series of relationships that are important to him (and the character). Relationships exist in order to define important personae not controlled by the players (NPCs). They are used by the players and GM to get into and out of trouble in play, provide color and background depth and create leads to new conflicts.

If one of your relationships is your wife in the village, the GM is supposed to use this to create situations in play. If you're hunting a Vampyr, of course it's your wife who is his victim! Suddenly, you're swept up in a plot of terror and intrigue.

Meeting and consulting with a relationship character doesn't require a roll. By spending resources points on establishing relationships with these characters, it is assumed that all the details of contact and communication are worked out ahead of time. So long as it is reasonably feasible in the game context, a player can have his character visit his relationship contacts freely and often.

Usually, tests are unnecessary with relationships. Information flows between the two characters via roleplay. However, social skill tests may be used to extract information from these characters when they have something they are trying to hide or withhold from the player character.

If the tradesman is reluctant to help because it might get him into trouble with his peers, a Persuasion test is in order.

A Duel of Wits may be used when player characters find themselves *seriously* at odds with their contacts.

Relationships are Always NPCs

Other *player characters* are never considered "relationships." Player characters are assumed to know and, in some way, be tied to each other at the outset of the game.

Circles

Circles is an ability and mechanic that allows players to abstract the process of discovering who their characters know in the game world.

The Circles ability is rolled when a player wants his character to find another non-player character from whom he can get information or favors. *This character need not exist at all before a player asks for a roll to find him*: No endless list of minor NPCs is needed. Just roll the dice to see who you can track down: Reveal spies in your ranks, tap informers, discover traitors in your enemies' household, uncover officials who harbor hidden secrets, find the character who knows what you need to know!

The information in question still needs to be extracted from these NPCs via roleplay, social skill tests and possibly even a Duel of Wits, but the character's existence and the player's knowledge of him is determined by a Circles test.

Pete: "We've got to get into the temple somehow!"

Thor: "We do? My mother's sister was an Abbess. Let me write a letter."

GM-Luke: "She was?"

Thor: "I dunno, can I roll my Circles? I was Born Noble."

GM-Luke: "Sure, but that's pretty obscure...."

Circles Ratings

Each character has one single Circles ability. It represents their professional, casual, familial and informal spheres of influence. The Circles ability begins the game rooted from Will. Affiliations and reputation add bonus dice. See the Character Burner for more on starting your Circles rating.

Scope of the Circles

A character's lifepaths define the basic skeleton of his Circles. Essentially, each lifepath is like a mini-affiliation. Knights know other knights and squires. Priests know other clergy. Artisans are familiar with other masons and architects. If the player can narrate a contact into the story of his lifepaths, he can test his Circles ability to see if he can track him down. Even character types indirectly tied to the lifepath—perhaps other lifepaths in the setting—can be rolled for.

A peasant hunter might know a trader, and even his local lord, but he can't and won't know the king, sea captains or high-ranking religious officials. These characters are beyond the reach of a Circles test for a player whose character has all Peasant Setting lifepaths.

Dro's cult priest is trying to track down an assassin. He uses his Cultist lifepath to test his Circles: "I think that maybe one of these cultists might be a poisoner and supplying the assassin." Poisoner and Cultist are two lifepaths in the same setting, Outcast. A perfect use of Circles.

Andy's crime lord is trying to uncover a nest of cultists in his territory. He uses his Criminal lifepath to leverage a Circles test: "One of my oyabun handles safehouses for me. I think the cultists might have hired his services. I call a meeting and question them all in an open and friendly manner." An excellent use of his prodigious Circles!

The player's narration creates the circumstance for a Circles test. The result of a successful Circles test indicates the character has *found* someone who fits his description.

Reaching

The scope of Circles is deliberately left open and loose in definition. Filling in gaps in the story is more important than arguing who knows whom and how. If a player and GM are at odds over who a character may or may not know, look at the player character's lifepaths and the possible *leads* he could have taken. If the character and contact could be connected through one of those leads, Circles can be tested to try to bring him into play.

Reputations and Affiliations

Reputations and affiliations add bonus dice to Circles tests. Reputation dice can only be used in the realm for which they are defined. A local reputation can't be used when traveling abroad, or anywhere beyond the next town over, really. Affiliation bonus dice can only be applied within the affiliation or functions directly related to it.

Testing Circles

When a player is ready to test his Circles ability to locate a prospective contact, he must state his intent and how he's undertaking the task. As part of the intent and task, he must describe who he is looking for and where, and how specific or broad his desires are.

It is an Ob 1 Circles test to find a person involved in a public/prominent/common trade or occupation, in his proper place, and of reasonable, appropriate disposition for his location/occupation; a bored shopkeeper in town, a fastidious clerk in the city, or a grim carpenter in the village. The exact parameters of those descriptors must be appropriate to your own game and setting, of course.

Expanding or narrowing these definitions modifies the obstacle for the Circles test. Add the following modifiers where appropriate—you don't have to add them all at once—to the base Ob 1:

Occupation

Who is the player looking for? He can name a role like, "an armorer skilled in damascening," or "the best scribe available."

Broad occupation/profession, an occupation common to your circle	—
Uncommon occupation, an occupation uncommon to your circle	+2 Ob
Specific occupation, an occupation completely outside of or unavailable to your circle	+3 Ob

For characters with a City Dweller or Villager setting lifepath, any non-criminal City Dweller or Village lifepath falls under the broad occupation definition. Criminal elements could be considered uncommon occupations. A master burglar would be considered a specific occupation.

Station

Same station/rank	—
Higher or lower rank by one iteration	+1 Ob
Lowest station/rank	+2 Ob
Highest station/rank	+3 Ob

A sergeant looking for another sergeant has no obstacle penalty. A sergeant looking for a captain has a +1 Ob penalty. That same sergeant looking for someone among the camp followers and prostitutes has a +2 Ob penalty to his Circles test.

Place

Anywhere in the region or GM decides	—
Somewhere local	+1 Ob
In a specific place or player decides	+3 Ob

Being nonspecific (and willing to travel) incurs no penalty. The contact literally could be anywhere in the region—the next city, another kingdom, another clan. The decision is up to the GM. Restricting your inquiries to the local area—the city, the territory, the hunting grounds—adds +1 Ob. Focusing specifically on a named place—the Baron's household, Randy's Comfort House, the merchant marine's crew—increases the obstacle substantially.

Disposition and Character Knowledge

Disposition or knowledge common to the circle	—
Disposition/knowledge different from members of circle	+1-2 Ob
A specific disposition or detailed/rare knowledge	+3 Ob

If you're part of a cell of insurrectionists, it's going to be easy for you to find people who want to assassinate the Civil Governor. If you're a minister charged with investigating rebels, you're at a +2 Ob to find rebels with your Circles. Looking for rebels specifically bent on assassination would be +3 Ob.

Time

Eventually or GM decides	—
Soon (sometime this game session)	+1 Ob
Now or player decides	+3 Ob

The *Eventually* condition hands the timing over to the GM. He decides when and how you locate this contact. *Soon* indicates the contact is made this game session. The exact moment is up to the GM. The *Now* penalty means that your character is looking to set up contact immediately and you want to cut right to that scene. The player determines when that scene happens (so long as it doesn't interrupt another scene in progress).

Add 'em Up!

Total up the obstacle modifiers, add them to the base Ob 1 and test the Circles ability. The result determines whether or not you've found who you're looking for and if that person is disposed toward or against you. Remember, the test isn't to see if such a character exists in the world, but to see if you can find him when you need him.

Are you playing a noble looking to bump into a high-ranking noble any old time and not concerned with where? Ob 4 (Base 1 plus +3 Ob for

highest rank). Looking to track down the duke's huntsman who knows something about strange goings on? Ob 6. (Ob 1 + specific occupation and different disposition.)

Also, not all of the modifiers are applicable all the time. Use only the penalties appropriate to the situation.

Wises

Appropriate Wises can be used as linked tests for Circles.

Searching for a Reputation

If a character who has a reputation is being sought, the seeking player may use the other character's reputation as advantage dice for his Circles tests. Reputations can make it a lot easier to be found.

Naming the Unknown

Once a Circles test is made to find a given character, the player may grant his new contact a legitimate and appropriate name. Doing so gives a +1D advantage to tracking down that contact with Circles in the future. The name must be written down by the player for the bonus to be earned. When trying to find a contact named in a previous Circles test, the player may search for named contacts without invoking any additional specificity penalties (i.e. it's the same obstacle as it was the first time).

In order to be able to name a contact, a player must either *exceed* the obstacle of the test, or fail the test outright and have the Enmity Clause invoked. If he merely meets the obstacle, the contact is just one of momentary convenience passing back into the shadow of obscurity after the deed is done. If he exceeds the obstacle, enough of an impression was made so that names are exchanged and remembered. If a Circles test is failed, and the GM invokes the Enmity Clause, then the contact can be named as a new enemy for the character! The GM must name and keep enemies.

Enmity Clause

When a player searches for a contact via his Circles, but fails the roll, the GM has the option to call on the Enmity Clause. Rather than finding someone who is favorably disposed to the character, the player finds he's got an enemy out there! Someone who feels insulted, mocked, intimidated, cheated or scorned by the character.

Such characters are obviously unwilling to freely give information and favors to someone they perceive as their enemy! Any standard social skill tests used against them are +2 Ob. In a Duel of Wits, such enemies gain +4D to their body of argument.

Thor: "Are there any Noble families out of favor in Fürstenburg?"

GM-Luke: "Roll your Noble-wise. 2 successes? Yeah, the Ördög."

Thor: "I want to test my Circles—I'm born Noble—I paged with an Ördög as boy. I think they have a villa here...."

GM-Luke: "Ok, that's an Ob 5 test. Ya failed? Oh he's here, but he happens to be looking for you, too. Seems you won his horse from him in a bad bet."

Thor: "Oh. Heh. I did, didn't I? ::gulp::"

Inimical characters do not have to be outright enemies. They can pretend to work with the players and help them. Of course, the information that they feed can be full of lies and half-truths. They can even attempt extortion and blackmail. That's half the fun of having an enemy!

Infamous and Hostile Reputations

If a character has an infamous or hostile reputation to a certain Circle—if he's a deserter from the navy, or an apostate from the church—then he gains +1 Ob per die of his reputation to Circles tests within that group. However, an infamous reputation can open up new Circles—as the saying goes, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Enemies to Friends, Friends to Enemies

The disposition of a contact can change. If, through play, the players manage to convince their enemies that they are on their side, that's cool. That's what the game is all about. Of course, the opposite is true as well: Friends and favorably disposed contacts might turn out to be enemies. That +2 Ob penalty when dealing with your former friends can be back-breaking!

Detecting Movement in the Circles

Using his influence in the Circles, a character can listen in and see if anyone's been asking around—if anyone has been testing his Circles ability to get information about *him*.

If no one has been asking, a faux obstacle is set to keep the player paranoid and on his toes. Ob 3-6 should do. Test against the obstacle. Success means you discover that no one was asking around. Failure indicates the player is given false or misleading rumors by the GM.

If another character *has* been testing his Circles to get information about or get close to a player character, the inquiring player may test his Circles. His obstacle is 10 minus his opponent's obstacle. He may only use his opponent's reputation dice against him if those dice were used in the first Circles test.

If his opponent made an Ob 5 test to get information, the inquiring player must make an Ob 5 Circles test to find out that someone has been asking about him.

If the character who was asking around used a specific contact, and the inquiring player meets his obstacle, and it fits the game context, he finds the same specific contact. Of course, the character does not necessarily know this.

Moving Quietly Among the Sheep

In order to stay hush-hush, and keep away from known untrustworthy informants, a player may willingly raise his obstacle for a Circles test before rolling the dice. This Moving Quietly penalty stands for his roll and the rolls of anyone looking into his doings.

If Nine-Fingers' player tacks on a +3 Ob Moving Quietly penalty to his search for information about Kublai's retinue, Kublai's player has a +3 Ob penalty when trying to detect Nine-Finger's movement in the circles.

Moving Inconspicuously

Alternately, a player may use his Inconspicuous to set his opponent's obstacle for detecting his movements. Test Circles first—it counts as a linked test for the Inconspicuous skill. Then test Inconspicuous. The obstacle is 2, plus any disadvantages for being a foreigner, garishly dressed or a freak. Successes over the obstacle act as a penalty for anyone looking to trace this character's steps through the circles. If the Inconspicuous test is failed, the searchers have no penalty to detect his movements. In fact, they gain a +1D advantage. Oops!

Circles and Advancement

Circles advances like a skill. Make sure to include the bonus dice from names, affiliations and reputations when counting the total dice versus the obstacle for advancement tests.

A character with a B2 Circles, a local reputation (1D) and a minor affiliation with the army (1D), makes an Ob 3 Circles test to track down some mercenaries willing to help out with a side job. Four dice vs Ob 3 is a Difficult test. If the player had opted not to use his reputation and affiliation, it would have been two dice vs Ob 3 (a Challenging test).

Exiled and Stripped of Rank: Affiliations and Circles

When involving his affiliations in a Circles test, a character may be exiled or stripped of rank in play and lose some or all of his influence.

If a player uses his Circles plus his affiliation dice to track down a contact and, in the course of dealing with that contact, fails a crucial social skill test or loses an important Duel of Wits, so that he actually causes harm or damage to his affiliation, then he loses 1D to his affiliation. This is completely conditional to play and arbitrated by the GM.

Alternately, a player may opt to cut his ties with an affiliation at any time. The player may reduce the amount of dice as he sees fit to reflect his new status.

Lost affiliation dice can be regained if the character makes good on his failures or word, or rejoins his former crew. This must be accompanied by a successful Duel of Wits or successful series of social skill tests.

Fallen Stars: Reputation and Circles

Reputations may be lost, damaged or changed through play. The conditions are similar to losing an affiliation: If a player uses his reputation dice in a Circles test that gets him into a very bad situation—loses a Duel of Wits, loses a battle, bankrupts a Resources test, etc—he loses a die from the appropriate reputation.

Infamy

Rather than be forced into obscurity, a player may opt to have his character live in infamy. When threatened with losing a die to his reputation, the player may instead escalate the situation: He may end the meeting with a flurry of insults, curses and threats; he may challenge his accusers to a duel; or he may have his opponents coldly murdered in the night—any flagrant, socially unacceptable
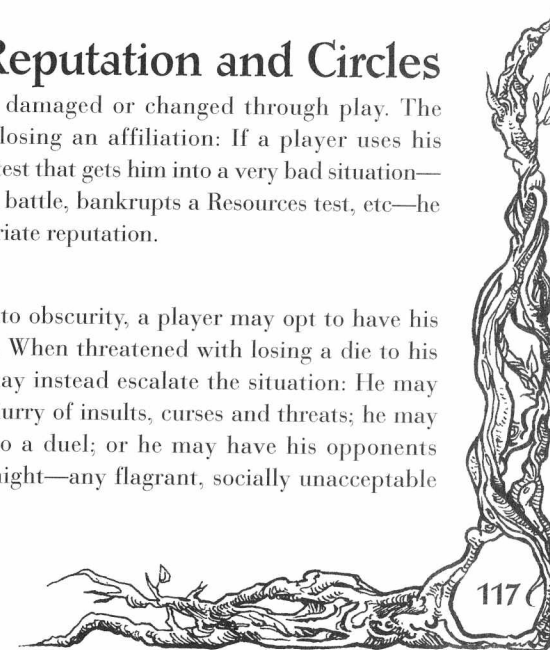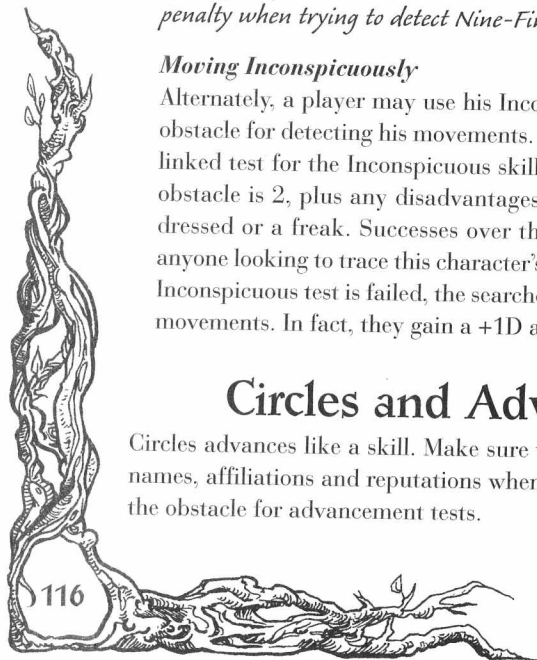
transgression will do. Undertaking this escalation changes the nature of his reputation and the Circles it influences. The player must rewrite his reputation including this new complication:

Our Head of the Household has lost a Duel of Wits with his uncle. He's been denounced as a criminal and blight to the family. The player lost the Duel of Wits, and thus his character's Reputation is under threat. Rather than lose a die, our player uses his Circles to find some thugs whom he hires to murder his uncle and aunt.

His former reputation is now reduced by one die, but that die is placed in an appropriate infamous reputation. Every time a player reduces his former reputation and exults in his infamy, he may increase this reputation. The GM may also opt to have relationships and named contacts turn into enemies.

The player rewrites his Reputation: From, "2D: Rules his house with a stern hand," to "1D Infamous: Ambitious, cold-hearted killer. 1D: Rules his house with a stern hand."

A Change of Identity

A player may also choose to change his identity and leave his reputation behind. All benefits of his former life are lost while under his new guise. Should he take up his old mantle, his former reputation is regained at one less die than its previous exponent.

New Reputations

At the end of a scenario, players and GM may nominate characters for new reputations. This process is exactly the same as nominating and voting for a new trait for a character. Players nominate the character based on how they think he was played—how the controlling player's roleplaying came across at the table.

The breadth of the reputation is dependant on the events that spawned it. A massive battle which saves the crown? 3D. A brilliant day at court? 2D. Settle a dispute between two feuding families? 1D.

Buying into New Affiliations

During the course of the game, a situation may arise where a character has the opportunity to affiliate himself with a new organization—a mercenary might get knighted, a noble might join the clergy, or a sorcerer might gather together bands of thugs to do his bidding.

If such a situation arises, make a Circles test using the appropriate Occupation/Station/Disposition obstacles. If successful, the player may invest in this new opportunity in order to gain further dice when using his Circles. Purchasing a 1D affiliation is an Ob 3 test Resources test, a 2D affiliation is Ob 5. If the affiliation is to an organization that demands expensive clothes or fine foods, like low nobility or mercantile affiliations, add +1 Ob. If the affiliation is of high noble or ecclesiastical rank, or excessively wealthy, +2 Ob. If the affiliation is obscure, extremely elite or secretive (like a sorcerer's cabal), +3 Ob.

All affiliations, no matter how lowly, require this Resources test in order to be able to write the new dice on the character sheet. There are parties to throw, clothes to purchase, bribes to pay, gifts to give, dues to account for and other various and sundry expenses; this is all reflected in the Resources obstacles.

It is worth noting that an affiliation cannot be simply bought like buying bread. An in-game situation must arise in which the character is invited to join.

Advancing in Rank

Advancing an affiliation from 1D to 2D follows the mechanics for buying into a new affiliation. If the character bought in or started at 1D, +1D can be purchased with a Resources test at Ob 5 plus the penalties. However, buying up within his own organization grants the character +2D advantage dice to the roll.

Advancing in Reputation

In addition to earning new reputations, existing ones may be enhanced by a player's performance in game. At the end of the campaign/scenario, existing reputations can be nominated for increase. They may only increase +1D per scenario. Advancement is handled exactly like a trait vote—nominate, lobby, vote. Unanimous decision gets it.

Building Relationships

This is an optional rule, but we recommend it. Each character has a Relationship aptitude equal to 10 minus his Circles exponent. If his *reputation* is favorable to the prospective contact, then subtract its dice from the aptitude. If the reputation is distasteful to the prospective contact, then reputation dice are *added* to the Relationship aptitude.

Each time a new contact is tapped and named via a Circles test, the player may attempt to build a relationship with him. If you successfully tap a contact within your Circles a number of times equal to the relationship aptitude, the contact moves from your Circles into your relationships. You no longer need to test in order to find him or even to get information from him.
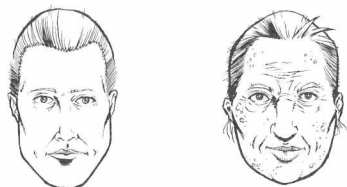
Circles in Brief

- Relationships are contacts the character has reasonably free access to and strong ties to. Players do not need to roll to contact them.

- Circles are peripheral characters, professional acquaintances, social friendships and familial relations, available as contacts. The range of Circles is determined by the lifepaths of the character.

- Test the Circles ability (plus appropriate affiliations and reputations) to locate a person from whom you want information or services. The more obscure the contact, or the higher or lower the station of the contact, the higher the obstacle.

- If the player rolls more successes than the obstacle, he may "name" his contact. Doing so gives him a +1D advantage to his Circles test when trying to locate the contact again. The name must be written down and remembered by the player for the bonus to be earned.

- If a Circles test is failed, the GM may invoke the Enmity Clause.

- If trying to find out if someone is looking for you: Test Circles. The obstacle 10 minus the obstacle of the guy who was looking for you. Success means you hear some disturbing rumors....

- When trying to cover your tracks, you may opt to raise your Circles obstacle by +1-5 Ob. This penalty is applied to your roll, and rolls by anyone trying to detect your actions. Alternately, test Inconspicuous (Ob 1 plus the modifiers listed in the CB description). Successes over the obstacle act as a penalty for anyone trying to retrace your steps. Failure means your opponent has a +1D advantage to track you down. ⊕
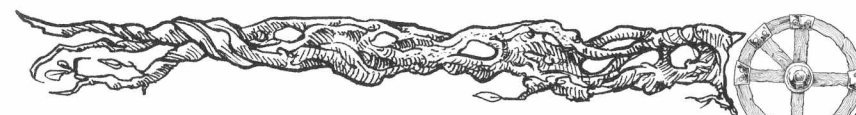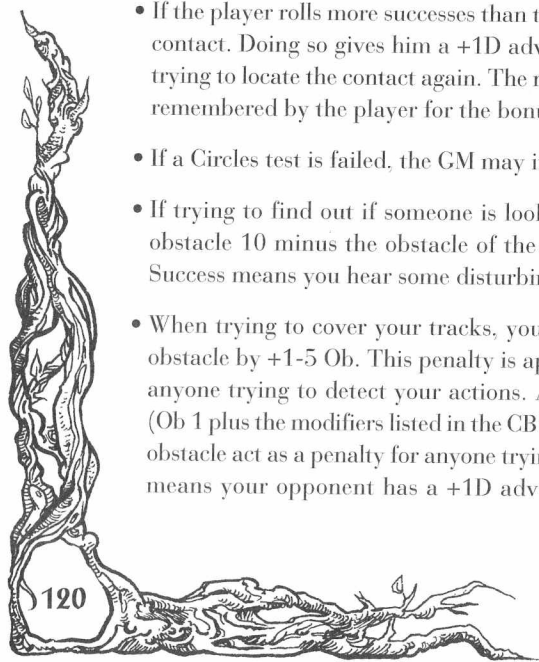
Steel

Steel is an attribute that represents the character's nerves. It is tested when the character is startled or shocked. The results of the test then tell us whether the character flinches, or whether he steels his nerves and carries on.

When a Steel test is failed, the player loses control of the character momentarily—just as the character loses control of his faculties. The player chooses *how* the character loses it, but after that the character is *out of action* for a few in-game seconds as he freaks out.

A GM can call for a Steel test under three main conditions: When the character is confronted with surprise, fear or pain.

Surprise, Fear and Pain

Surprise

Whenever a character is surprised or startled—by an ambush, an unexpected loud noise, or even a shocking secret laid bare— he must make a Steel test. Surprise Steel tests are used when the situation demands that the character react instantly and without hesitation. If this isn't the case, let the players react as they will, and don't worry about a Steel test until it really counts. Surprise also factors heavily into the Fight! mechanics and is discussed a bit more there.

Fear

Fear is similar to surprise. Whenever the GM deems the characters encounter something terrifying and/or utterly disconcerting, a Steel test is called for to determine how the character reacts.

Pain

When a character is badly injured, he must make a Steel test to see if he flinches from the pain and momentarily hesitates, or if he just sucks it up and carries on. When to take a Steel test from pain is discussed in the Injury and Recovery section.

10 Minus Will = Hesitation

The base obstacle for a Steel test is 10 minus the character's Will exponent. This tells us, roughly, *how long* this particular character will *hesitate* when surprised, shocked or in pain. Each point of hesitation is a heartbeat of real time.

With a Will of B4, a character has a hesitation of 6.

Steel is tested to overcome that hesitation.

Steel Tests

GMs call for Steel tests; players don't. When testing Steel, the attribute acts like any other ability in the game. Steel tests are open-ended. There are no FoRKs for Steel, and *very* rarely any help.

Steel Successes Reduce Hesitation

Every success generated on a Steel test reduces the character's hesitation by one—thus reducing the actual time spent hesitating. If the player gets a number of successes equal to his character's hesitation, then the character doesn't even blink. He steels his nerves and is unaffected.

If Aaron's character has a 6 hesitation and a B5 Steel, he rolls five dice. Each success knocks off one point of hesitation. If he gets four successes, he reduces his hesitation from six to two.

Failed Steel Tests

When a player fails to get a number of successes equal to his hesitation, he's failed the Steel test. When this happens, the character stops what he is doing and loses it for a moment—for as many heartbeats as the margin of failure. During those achingly long heartbeats he may do one of four things:

Stand and Drool

The character may gasp and stand his ground, his mouth hanging open. If he was wounded, he clutches himself in pain. If surprised, he blinks and tries to register what's happened. If afraid, his mind shuts down momentarily, overwhelmed.

Characters standing and drooling may not defend themselves in any way, nor may they yell or call for help. They are utterly (if momentarily) stunned.

Fall Prone and Beg for Mercy

A character may immediately drop to the ground and prostrate himself or fall and curl into a ball. This reaction is particularly useful when caught unawares by bow shots or explosions—the character can drop behind cover.

If a character falls prone in a close combat situation, it is assumed that he is begging for mercy from his opponent. He drops his weapon and pleads for his life. Of course, his opponent's reaction is his own decision.

Swoon

A player may determine that his character is so overwhelmed he pitches backward in a swoon. The character is dazed and utterly unaware of his surroundings while in a swoon. Players who opt to have their character swoon may choose how and when their character is roused. The character hesitates for at least as many heartbeats as the margin of failure, and for as long as the player wants after that.

Run Screaming

If you opt to *run screaming* the character must *flee at top speed* away from the source of terror. If he does so, he must scream. (Whatever his idiom, he must vocalize his dismay.)

Run Screaming is not a tactical retreat. The character cares about one thing only—getting away as fast as possible. Caution and wisdom are left behind. Putting distance between himself and his adversary might just save his life—dignity be damned!

Characters who run and scream move *directly* away from their opponent/object of terror, heedless of pitfalls or obstacles. They are solely focused on getting away from *that*, whatever it is.

Conditions for Standard Steel Tests

Here is a short list of conditions for Steel tests that are based solely on the character's inherent hesitation. There are no advantages or disadvantages to these tests: *Being at the business end of a loaded gun, spooky sounds at night, seeing subtle evidence of magic at work, witnessing childbirth, witnessing technology beyond your ken, witnessing gore, and your first life and death struggle.*

Steel Test Advantages and Disadvantages

Conditions for Steel Advantages

Being startled by something mundane	+2D
Feeling safe in a group of friends/allies	+1D

Conditions for Steel Disadvantages

Being shot at	+1 Ob
Being directly affected by magic	+1 Ob
Witnessing a person killed	+1 Ob
Small explosions	+2 Ob
Committing murder	+2 Ob
Explosions	+3 Ob
Witnessing pronounced sorcery at play	+3 Ob
Seeing a ghost	+3 Ob
Seeing the living dead	+4 Ob
Volcanic eruptions, cataclysm	+4 Ob
Seeing horrible magic at work	+4 Ob
Being in the presence of the supernatural	+5 Ob

The increased obstacle is essentially increasing the character's hesitation. The more scary and frightening, the longer a character is likely to hesitate.

Steel and Advancement

Steel functions like a skill for the purposes of advancement. At exponent 4 or lower, Routine tests count for advancement, and Difficults and Challenging tests are interchangeable. At exponent 5 or higher, Routines no longer count and Difficults and Challengings are required.

Situational Conditions for Steel Tests for Advancement Only

In addition to advancement via die rolls and tests, *GMs can award tests for advancement based on conditions that arise in play*. Players compare the situational obstacle to their current exponent and record the level of difficulty for purposes of advancement.

If an actual Steel test is made—dice are rolled, hesitation is overcome—these conditions should not be used. They are only used to represent the overall nerves of a larger situation.

Some possible situations and their equivalent obstacles for advancement:

Obstacle 1 Steel Tests
News of a relative dying. Weird low-grade supernatural phenomena.

Obstacle 2 Steel Tests
Witnessing violence (a fight, a beating, a stabbing, a hit and run accident). Being in the presence of a character with the Dreaded trait. Heated sports competition. Witnessing childbirth.

Obstacle 3 Steel Tests
Witnessing real bloodshed and gore (a murder, a bloody accident). Being badly beaten up. Being in a brawl or fist fight or riot. Bearing a child.

Obstacle 4 Steel Tests
Fighting a duel to the death. Participating in a knightly tourney. Being stabbed. Shooting another character. Witnessing a friend or relative killed. Surviving a natural disaster. Encountering anthropomorphic monsters.

Obstacle 5 Steel Tests
Participating in a mass battle. Being shot with a bow, crossbow or gun. Stabbing someone to death. Murder in cold blood. Witnessing or being a party to spirit activity.

Obstacle 6 Steel Tests
Being Mortally Wounded (and surviving). Living under starvation conditions.

Obstacle 7 Steel Tests
Encountering intelligent/sentient, non-humanoid monstrous creatures.

Obstacle 8 Steel Tests
Sustained artillery barrages. Encountering the living dead.

Obstacle 9 Steel Tests

The presence of demons and angels. Witnessing or suffering under sorcerous, cataclysmic destruction.

Obstacle 10 Steel Tests

Being in the presence of the divine.

Steel in Brief

- Hesitation is 10 minus Will.

- Test Steel against hesitation (which is the obstacle of the test) when confronted with surprise, fear or pain.

- Steel test successes are subtracted from hesitation. If hesitation is not reduced to zero, the character must choose one reaction: Stand and Drool, Fall Prone and Beg for Mercy, Swoon or Run Screaming. If hesitation is reduced to zero, the character does not hesitate and may continue what he was doing. ⊕
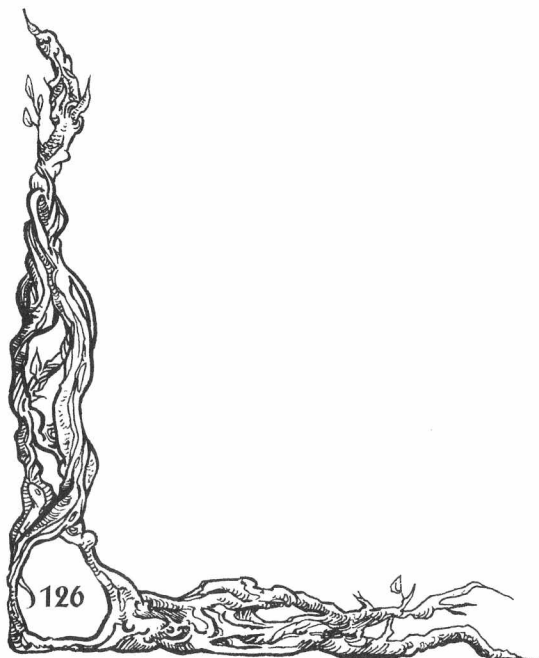
Range and Cover

Maxahana ducked through the undergrowth as he trotted silently along the deer path. His senses were pitched high, sensitive to every movement and sound. His gloved hand cradled his hunting bow, an arrow at the ready. Shifting his course to take up position on a hillock, Max spotted movement down in the valley, off to his right. It was him, it was Holt! Without wasting a second, Max drew the string taut and levelled his bow. He realized a moment too late that Holt had spotted him as well.

When a character wishes to bring down his quarry at range with a bow, javelin, or even a rock, we use a system similar to the Duel of Wits. Players plan out an overall strategy for their characters by scripting three maneuver actions in three consecutive volleys. This time, though, there is no body of argument to destroy. Now you're trying to kill another character.

When playing out a conflict between two bowmen, two ninja, a bowman stalking his quarry or a crossbowman defending a staked position, use these mechanics. Any time characters are opposing each other with missiles, or one character is attempting to approach/flee from a missile weapon-wielding character, use these mechanics.

But I'm Not a Bowman

The term "bowman" is used in the following rules simply as an example of a missile weapon-wielding character. It's a term of convenience. By no means are these rules limited to the use of bows and men!

Range, Cover and Position Basics

Before he can take a shot, a bowman must get into position. At its most basic level, these rules use a versus test to determine position: use Speed vs Speed if it's a running chase, Perception vs Speed if one character is trying to hold his ground. Other methods are described in Field Maneuvers later on.

The winner of the test has the opportunity to shoot—the target has exposed himself or been outmaneuvered. He may now test his appropriate weapon skill to hit the target. This chapter describes this process in detail.

Ranging Shots

The distance between a bowman and his target is a vital detail. It allows the GM to assign an obstacle to the weapon skill test. In Burning Wheel, we're not concerned with precise distances. We only need to know broad categories: Either the target is out of range, at extreme range, at optimal range or too close to shoot.

All missile weapons have a maximum range listed in paces to help give players a sense of their effectiveness and to allow GMs to better narrate space and distance in the game. Moving from one range to the next is done via *positioning tests*.

If an archer wants to put himself in optimal range for his hunting bow, he's got to win a positioning test.

Listed below are descriptions of the range categories and the obstacle to hit targets at those ranges.

Out of Range

A character is *out of range* if the target is farther away than his weapon's extreme range. If a character withdraws from the extreme range of both his and his opponent's weapons, he's considered to be out of range and the contest of maneuvers is over. He's escaped!

Extreme Range

Shots at *extreme range* are Ob 3. Ob 4 for hitting targets in forests, across walls, behind barricades or hedges, and Ob 5 for targets in fortifications or dense cover. *Extreme range* lies beyond optimal range, and ends at the pace value listed for the specific weapon.

Optimal Range

Optimal range shots are Ob 2. Optimal range for medieval missile weapons is between 10 and 30 paces. Without benefit of sighting mechanisms or precision mechanical devices, archers, crossbowmen and fusilliers are forced to rely on their own eyesight, depth perception and good judgment.

Forests and Fortifications

Optimal range shots are Ob 3 for targets concealed in forests, across walls, behind barricades or hedges. Ob 4 to hit those protected by fortifications or under dense cover (parapets, archer loops, heavy forest).

Too Close to Shoot

Too close to shoot indicates that the bowman is so close to his target that swords and spears can be brought to bear. The missile weapon can still be discharged, but the shooter may be set upon by his opponent.

Once a fight moves into the *too close to shoot* range, Range and Cover volleys end and players script for melee. Shots in the *too close to shoot* range use action costs and obstacle modifiers listed in the Fight! section. See the Too Close to Shoot! section below for more on this.

Shields, Cover and Range

A character using Speed- or Steel-based maneuvers, and who possesses a shield and is not returning fire, may use the shield to increase his level of cover by one degree. From "in the open" to "reasonable cover," for example. However, in order to gain this benefit, the shield's dice must be higher than the Versus Armor rating of his opponent's weapon; otherwise no benefit is conferred.

Weapon Range and Dice

The range capabilities of a missile weapon in Burning Wheel are described not in a set distance, but in the number of dice granted to the wielder's *positioning test*. The greater the dice, the more chance the character will have of outmaneuvering his opponent and pulling off a shot before his opponent can return fire or take cover.

Missile weapons add their *range dice to the positioning test*. The number of dice is dependent on the current range of the characters. At extreme range, more range dice are granted, but as the characters close to optimal range, the bonus dice flatten out.

Weapon	Optimal	Extreme	Max. Range
Hunting Bow	1D	2D	100 paces
Great Bow	2D	4D	300 paces
Crossbow	2D	3D	125 paces
Heavy Crossbow	2D	4D	300 paces
Pistol	2D	1D	10 paces
Arquebus	1D	2D	50 paces
Thrown Knife	1D	1D	10 paces*

Crossbow and Gun Dice

To represent how slow crossbows and guns are to reload, these weapons lose access to their Range dice for one volley after they have fired. They may not fire until the character takes one volley to reload. To reload, a player must be unengaged in melee, and not fire for one volley of positioning.

* This is just one example. Thrown weapons have their own range chart in the Weapons Appendix.
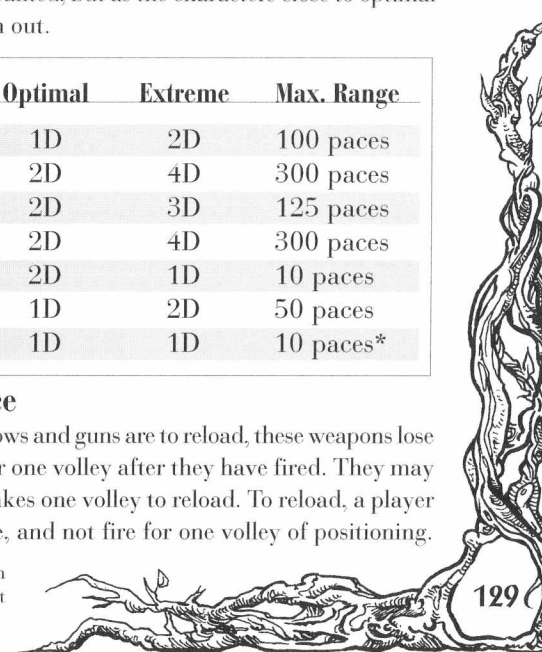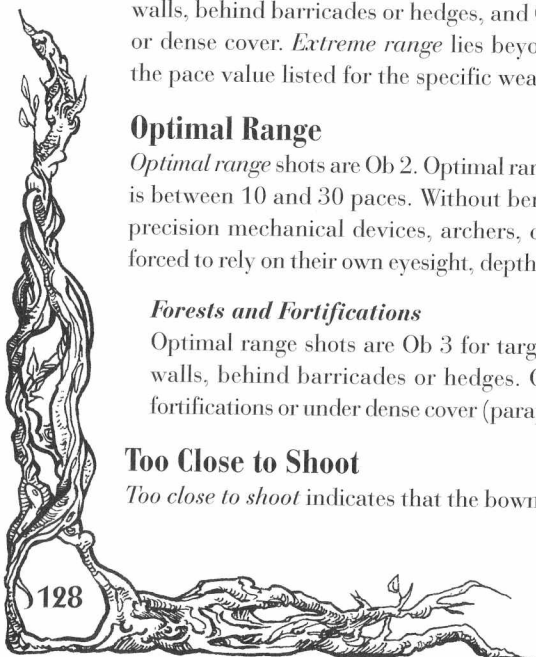
Positioning with Missile Weapons

Starting Position

Characters start out of range unless the situation demands otherwise. Before any maneuvers are scripted or any shots are fired, both opposing parties make a versus test using either Speed or Perception with FoRKs plus full range dice from their weapon. The winner may choose to start either out of range, at extreme range or at optimal range (not too close to shoot).

Reflexes and Speed Advantage Dice

The character with the highest Reflexes gets a bonus die to position. The character with the highest Speed *multiplier* gets a bonus die as well.

Vie for Position

When a positioning test is made, the characters are doing their level best to outmaneuver their opponents so they can pull off a shot without being shot at themselves. It is a versus test. Use the Field Maneuvers to determine which stat, skill or attribute is tested. The winner is allowed to spend extra successes on taking actions during this volley. Actions include shooting, shrugging off a wound, opening a crypt, aiming or taking cover.

Taking a Shot

One success may be spent on taking a shot at the range determined by the positioning test. Obstacles are listed in the Range section above.

Taking Cover

Cover comes from three sources: location or setting—a forest, a field; pre-existing fortifications; and from a character's use of the terrain. Extra successes in a positioning test can be used to draw additional advantage from the setting or fortifications. Two successes from a winning test may be allocated to "taking cover" or building a better position. *Successes spent on taking cover translate to positioning dice for the next volley.* A character may only ever have a 2D bonus from taking cover. If the character scripts a Close or Withdraw action, cover dice are lost at the end of the volley (after the test). If a Maintain action is scripted, cover dice roll-over to the next volley.

Aiming

Extra successes may be spent on aiming. *The number of successes spent translates directly to advantage dice for the skill test to hit the target.*

If Danny won the positioning test by three successes, he may spend one success to take a shot and use the two additional successes to aim. With his character's B5 bow skill, he'll roll seven dice to hit his target on this volley.

Aiming dice can be used this volley, or they may be carried over to the next volley. But if the character loses a positioning test, fails a Steel test or is in any other way distracted before shooting, he loses benefit of his aiming dice.

A character may aim for a number of dice equal to half his Perception exponent rounded up.

Remember, aiming dice are used for the shooting skill test, not for the positioning test.

Other Actions

A player may only shoot once per volley, but extra successes may be spent on other actions. Any action a player wants to take—shrugging off a wound, quickly memorizing a map, or prying open a tomb door—all must be purchased with extra successes from the positioning test. Without those successes, the character just doesn't have enough time to get it done before the opposition fires off another shot.
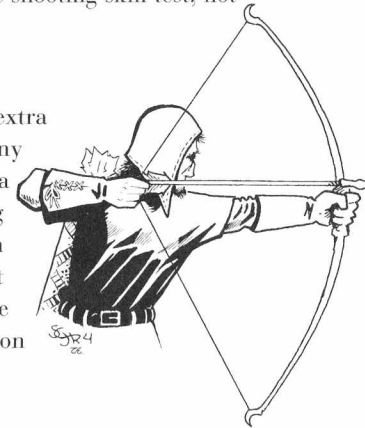
Tying for Position—Who Shoots?

If two characters tie in a positioning test, they both spot each other at the same moment and have but the most fleeting opportunity to capitalize. Each player may shoot at his opponent (without spending a die) or hold his fire and duck (aka, take cover). If he opts to shoot, he may fire at his current range and cover obstacle. If he opts to take cover, he raises his opponent's obstacle to shoot by one.

Field Maneuvers

As mentioned above, playing out a duel of arrows or a charge into a gunners' nest is similar to playing out the Duel of Wits. Each side builds a hand of three moves and tries to outmaneuver his opponent. Individual, moment to moment actions are not important here; it's all about positioning. Each player scripts his exchange of *maneuvers*—whether and when he'll Close, Withdraw or Maintain his distance. As with Duel of Wits, each player plans out three volleys, one maneuver per volley.

Using missile weapons, cover and steely courage, there are multiple ways to maneuver. The following guidelines determine what stats, skills and attributes to roll and what penalties to apply.

Close

Using this maneuver, the character attempts to bring himself closer to his opponent. If successful, the character advances one range category of his *opponent's weapon*—from out of range to extreme range, from extreme to optimal and from optimal to too close to shoot.

Speed Close

With a Speed-based Close, the character attempts to dash into position quickly. Test Speed plus advantage dice. Advantage dice from "taking cover" which are used on this volley are not carried over to the next volley—you've abandoned your position. (But you can win a better one!)

Stealthy Close

If using Stealthy to Close against a Speed, Perception or Steel-based maneuver, then the Stealthy *skill exponent becomes the base obstacle for the opponent.* That's right, Stealthy successes are automatic. Roll any dice for range, cover and advantage. Add the successes to the Stealthy successes.

If the opponent scripts a Stealthy or Observation-based maneuver, *the test is a standard versus test.* (Stealthy successes are *not* automatic.)

Rich is Closing with Speed, while his opponent is using a Stealthy Close. Rich tests his Speed dice plus advantages. The GM sets out six dice—the exponent of the NPC villain's Stealthy. The GM then rolls any range advantage or cover dice and adds these successes to his Stealthy exponent. The total is Rich's obstacle for his Speed Close.

Steel Close

A player may choose to advance with his character's Steel rather than Speed or Stealth. He pricks up his nerve, dashes from cover and charges screaming at his opponent. This is a difficult and dangerous maneuver. The player must essentially meet two separate obstacles with one Steel test. First, he must generate enough successes to overcome his hesitation. If he fails to meet his hesitation, he cannot nerve himself to break cover and *does not advance.* (In fact, he hesitates for additional volleys equal to his margin of failure.) Second, *he must win his versus test against his opponent.* If he wins the versus test, then he closes one range—from extreme to optimal or from optimal to too close to shoot. Any dice used for cover on this volley are not carried over to the next volley—you've abandoned your position.

There is a big "however" for Steel Close: Opponents of a character using the Steel Close may *always* shoot—*even if they lose the positioning test.* The shot does not cost a success to pull off. Take a shot at the current range obstacle. If the opponent of a Steel Close won the versus test, extra successes can be used as aiming advantage dice, or to build a better position for next time.

Withdraw

Using the Withdraw maneuver, a character can attempt to extricate himself from a sticky situation. A successful Withdraw allows the character to retreat one of his opponent's range categories.

Speed Withdraw

Using Speed to Withdraw is a tried and true method. Thousands have used their trusty feet to beat a hasty retreat, and while not all have been successful, I'm sure many would attest to the efficacy of such a strategy.

Speed Withdraw grants the character a +2D advantage. Run! Any actions taken while using the Speed Withdraw cost *three* successes. Taking a shot, shrugging off a wound, or bolting a door closed requires that you win by at least three.

Stealthy Withdraw

Stealthy Withdraw follows the same mechanics as a Stealthy Close, except in the case of victory, the character pulls back one range category (rather than advancing).

Steel Withdraw

A player may feel his character has had quite enough and send him from cover, ducking behind his shield, retreating from the fray. This takes nerves! Steel Withdraw follows the same mechanics as Steel Close, except that the character is trying to get the hell away.

Maintain

Speed Maintain

Using his footwork and reflexes, the character attempts to get the better of his opponent. Test Speed with range, cover, FoRKs, advantage dice and any trait bonuses. If the character is successful, he's held his opponent at the current range.

Perception Maintain

Attuning his senses to his surroundings, a character may attempt to hold his ground with quick thinking alone. Using Perception to Maintain, the character tries to spot his enemy and pick him off before he can react. This is a standard versus test using Perception plus range, cover and advantage dice. It is an open-ended test. If the character has Observation, he may use this skill against a Stealthy opponent. In this case, the Maintain is not open-ended, nor are the Stealthy successes automatic.

Winning the Position

When a character wins a positioning test his maneuver *intent* is successful. If he scripted a Close, he advances one range category (of his enemy's weapon)—from extreme to optimal, for example—or if he scripted a Maintain, he keeps his enemy where he wants him.

Tying for Maneuver

A tied positioning test from a Withdraw vs Close or Close/Withdraw vs Maintain results in a Maintain. Neither side gains advantage. However, if two like maneuvers are scripted—Close vs Close—both characters do achieve their intent and advance (or withdraw) in accordance with the maneuvers. Characters may find that they have suddenly stumbled into one another's positions!

Losing

When a character has scripted a Speed Close and his opponent beats him with a Perception Maintain, what happens? Well, the loser is driven away, or picked off before he can make any real headway. Sure, he might have ducked laterally across the field, finding cover behind a fallen tree, but he didn't get any closer before his opponent spotted him and unleashed a deadly hail of shot.

The loser in a positioning test may not shoot or take any other action described above. He may keep any cover dice he has won so long as his last action scripted was a Maintain. If firing a crossbow or gun, he may reload.

Positioning and Range Example

Thor's Roden assassin is lurking along the forest road, waiting for Dro's Dwarven liar. The GM calls for an initial positioning test to determine starting ranges. Thor has Speed of B5, plus the higher Reflexes and Speed multiplier advantages. He's using throwing knives, which grant +1D for range. He rolls 8D altogether. Dro's using his character's Perception (to spot this ridiculous ambush), he's got a B5, plus he's got a brand new crossbow giving him +2D for range. Thor wins the test and declares he's in optimal range for the knives. (Which is also optimal range for the crossbow. See My Range is Longer than Your Range below.)

Now the players script three volleys of positioning. Thor scripts a very simple Speed Maintain/Speed Maintain/Speed Maintain to Dro's Speed Withdraw/Speed Withdraw/Perception Maintain. First volley—Thor rolls his 8D vs Dro's 4D for Speed, +2D for his crossbow's optimal range, +2D for the Speed withdrawal advantage. 8D total. Thor wins by two. Uh-oh. He decides right away to put those into cover. "Seeing

his crossbow, I take cover behind a gnarled old tree." Next volley, Thor rolls 10D total vs Dro's 8D. It's not good. He wins again, this time by three. Dro's Dwarf is desperately dashing about looking for cover, but everywhere he turns, there's the Roden, ready with his vicious knives. Thor maintains the optimal range for his knives and puts all three dice into aiming (his Perception is B5, so that's the max he can have) and holds his shot until next volley.

Third volley, both players have scripted Maintain so the distance won't change this volley, but we still need to make the versus test to see who gains the opportunity to fire. Thor once again rolls his massive pool of 10 dice. Dro's scripted a Perception Maintain. Turning to face his opponent, he searches for an opportunity to fire. He rolls 5D, +2D for his crossbow, but this test is open-ended and he luckily manages to tie Thor. The Roden sought to outmaneuver his opponent with a flanking attack, but the Dwarf wheels around just in time to bring his crossbow to bear. Both players can either shoot or hold their fire. They both opt to let fly. Thor rolls his B4 Throwing skill plus his 3D from aiming. Since they're fighting in the forest, we assume that there's cover available—optimal range under cover is Ob 3. Dro rolls his B3 Crossbow skill. He also needs three successes. Both players hit. Dro's Dwarf is horribly wounded from the deadly knife, but Thor's Roden is killed outright as the crossbow bolt shatters his rib cage and punctures his evil heart. Dro heaves a sigh and examines his character's wound.

Position and Then Act

To be explicit: Use field maneuvers to position, then spend dice to act. Make subsequent skill tests to determine success or failure.

Too Close to Shoot!

If a character closes from optimal range to "too close to shoot!" he has positioned himself so close to his enemy that they are now in range for hand to hand combat. After resolving any last ditch arrows, make a *melee* positioning test and use the Fight! scripting mechanic.

Last Ditch Arrow

If a missile-armed character *won or tied* the positioning test as he Closed to *too close to shoot*, he may fire his last arrow at optimal range. If he stops his opponent, there's no need to go into melee, is there?

If the bowman *lost* the Range and Cover positioning test that ended in too close to shoot, he can't shoot. Immediately make a *melee* positioning test. If the bowman wins (or ties) this test, he can declare the starting *fighting distance* and he begins the melee with an arrow/bullet/bolt ready to fire. If he loses the melee positioning test, he's caught completely flat-footed—his weapon is not loaded and not ready to fire.
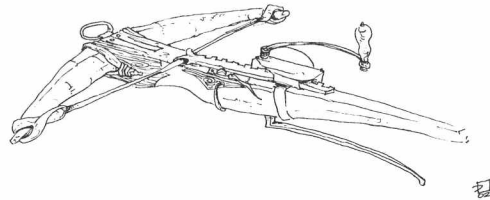
My Range is Longer than Your Range

Once you determine a distance with positioning, use the following criteria to determine if "my range is longer than your range:" If your range is X, then my range is Y.

Same Range

If two characters are using weapons with the same maximum range, when one is in optimal range the other is in optimal range and so on.

Longer vs Shorter

If one character's weapon range is longer than his opponent's, then he may—via winning a positioning test—place himself at extreme range and force his opponent to be out of range. If in optimal range, the opponent is in optimal as well unless the longer-ranged weapon's maximum range is ten times as long as its opponent's. If this is the case (knife vs bow, for example) the longer-ranged weapon may place itself at optimal range and its opponent out of range.

Shorter vs Longer

A weapon that is shorter-ranged than its opponent is out of range when the opponent is in extreme range (arquebus vs heavy crossbow, for example). If a shorter-ranged weapon is in extreme range, the opponent is in optimal (bow vs great bow, for example). If a shorter-ranged weapon is in optimal range, the longer-ranged weapon is in optimal range.

Once one character is *too close to shoot*, all weapons are considered to be in the too close to shoot zone.

Fixed Positions, Cover and Fortifications

Situations may arise in which bowmen are behind prepared defenses—a staked out hill, a rampart or even a castle wall. These fortifications grant the bowman between 3 and 10 dice of cover for positioning (determined by the GM at start). So long as the bowmen script the Maintain action (i.e. they hold their ground), these dice can be used for all positioning tests.

In addition, mounted soldiers attempting to overrun the bowmen may only advance into optimal bow range using their mount's Speed. After that, their mount is restricted by the terrain. The soldier must dismount and take that hill on his own—either with his own Speed or his Steel.

Hesitation

If a character hesitates during the Range and Cover positioning scripts, he loses aiming, cover and range advantages and may not act in the next volley. He's in deep trouble: He may Stand and Drool. If he does so, his opponent automatically wins positioning tests while he is hesitating. The standing character holds his ground. He may Run Screaming— Speed or Steel Withdraw with no cover or range dice. While running and screaming he must scream and *he may not win aiming dice or shoot*. If a character can withdraw so as to be out of range of his opponent, the Range and Cover conflict ends as does any hesitation. A hesitating character may Fall Prone and wet his pants—he automatically loses any positioning tests, but when he recovers his wits, he begins the volley with 2D of cover. Lastly, he may Swoon. A Swoon allows the character to "disappear" for a moment. He automatically loses positioning tests while hesitating, but he may make a Stealthy test to roll under a hollow log, fall in a bog or collapse in a pile of trash. *So long as he gets one success, he may not be shot while Swooning*. If the opponent moves into the too close to shoot range, he must pass a Perception or Observation test (obstacle equal to the Stealthy successes) in order to spot the Swooner. If he does, well, he's just discovered Sleeping Beauty—and may either shoot him or beat the crap out of him. If he's not spotted, the Range and Cover conflict is over. The Swooner wakes up hours later cold and alone with no one around. Ok, I suppose the victorious character could call out the dogs and make a few Tracking tests, but that's another issue not covered here.

Forfeiting

A player may lose his third volley maneuver to change his second volley. This means the player hesitates with Stand and Drool (as per the rules above) during his third volley.

Obstacle Penalties

Just to be clear: There are no additional obstacle penalties for movement, range or cover in these rules. Those penalties have been factored in already—they are part of the base obstacles to hit at the various ranges in the different kinds of cover. The only obstacle penalties that need be considered are those for wounds, weather and light.

Using missile weapons in the next section, Fight!, is slightly different. In the hectic melee, deadly ranged weapons suddenly become slow and ponderous. Read on for more.

Timing and Positioning

Volleys are 10 seconds maybe, or perhaps a minute. So there's no need to worry about reloading your bow or other minutiae when using these rules. Characters are assumed to be reloading and maneuvering as fast as they can. The abstraction of the mechanics handles all that. What you have you worry about is winning those positioning tests!

Range and Cover in Brief

• When one character wants to shoot another, make a positioning test to see if the character is in range and can get off a shot.

• Initial positioning tests: Speed or Perception. Add bonus dice: Extreme range dice for weapon, +1D for highest Speed multiplier, +1D for highest Reflexes. The winning player determines the starting range based on *his weapon*. You may not start too close to shoot.

• Once initial positioning is done, script a sequence of three field maneuvers in order.

• Resolve field maneuvers. The winner maneuvers as per the intent of the field maneuver: He Closes the distance equal to one category of his opponent's weapon, Withdraws one range category, or Maintains his current shooting distance. The winner may also act and shoot. The loser may hope and pray.

• Optimal range shots are Ob 2 at targets without cover, Ob 3 for targets with reasonable cover, and Ob 4 for those with fortifications or under dense cover. Extreme range shots are Ob 3 at targets without cover, Ob 4 at targets with reasonable cover, and Ob 5 for targets in fortifications or dense cover. ⊕

Martial Conflict: Fight!

Martial conflict in Burning Wheel is designed to be uncertain, dirty, undignified, bloody, brutal and ugly. Entering into physical combat is entering into a world unknown, confusing and dangerous. Players control their characters' every move, but they never know what their opponent is going to do—literally. Outwitting your opponent and beating him to the punch are major factors when playing this game.

In this system, players square off with their opponents and try to predict what they are going to do. Each player builds a short "hand" of maneuvers that they use to protect themselves while simultaneously laying their opponents low.

It's a game of strategy, tactics and straight up luck; it's a game where the unskilled can outwit the trained and win; and where the skilled fighter is supremely dangerous in his element.

Mechanically, it's an expansion of the Duel of Wits and Range and Cover rules—a series of privately determined versus tests that are made across a short span of time, which represents the characters vying for position and bashing away at each other.

Simple Martial Conflict

When a player shouts, "I attack him!" in Burning Wheel, he's declared the intent of his action. He hasn't actually stated a task yet—how he's going to accomplish that intent—and his character hasn't done anything at all.

In situations where both characters are aware of each other's actions, can reasonably guess each other's intent, and life and death isn't on the line, *a simple versus test is used to resolve conflict.*

In a simple conflict, where timing or extended actions aren't in question, players declare their intent: "I attack him!" or "I knock him down!" If a player's character is being acted against, the GM then asks the targeted player, "What do you do?" Nothing is rolled until all players have their intent and task announced to the group at large. After that, the conflict is resolved with a versus test.
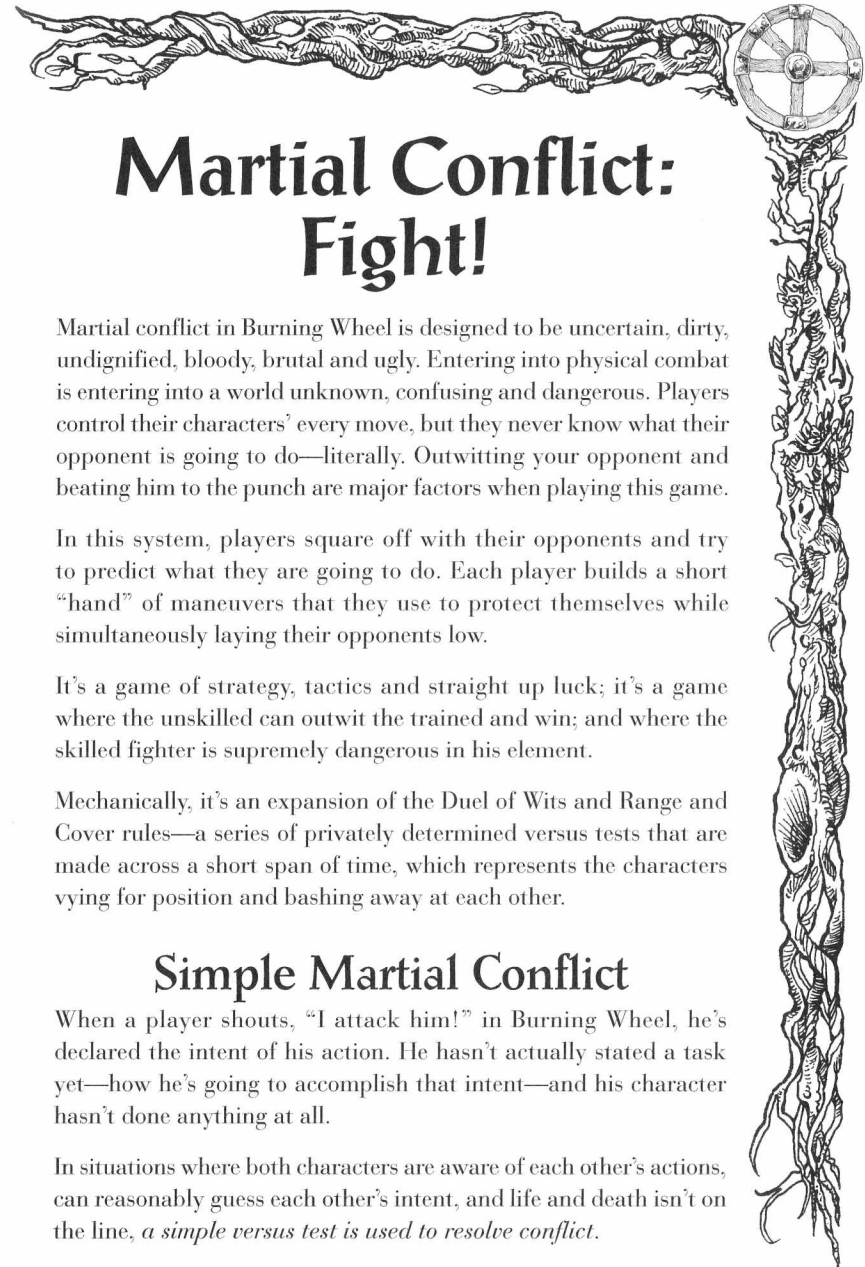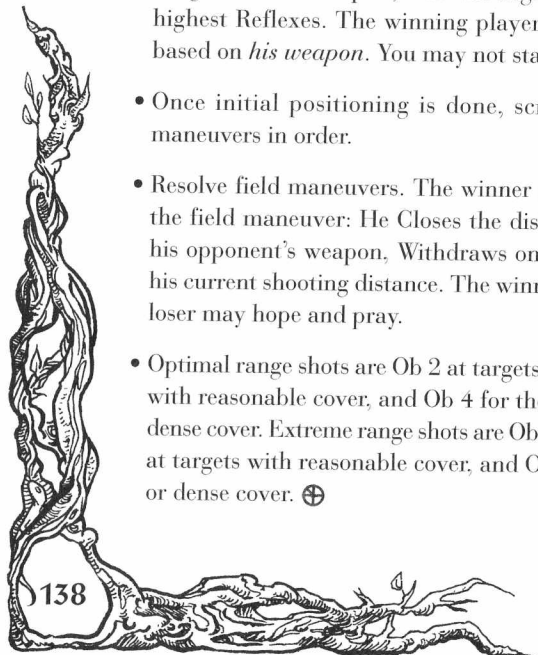
Versus Test

Sir Thormund and Khalid Mohammed stand over a sarcophagus. Inside rests the preserved corpse of a great Moorish captain, clutching his fabled scimitar. Next to them, Sir Carl consults his notes and prays for guidance. What to do next? Seeing his chance, Khalid lunges for the scimitar!

Luke turns to the GM and announces, "I grab it; I lunge for the scimitar."

Dro, playing Thormund, blinks. "I stop him; I hold him back!"

The GM raises an eyebrow: "Roll for it: Power vs Power."

Both players come up with four successes. Since Khalid was the aggressor in this situation, the tie goes to Thormund, the defender. The burly knight grabs the Mameluke slave around the shoulders and holds him back.

Luke continues to mime struggling for the sword, even telling the GM, "I don't stop!" but the Let it Ride rules are in effect. He lost that versus test to Dro, so his task fails and his intent is not carried out, and we don't roll again.

Bloody Versus Tests

Combat in Burning Wheel can be resolved with a single versus test. If there is an attacker and a defender, roll a versus test between their weapon skills. If the attacker gets more successes, damage is applied as described in the Weapons Mechanics section. If the defender gets more successes, he wards off the attack and no damage is inflicted. The defender may withdraw, escape or flee.

If both players are intent on slaying each other, I recommend using the Detailed Martial Conflict rules described below. However, if you want to resolve it quickly, have both players divide their weapon skills into two pools. One for attack, one for defense. Each player then rolls his attack pool and then his defense pool. Add an advantage die or two to the defense pool if either character is wearing armor. Successes in the defense pool subtract from the opponent's attack successes. Extra successes in the attack pool do damage as described in the Weapons Mechanics section.

Sir Carl and the bandit square off. Carl's player, Danny, divides his B5 Sword skill, putting 3D in attack and 2D in defense. The GM divides the bandit's B4 Axe skill, putting 3D in attack and 1D in defense.

Danny rolls one measly success on his attack dice. The traitors! And another success on his defense dice. The GM rolls three successes on the bandit's attack, and one on his defense. Nice.

Danny's defense success subtracts one of the GM's attack successes, leaving two remaining. The GM's defense success knocks off Danny's measly one success attack. Uh-oh. Danny lost the versus test—meaning Sir Carl lost this fight and is probably badly injured! See Weapons Mechanics chapter and Anatomy of Injury for rules on injuring your opponents.

One roll and the fight's over, with the losing character generally wounded if not incapacitated. The loser is at the winner's mercy. If it was a tie, either call-on a trait to break it or let the results stand as inconclusive.

This is a very abstracted and simple way of conducting a martial conflict in Burning Wheel. It uses the basic concepts of the game to resolve the fight, but relies heavily on luck. If players require more control of the outcome—Can I try a different strategy? Can I shake it off and stab him in the throat? Can't I just execute him?—the detailed method provides answers to all those questions and leaves room for skill, tactics and luck!

Detailed Martial Conflict

In the detailed conflict rules, players publicly declare their intent, privately note their tasks (how they are accomplishing that intent), and initiate and execute their actions in a strict temporal structure. Final results of a character's actions are determined after everyone involved has rolled for their tasks.

That's pretty heady stuff, so let's break it down. Let's talk about time in a Burning Wheel conflict.

Exchange

The detailed martial conflict system expands on the one described in the Duel of Wits: The basic unit of time measurement is called the *exchange*. When players declare their intents and privately note their tasks, they do so for the entire *exchange*—about three heartbeats worth of time.

Rich announces, "I've drawn my sword; I'm entering the fray." That's his intent. A pretty guarded one, but that's cool. He then takes a moment to privately note what his character is going to be doing for this exchange of blows: Whacking that Orc on the head, dodging back, pushing that other one to the ground and then finishing him with a thrust. Straightforward stuff for a knight.

We do not play out the exchange in one chaotic blast of action. It gets broken down into manageable chunks and played out heartbeat by heartbeat.
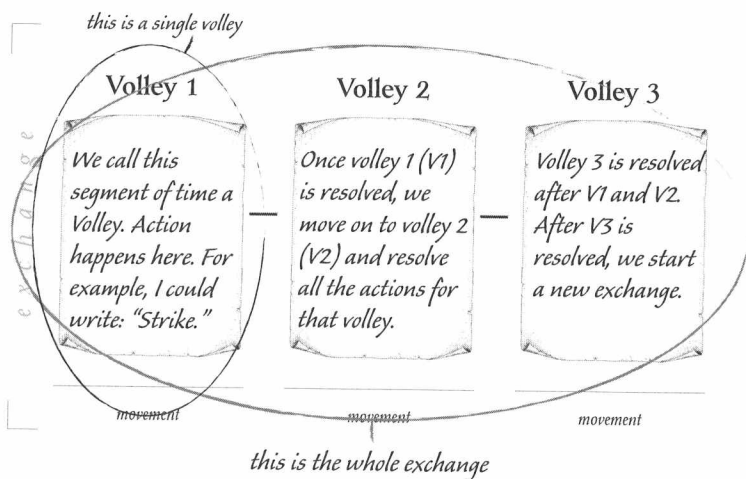
If all of the privately declared actions of the exchange have been announced and executed, and there is still conflict to resolve, we start another exchange. Intent is modified as need be, actions are again declared privately.

Volley

Within the exchange, we break time down into single heartbeats. These are the actual moments of play. The clash of steel and deadly impact of arrows happens in the *actions* of the *volley*.

There are three volleys in each exchange. The actions contained in each volley are played out—announced, executed and resolved—before moving on to the next.

this is a single volley

Volley 1
We call this segment of time a Volley. Action happens here. For example, I could write: "Strike."

Volley 2
Once volley 1 (V1) is resolved, we move on to volley 2 (V2) and resolve all the actions for that volley.

Volley 3
Volley 3 is resolved after V1 and V2. After V3 is resolved, we start a new exchange.

movement   *movement*   *movement*

this is the whole exchange

Actions

Actions divide up tasks in the exchange so that we may play them out in sequence. If I want to drive my sword through my opponent's chest in the melee, that's my intent. To do this, I note "Strike" as my action. My skill roll will determine how far into his chest I go!

Any kind of physical or mental task in detailed combat is broken down into an action or a series of multiple actions. Striking someone with a sword is a simple action. Drawing an arrow, nocking it and releasing it into the chest of your enemy is more complex—it eats up more time and hence more of your character's actions.

Actions in the exchange can really be anything you can imagine that occupies about a heartbeat's worth of time. I've broken them into a list of commonly chosen options: Assess, Throw Object, Physical Act (like opening a door or drawing your sword), Aim, Release, Snapshot, Acquire Target, Nock Arrow, Draw Bow, Change Stance, Avoid, Beat, Block, Charge/Tackle, Counterstrike, Disarm, Feint, Lock, Push, Strike, Great Strike, Throw, Incant Spell, Drop Spell, Coup de Magie, Command Spirit, Stand and Drool, Fall Prone, Run Screaming and Swoon.

Rich knows he wants his knight to do the following: Whack that Orc on the head, dodge back, shove that other one to the ground and then finish him with a thrust. To describe this for his character he notes the following actions: Strike, Avoid, Push and Strike. Pretty simple.

Reflexes

The Reflexes attribute determines how many actions a character can perform in the exchange. The exponent is the number of actions.

A character with a B4 Reflexes has four actions to play with.

Divide Actions by 3 Volleys

Actions are divided into the three volleys as evenly as possible. You can't double up unless you have one action in each volley. You can't triple up unless you have two actions for all three volleys.

Rich's knight has a B4 Reflexes. He gets four actions in the exchange. That means one action in each volley, plus one doubled up (which means he gets a second action).

What follows is a list of Reflexes exponents and the possible action divisions across all three volleys.

As we've just seen, with a B4 Reflexes, Rich's knight has four actions in the exchange. He can take 2 actions in volley 1, one in volley 2 and one in volley 3. Or he could do one action, then two, then one again. Or one, one and then two.

Reflexes	Actions Per Exchange	Volley and Action Combinations
B1	1	1/–/– or –/1/– or –/–/1
B2	2	1/1/– or –/1/1 or 1/–/1
B3	3	1/1/1
B4	4	2/1/1 or 1/2/1 or 1/1/2
B5	5	2/2/1 or 2/1/2 or 1/2/2
B6	6	2/2/2
B7	7	3/2/2 or 2/3/2 or 2/2/3
B8	8	3/3/2 or 3/2/3 or 2/3/3
B9	9	3/3/3
		V1/V2/V3

A character with a Reflexes of B6 has two actions in each volley. A character with a B5 Reflexes has two actions in two volleys, and one in the remaining volley.

This is important for sequencing the actions. Read on and see why!

Scripting

Scripting is our term for building a plan of action for your character at the head of every exchange. The plan is not immutable, but it's what you are committing to—the options that are available to your character in the chaos that's about to ensue.

Players are rewarded for thinking ahead, and penalized for having to rethink their course of action.

In the script, actions are played out in a *strict* order of events. This keeps things fair and easy.

As a player lists what he wants his character to do, he must note in what order he wants those actions to happen. This is very important for determining which actions play off against each other and which slip through uncontested.

Once Rich determines what actions he wants to take, he needs to figure out their timing and order. The timing—in which volley they happen and whether they are his first or second action in that volley—determines whether or not another character can oppose or interfere with him as he's acting. His script for the exchange is as follows:

Rich's Knight's Script

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Strike	Action 1: Avoid	Action 1: Strike
	Action 2: Push	
movement	movement	movement
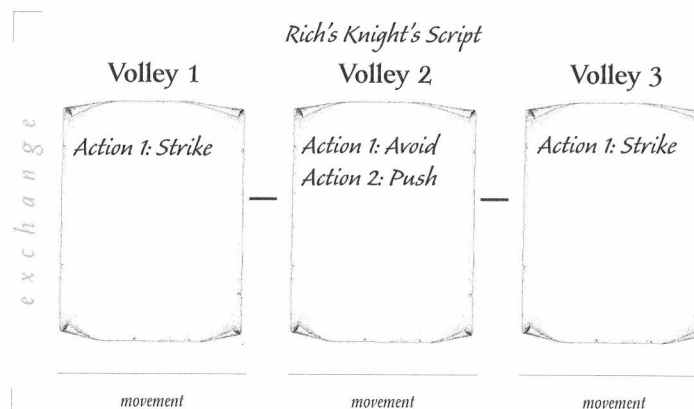
Simultaneous Action

All actions scripted for volley 1, action 1 happen at the same time. Announce them, roll for them and resolve the results—wounds, incapacitation, failed Steel tests, death, etc—before moving on.

This is the case for all actions and intervals in the exchange: Actions are matched up in each volley—first actions against first actions, second actions against second actions.

At the beginning of this combat, the GM took a moment and wrote a script for this Orc (and probably a few others). It looks like this:

possible Orc script

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Avoid	Action 1: Strike	Action 1: Strike
	Action 2: Push	
movement	movement	movement
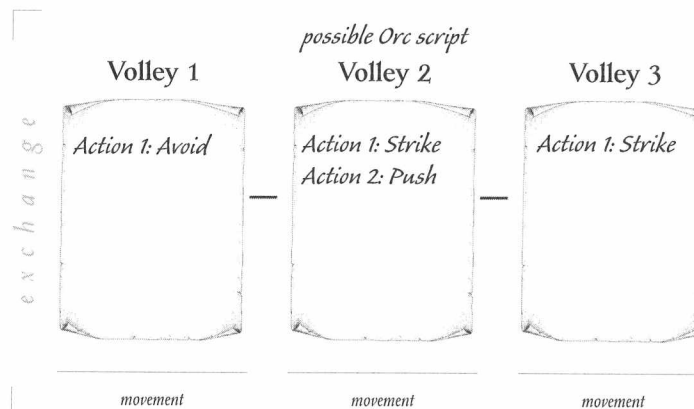
Once we're in the heat of combat, we start with volley 1 and compare actions. The GM demands, "Everyone announce their first volley." Rich has his character Striking on volley 1 (V1), first action. The Orc is Avoiding. Consulting the action descriptions in this chapter, we see that these two actions oppose one another, so a versus test is made.

Volley 2: First action, situation is reversed. The Orc Strikes while Rich's knight Avoids. On the second action, both characters have a Push scripted. The Push actions are both attacking type maneuvers—both characters are attempting to forcibly shove the other to the ground at the same time. Both actions are rolled for simultaneously and independently of each other. They can both be successful—both combatants can knock each other off balance and fall to the ground at the same time.

In volley 3, both characters are Striking simultaneously. It's possible for them both to be injured or killed at the same time.

Roll When?

Dice aren't rolled for actions until everyone has announced their actions and declared their intents. All actions are taken into account—compare which oppose each other and which are unopposed— and then roll the dice. Make versus tests when two actions oppose each other, but otherwise just make standard ability tests when trying to get something done (like hacking the Orc's head off).

That's the basic gist of the scripting system: Plan ahead, note your actions, decide where they fall in the exchange, then play them out against your opponent. From here on out, we get into the nitty gritty— how to integrate movement, what the effects of the actions are, speech and surprise. And how to change your mind.

Positioning Tests

Throughout the melee, characters vie for position, trying to place themselves in an advantageous attitude so they may strike safely and fell their opponents without risk to themselves.

Positioning tests are tandem actions. They are made at the top of each volley and do not count against the character's Reflexes. They test Speed plus advantage dice from traits, attributes and weapon length. It is a versus test between all characters in the fight. The winner of the test has his intent carried through and declares his desired *fighting distance* (which is based on the positioning action he scripted).

Close, Maintain, Withdraw

Like Range and Cover, there are three positioning actions: *Close* fighting distance, *Withdraw* from fighting distance and *Maintain* current distance. Close, Maintain and Withdraw for short.

A player scripts one of these three choices at the top of his volley. *Positioning tests are resolved before all other actions in the volley.* The character who wins the test has the intent resolved in his favor—he either holds the enemy at bay, closes the fighting distance, or withdraws.

Rich scripted a Maintain for his knight, Tristam. I scripted a Close for the Satyr he's facing. Rich rolls two successes; I roll three. The Satyr now moves from optimal striking distance to inside striking distance. (See Fighting Distances below.)

The precise measure of distance moved doesn't matter so much. It's the versus test that's paramount. Once the results are determined, the players can assume that their characters moved, spun, dodged, ducked and dashed the distance necessary to get them into their desired position.

Moving Quickly Disadvantage

Characters who are Closing or Withdrawing are considered to be moving as quickly as possible to get where they want to go. Therefore, the character suffers a +1 Ob to all actions in the volley when these movements are chosen.

Move and Shoot Disadvantage

In addition, Throwing, Bow, Crossbow, Javelin or Firearms tests all add +1 Ob even if the character Maintains in the volley.

Let 'em Come

A player may opt to have his character stand his ground and not position at all. He doesn't suffer any obstacle penalties for moving, but his opponent's intent is automatically successful.

Fighting Distance

Fighting distances are primarily determined by the length of the weapon being wielded. In Burning Wheel, the character with the longer weapon starts with the advantage. This can change as the fight develops.

There are technically four fighting distances in Burning Wheel: outside striking distance, lunging distance, optimal striking distance and inside striking distance.

Outside Striking Distance

A character who is outside of his striking distance *may not* Strike, Great Strike, Charge, Feint, Push, Lock or Throw his opponent. He may defend from his opponent's advances with Avoid, Block and Counterstrike.

If, in the course of a battle, the fighting characters end up outside striking distance, the fight is technically over. They may reengage/rescript if the players desire, or move to Range and Cover, Pursuit or even Duel of Wits.

Lunging Distance

If a character is positioned in his lunging distance, all actions (not positioning) made against or toward his opponent are +1 Ob. Actions *defending* against his opponent do not suffer this penalty.

Optimal Striking Distance

When in optimal striking distance, the character has no penalty to act against his opponent.

Inside Arms Reach Striking Distance

Inside striking distance indicates that one of the characters has closed to the point that puts them both inside arm's reach. When one character has "gotten inside," both characters are considered to be on the inside. At this fighting distance, long weapons are all but useless.

Obstacle Penalties for Weapons Used on the Inside:

Pole Weapons, Two-Handed Axes	+4 Ob
Swords, Axes, Clubs	+3 Ob
Small Swords	+2 Ob
Hilt/Butt/Shield Strike	+1 Ob
Knives, Daggers, Fists	*No Penalty*

Positioning to Start a Fight

When two characters engage in close combat, make a positioning test before any actions are scripted. The winner of the test determines the starting fighting distance—outside of striking, lunging or optimal, *not inside*. After that's set, then script actions and positioning accordingly.

I Position with My Lance and Stab Him with My Knife

The weapon used to gain bonus dice in the positioning test must be used in the melee actions of the volley.

Positioning Tests, Fighting Distance and Timing

Positioning tests are rolled before everything else in the volley. Therefore, fighting distance is determined for the upcoming actions before the actions are rolled. If actions are rendered useless because of fighting distance, *c'est la guerre*. The characters are vying for position. Move on to the next volley.

Bonus Dice to Positioning Tests

Higher Speed *multiplier*	+1D
Higher Reflexes	+1D
Longer Weapon	See Length Advantage Dice below
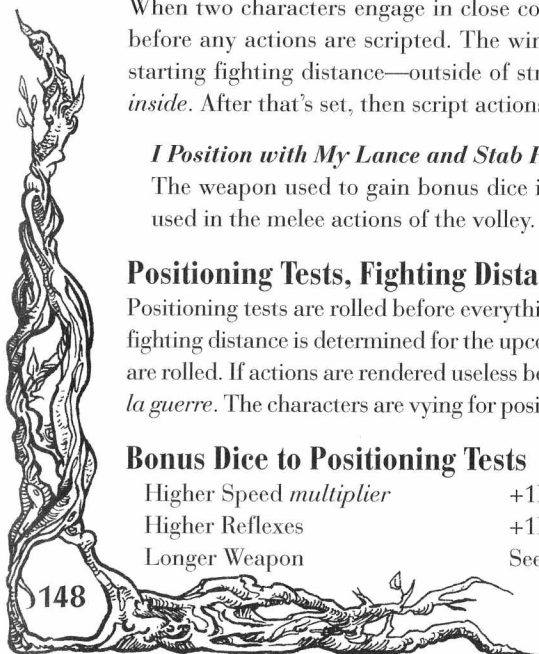
Weapon Length

Weapon length is important when determining bonus dice and striking distance in positioning tests. There are five weapon lengths:

Longest: Spears, Lances, Pikes
Longer: Polearms
Long: Swords, Axes
Short: Small Swords, Clubs, Hatchets
Shortest: Knives, Teeth, Claws, Fists, Feet

Length Advantage Dice

If your weapon is longer than your opponent's, you get a +1D advantage to positioning tests at outside, lunging and optimal striking distance. If your weapon is *more* than two steps longer than your opponent's, add +2D to positioning tests at lunging and optimal striking distance.

Rich's knight is confronted with a Satyr champion. Rich scripts a Maintain to keep the Satyr off of him while he hacks at him. He tests his Speed (B4) plus +1D for his longer weapon—his bastard sword to the Satyr's hatchet. The Satyr has no advantage here, and just tests his Speed.

Later, Rich's knight is confronted by a Great Wolf. Rich still has the longer weapon—sword vs teeth—but the Wolf has a higher Reflexes and a higher Speed multiplier. The Wolf tests his B5 Speed plus +2D. Rich rolls his B4 Speed plus +1D for weapon length for the knight.

Shortest Weapons Inside Striking Distance

On the inside, shorter weapons have the advantage. Long/Longer/Longest weapons lose all advantage dice. Short and Shortest weapons gain +1D to positioning tests (if they are indeed the shortest weapon being used that volley).

Winning Position

When a player who scripts a Close wins the positioning test, his character moves one fighting distance closer to his opponent: from outside striking distance to lunging distance, from lunging to optimal striking distance, from optimal to inside striking distance *for the winning character's weapon*. If Withdraw is the winning action, it's the same but in reverse—the character retreats one fighting distance for the character's weapon. If Maintain wins the versus test, the fighting distances from last volley remain the same.

I script Close, my opponent scripts Maintain; I win the test. What does that mean? The winning character gets what he wants. In this case, I move in one fighting distance.
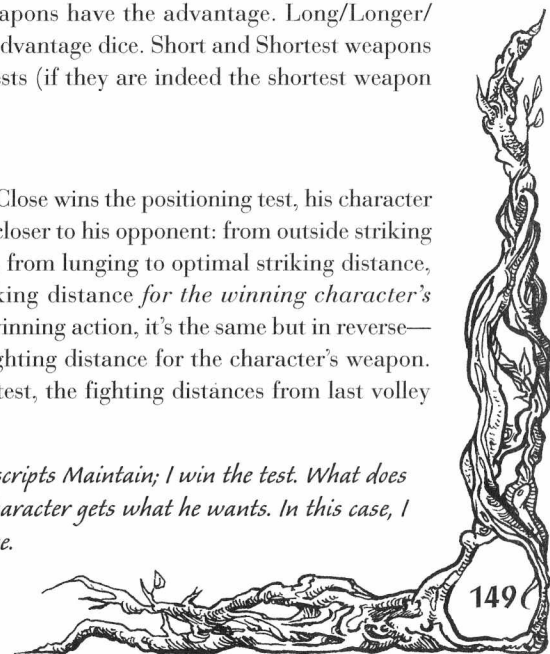
The important detail to note is that winners position themselves in the best place for *their* weapon. If a knife fighter beats a spearman in the positioning test, he puts himself at optimal striking distance for the knife, not the spear.

Win by Two

Winning by two successes allows the character to move two areas of fighting distance—from lunging to inside in one fell swoop if he desires.

Tie

In a tie, the fighting distance does not change. Characters act from their current distances.

Lose

A character who lost a positioning test has been outmaneuvered. His opponent is in control of the movement of the fight for this volley.

Determining Relative Distance

When dealing with weapons of different lengths, fighting distances are not the same for both characters. If one character is at his optimal range, the other may very well be out of striking distance. Using the list of weapon lengths above, follow these guidelines:

Same Weapon Length

If two characters are using weapons of the same length, when one is in optimal striking distance the other is in optimal striking distance.

Longer vs Shorter

If a longer weapon is in optimal striking distance, the next shorter weapon is in lunging distance; a weapon two lengths shorter is outside of striking distance.

Shorter vs Longer

If a shorter weapon is in its optimal striking distance, all longer weapons are in optimal striking distance.

Inside Striking Distance and Weapon Length

Once one character is on the *inside*, all weapons are considered to be on the inside: The shortest weapon then gains the +1D advantage.

Weapon Length for Missiles in Melee

Thrown knives, rocks and such always count as a *longest* weapon. However, they only grant +1D advantage to positioning tests. Loaded and ready bows and crossbows also count as a *longest* weapon and grant +2D to positioning tests no matter which weapon is opposing them (even

if it's a lance!). Missile weapons—except for pistols—may not be used at all when the characters are on the *inside*. Oh, and unloaded bows and crossbows are clubs.

Basic Actions

In order to simplify this process and make it go as quickly and smoothly as possible, we've developed a collection of common actions, their action costs and the terms to describe them. These are all non-melee, non-martial actions that can take place during a fight. Martial actions—for fightin'—are described a little further on in their own section.

General Actions

Assess

Assess is a vital action in the script. If a character embroiled in a melee doesn't assess for additional information, he only has what the GM provided for details. Assessing allows for a player to look for specific details—easy exits, the sources of that burning smell and unarmored locations on the opponent.

An assess takes one action. This is a quick, over the shoulder glance. Such an assess nets the character a Perception test in search of what he described in his intent and task. Additional actions may be spent on an assess in order to gain advantage dice to the Perception test— +1D for a second action, +2D for a third.

Draw Weapon

Two actions are required to unsheathe/unsling a handheld weapon. This includes sheathed swords, throwing knives, slung crossbows, etc. It does not apply to concealed weaponry on the character. Concealing a weapon increases the amount of actions required to draw it to four actions. Readying a weapon—on a strap or in an off hand—decreases draw time to one action.

Get Up

Characters are always getting knocked down. It requires two actions to get up from being laid flat. The first action is spent getting to a crouching position. The second action is spent rising from a crouch to a standing position. Characters who are knocked off their feet have +2 Ob to all Natural Defenses, positioning and defensive moves; +4 Ob to any attacking maneuvers.
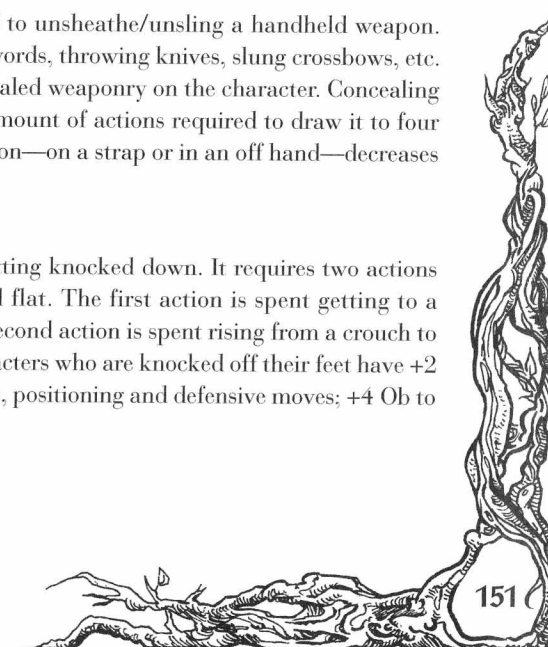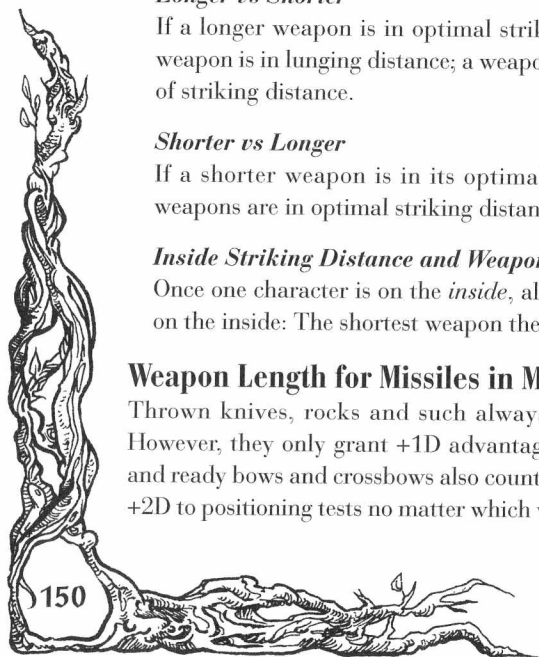
Throw Object

This action is used for hurling inanimate objects around in the melee—a stone, a chair, a knife or even your sword. Thrown "objects" obey all the rules for thrown weapons in positioning and Weapons Mechanics.

Physical Act

This category of actions covers everything from overturning tables to opening doors and climbing through windows. Most *physical acts* eat up two actions.

Actions for Shootin'

The short of it: It takes six actions total to take an arrow from your quiver, nock it, draw your hunting bow and then let fly. It takes two actions to raise a loaded crossbow or gun, pick a target and fire. It takes 16 actions to reload that crossbow, and 40 actions to reload the pistol.

These action costs only count when a missile weapon is being used in melee combat. Range and Cover describes how to use them at range.

Acquire Target

This is the act of raising your weapon, leveling it and pointing it at your intended target before firing. Unacquired targets are +2 Ob to hit (also known as a snapshot). This action is for use with thrown knives and rocks, crossbows and guns. It is not necessary for bows. See Draw Bow below.

Aim

Once a target is acquired, a player may spend additional actions aiming. Each action spent gives a +1D advantage. Characters may aim for as many actions as half their Perception exponent rounded up.

Draw Bow

It requires two actions to *draw* back a hunting bowstring, four to draw a long or great bow. As he draws the bow, the archer gets a "free" *Acquire Target*—choosing a victim for the shot is just a natural part of using the bow. This action does not include nocking an arrow. A character may hold a bow drawn for actions equal to his Power.

A bowman may reduce his draw time by one action if he wishes to fire an unacquired "snapshot" at +2 Ob.

Nock Arrow

When using a hunting or great bow, it takes three actions to pull an arrow from the quiver and nock it. (This action does not include drawing the bow or releasing the arrow. See *Draw Bow* and *Release*.) Characters may *prep* a shot using this action; nocking an arrow but not drawing the bow.
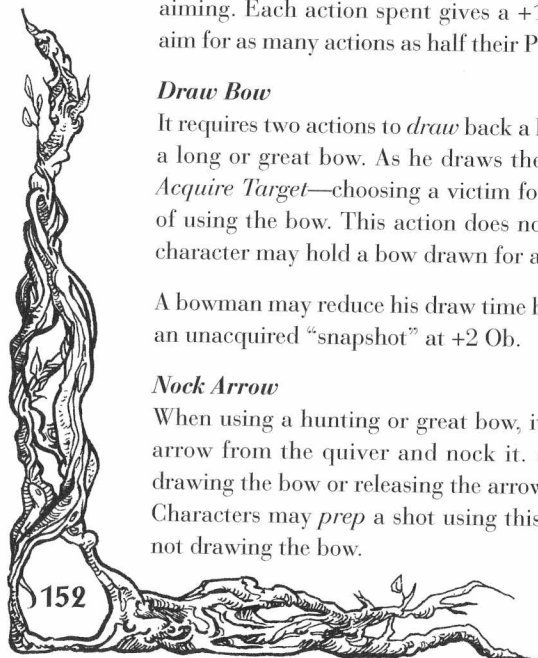
Reload Crossbow

Crossbows require 16 actions to draw and load. Heavy crossbows require 32 actions. Crossbowmen must Acquire Targets after loading. (It costs one action to Acquire. He may release on the following action.)

Shoot/Release

One action is required to release, trigger or launch a bow, crossbow or handgun. Base Ob 1: +1 Ob if you Closed or Withdrew; +1 Ob if your opponent Closed or Withdrew; +2 Ob if your opponent manages to find cover; plus any light or weather disadvantages.

Social Actions

Most "social actions" don't have a place in the melee. It's too late for all that! Two skills can be useful, though: Command and Intimidate.

Command

A character may attempt to bark out orders—three short words per volley. Command can help reduce hesitation. See the Command skill description for more on the limitations of this.

Intimidate

Using the Intimidation skill on another character in a melee costs two actions. Successful Intimidation can cause a character to hesitate. See the Intimidation skill description in the Character Burner for the mechanics of it.

Magic Actions

We haven't covered magic yet, but it's worth including magic-based actions here. This way it'll all be in one place when you come back for it.

Incant Spell

Spells take a number of actions to perform. Spell actions must be performed continuously and without interruption (otherwise bad things happen). A character who is *casting* may only Maintain his fighting distance, he may not Close or Withdraw (or do anything else).

Drop Spell

If a caster no longer wishes to concentrate on a spell, it costs one action to drop it.

Command Spirit

A summoner may command a spirit via *speech*. One short imperative statement per action. If orders have been predefined, it only takes one action to send the spirit into the fray. "Go!"
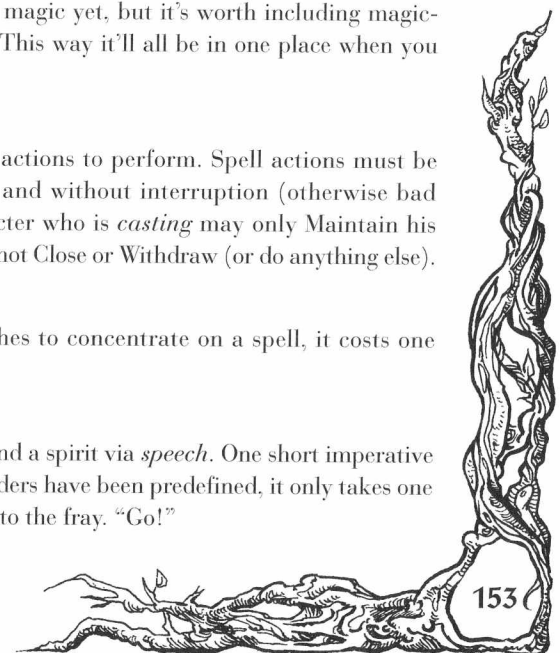
Tandem Actions

Movement and Positioning

Movement, aka positioning, does *not* "cost" an action in the exchange. It is something done *as* a character performs another action. Characters may swing at an enemy as they duck through the door. That's one action.

Speech

Characters may speak a few words in each volley they are not hesitating. (That's 6-8 syllables, for the pedants.)

Song and Prayer

Elven songs and Mannish prayers are counted *as tandem actions*. They do *not* cost an action to perform and may be attached *to any other action*.

Natural Defenses

It is the body's natural inclination to stay balanced and on its feet, especially if one is martially trained. Natural Defenses tests represent this inclination in the script. When Charged, Locked, Pushed or Thrown, the defending character is allowed to make a Natural Defenses test against the attack—even if no active defense was scripted. I'll say it again: Natural Defenses don't cost an action to perform. They are automatic!

Note that, for Charge, the Natural Defenses for the defending character is his positioning test.

A Natural Defenses roll is always a versus test. Successes from the defender knock off the attacker's successes. Remaining attacking successes are then applied to the effect of the move. If the defender generates successes equal to or greater than the attacker, then the move is foiled completely. Each martial action lists the Natural Defenses available to the defender.

Martial Actions

These actions all cost one action in the exchange (ok, except Great Strike). *Tests* indicates which ability is rolled for the maneuver. *Defends Against* indicates which maneuvers you can counteract with this move. *Countered by* lists any maneuvers to which this maneuver is vulnerable. The details are given in each description.

Avoid

Defensive Maneuver   **Tests:** Speed

Defends Against: All

Special Requirements: Avoid is *not* Withdraw; whether successful or not the character remains at the same fighting distance. If the character has any other actions in the same volley as he Avoided, those actions take a +1 Ob penalty. (Avoid *does* suffer the +1 Ob from Close/Withdraw.) Avoid *cannot* be used to reduce the successes of incoming missile fire, but characters who are Avoiding in a volley incur a +1 Ob on the shooter.

Effects: The Avoiding character tests his Speed vs the incoming attack. If the successes of the Avoid reduce the attack below its obstacle, the attack misses. If the Avoid only partially reduces the successes, the effect of the attack is reduced. The remaining successes are applied to the damage/effect.

Avoiding combines with Natural Defenses for all maneuvers. So when an Avoid is scripted against a Charge, Lock, Push or Throw, the player gets to roll his Avoid *and* his Natural Defenses. The successes are totalled.

Just to be safe, I scripted an Avoid on my first action of the exchange. My opponent sweeps in with a Strike! Good thing I have that Avoid. I test my Speed and get three successes. My opponent gets five. My successes reduce his total to two. If his obstacle was 1 or 2, he still tags me, but at a reduced effect. If it was Ob 3 or higher, I've caused him to miss.

Beat and Bind

Neutral Maneuver   **Tests:** Weapon skill

Countered by: Counterstrike, Block, Avoid; Natural Defenses is opponent's weapon skill

Effects: Rather than striking for the body, a duellist can knock aside his opponent's weapon. Using this maneuver, a combatant may knock away or temporarily immobilize his opponent's weapon. Test the attacker's weapon skill vs the Natural Defenses (which is the defender's weapon skill, or Agility if there's no weapon skill). If the attacker wins, his opponent may not use his weapon in the next positioning test—no bonus dice for length. If the attacker wins by *two* successes, then the opponent is also +1 Ob to his next action with that weapon. If the defender wins, the maneuver has no effect whatsoever.

Block

Defensive Maneuver   **Tests:** Weapon skill

Defends Against: Strike, Disarm, Beat   **Countered by:** Feint

Effects: A Block is the Burning Wheel term for using the hands, shield or weapon to deflect or absorb a blow. Successes from a Block subtract from the successes of the attacker's Strike, Disarm or Beat actions. If the Blocker gets enough successes to drop the attack below its obstacle, the attack is completely deflected. If the Blocker gets fewer successes, the attack is partially successful. Remaining successes over the obstacle are applied to damage/effect. (In the case of a Beat action versus a Block, the defending player may test his skill twice. Once for his action, once for his Natural Defenses.)

Block works similarly to Avoid, except I test my weapon skill instead of my Speed. Also, there's no +1 Ob penalty to my other actions as there is with Avoid.

Charge/Tackle

Neutral Maneuver   **Tests:** Power +1D + Speed Advantage

Charge is a Power-based <u>Close</u>; it is a positioning test in all respects

Countered by: Close, Withdraw and Maintain count as Natural Defenses against Charge; though the defending character scripted Maintain, he may use Power as Natural Defenses instead. Also, defending characters add any Avoid successes from the first action of the volley to the Natural Defenses.

Special Requirements: A Charge or Tackle is a special action. *It is a Close maneuver that also costs an action to perform.* All positioning bonuses apply to a Charge. It does not suffer the Moving Quickly penalty. A character may only Charge once per volley and it must be his first action.

Effects: Using the Charge/Tackle action, the attacking character hurls himself at his target intending to knock him down. If the Charger wins by one success, the target is knocked off balance. He has +1 Ob to his next action. If the Charger wins by two successes, the target is knocked off his feet. (See the Get Up action.) If the character is Charging *more than one fighting distance in a volley*, the Charge action is at +2 Ob. If the Charge fails to stagger or knock down the target, the *attacker* must hesitate for his next action as he recovers himself. Cross off that next action and replace it with Stand and Drool.

(If the attacker wishes to stay on his feet after the maneuver, he scripts a Charge. Extra successes are used to knock down his opponent, but the attacker ends up at optimal fighting distance. If the attacker wishes to pile onto his target and go down with him, he scripts a Tackle. A successful Tackle automatically puts the attacker *inside* his opponent's striking distance.)

Charge/Tackle gives the attacker a +1D advantage to Power for the purposes of this action. If the attacker Closed on the previous volley, he gains an additional +1D advantage to the Charge/Tackle. (Therefore, to Charge long distances, script multiple Closes followed by a Charge).

Caution to the wind, I lead with a Charge. I script Close for positioning and Charge for my action. My opponent saw it coming, of course. He's got Maintain/Avoid scripted. Damn. I test my character's B5 Power +1D— 6D altogether. I roll four successes. My opponent tests his B4 Speed for his Maintain. He rolls two successes. I win! Wait, though. He scripted an Avoid action, so he gets to roll that as well. Damn. So he tests his Speed again. Another two successes. Four total. His character nimbly sidesteps my brutish oaf, and I eat turf for an action as I recover. Now I'm in trouble!

Alternately, let's say he flubbed his Maintain Speed test. I got four successes, he got two total. That means I won by two. Enough to knock him flat. In this case, I scripted a Charge, not a Tackle. So I check him, knock him flat and lord it over him. I'm in optimal striking distance. Now who's in trouble?! If I had wanted to grab him and drag him to the ground, I would have scripted a Tackle.

Counterstrike

Defensive Maneuver   **Tests:** Weapon skill, Brawling or Boxing

Defends Against: Beat and Bind, Strike, Great Strike, Disarm and Push

Countered by: Feint

Effects: The defending player divides his skill dice between deflecting the blow and offering a riposte. The number of dice allocated to defend and counter must be determined *before* the attacker rolls. There must be at least one die in both pools to Counterstrike. If you've only got one die left, choose one pool or the other. You're screwed.

The defense dice subtract from the incoming attack successes. The counter or riposte dice are rolled as a standard Strike.

My opponent's going to throw in a Strike somewhere in the exchange. He's got a sword, I've got an axe. He's going to want to tag me while I'm not looking. So, second action, second volley, I script a Counterstrike. My gut tells me my opponent's going to Strike then. And I'm right! Hah! Now I divide my skill dice (plus FoRKs) between defending myself and striking back at him. I've got a B6 Axe skill and a Brawling FoRK (+1D). I put 4D into defending and 3D into a riposte. My opponent rolls three successes on his Strike. I roll two on my defense. I deflected most of the energy, but he gets through with one success. Then I roll my 3D to Strike him! One success tags him just like he tagged me.

Counterstrike is not rolled for at all—no attack or defense—against a Feint.

Disarm

Neutral Maneuver   **Tests:** Weapon skill

Countered by: Counterstrike, Block, Avoid.

Effects: Using this maneuver the acting character attempts to knock the weapon from his opponent's hand. This is an active, forward attack. Not quite the same as a Strike, but it is definitely not a defensive maneuver. The obstacle for the test is equal to the target's weapon skill. (If the target has no weapon skill, the obstacle is half his Agility.) If the Disarm is successful, the weapon is knocked away. It lands in the same fighting distance/area, and it costs two actions to retrieve it. Successes over the obstacle can be used to knock the weapon farther away—two successes over knocks it one fighting distance away. The now weaponless character must win a positioning test in order to get to his weapon before he can pick it up.

Taking a risk, I throw in a Disarm as my last action of the exchange. I test my skill vs an obstacle equal to my opponent's weapon skill. In this case, he's got a B5 Sword to my B6 Axe. Not likely. If I roll five successes, I knock his weapon out of his hand.

Feint

Neutral Maneuver   **Tests:** Weapon skill

Counters: Block and Counterstrike   **Countered by:** Strike

Special Requirements: Feint is a special counter counter-maneuver. It only works if scripted against a Block or Counterstrike. It is useless against all other maneuvers.

Effects: A properly scripted Feint is devastating. This maneuver draws a defensive opponent out of position and opens him up to attack. If Feint is scripted against Block or Counterstrike, the defender counts as *hesitating* and the Feinting character may take a free Strike. If scripted against any other maneuver, the Feinter counts as hesitating (except he gets his Natural Defenses). Feint also allows the attacker to declare the target location hit. See the Weapons Mechanics for how that's done.

I've got my opponent on the defensive. I've been hitting him with a lot of Strikes, and I bet he thinks that's my strategy. He'll script defensively to counter me. So I drop a Feint in for my second action this exchange. He scripted a Counterstrike. Nice! My Feint bypasses his Counterstrike completely—I get a free Strike on his defenseless butt. I test my B6 Axe skill...

Great Strike

Aggressive Maneuver   **Tests:** Weapon skill, Brawling or Boxing

Countered by: Avoid or Counterstrike (not Block)

Special Requirements: Requires two actions, Set and Strike.

Effects: This Strike involves the character rearing back and readying his weapon before delivering a blow at full force. Before the dice are rolled, the attacker must choose the effect of his Great Strike: he may increase damage by +1 Power, or he may increase the VA of his weapon by one. See the Weapons Mechanics and Armor and Shields sections for more on how armor and VA work. Note: Great Strikes cannot be Blocked.

I've really got him on the defensive, so I think I've got time to pull off this move. I script "Set/Great Strike" in my first volley. If he doesn't kill me right away, he's going to be in trouble. When the time comes to deliver my hate onto his skull, I roll my B6 Axe skill as normal. Before I roll, I decide to take the Great Strike bonus in VA, all the better to penetrate his armor!

Lock

Neutral Maneuver   **Tests:** Power

Countered by: Avoid; Natural Defenses Power

Special Requirements: A Lock is best performed when at *inside striking distance*. It's +2 Ob to perform a Lock from optimal striking distance, and +4 Ob to Lock from lunging distance.

Effects: When a Lock is scripted, both players make a versus Power test. If the attacker wins, his opponent is immobilized or hindered: He loses dice from his physical stats and skills equal to the margin of failure.

Lost the versus tests by two? 2D is subtracted from stats and skills until the Lock is lifted or broken.

Skills reduced to zero dice cannot be used in any way. *Attributes* are never affected by a Lock.

Victims of a Lock are always assumed to be able to struggle to the best of their ability. Therefore, for the purposes of *resisting* the application of a Lock, Power dice are *never* reduced. You always get your full Power to *resist* a Lock. All other physical stat and skill dice are reduced. If Agility, Speed, Power or Forte is reduced to zero dice from a Lock, the character is completely immobilized and is now at the attacker's mercy. He may not effectively struggle or resist any further. In order to be freed, the attacker must either let him go, or another character must come to his aid.

Even though I'm in a 3D Lock, I still get to test my full B4 Power if he tries to further increase the Lock. However, if I'm reduced to zero dice, my character can no longer struggle at all.

If a character is partially Locked (a few dice off, but not immobilized), he can escape by wriggling free with an Avoid action or he can script an "escape" action and use his Power to try to break free. The obstacle of both tests is equal to the number of successes applied to the Lock. Any successes generated on these rolls *reduce* the Lock rating.

I'm kind of screwed. I'm in a 3D Lock and my opponent is about to start pounding on me. I forfeit an action to script Escape Lock. I test my Power (always at full to escape). I get two successes—I'm now in a 1D Lock. Better, but not quite out.

Once a Lock is applied, the attacking character doesn't release it until he says so or until its broken (reduced to zero dice). Other actions can be taken while maintaining a Lock—you may partially immobilize your opponent and then smash his face in.

Yup, I'm in a 1D Lock and he's smashing me with the hilt of his sword. My Block roll is reduced by the -1D penalty, as are any other actions I take while Locked. I'm in trouble.

Characters who are Locked are considered to be inside striking distance and they may not Withdraw while Locked. Corollary to that, once a Lock is achieved, both characters are considered to be inside arms reach for purposes of fighting distances. Yes, you can drag him toward you….

Push

Neutral Maneuver   **Tests:** Power

Countered by: Avoid or defense half of Counterstrike, plus Natural Defenses Power or Speed the if the target Maintained, or Speed if he positioned with Close/Withdraw.

Effects: This is a simple maneuver shoving the target off balance and hopefully off his feet. Whenever a Push is scripted, make a versus test between the attacker's Power and the defender's Power or Speed (as described above).

If the Pusher wins by one success, the target is knocked off balance. He suffers +1 Ob to his next action or positioning test, whichever comes first. If the Pusher wins by two successes, the defender is shoved off his feet. (See the Get Up action, above.) The Pushing character can also use his successes to shove his opponent away. Two successes can be spent to force the character back one fighting distance—from optimal to lunging, for example. Extra successes can be divided between pushing back and knocking down.

I'm feeling cheeky and clever as I confront this Elf. As an Orc, I'm pretty confident that I have a higher Power, and I'm going to solicit the GM for a "weight" advantage—+1D to Push because I'm heavier than the poncy Elf. Hah! I throw a Push into my script. First action, third volley. He's scripted a Strike. I throw my B6 Power plus the +1D advantage into him—four successes. He tests his Natural Defenses B5 Speed—three successes. I got one more than he did. That staggers him: +1 Ob to next action. If I had rolled five successes—two more than him—he'd be knocked on his ass. Now all I have to do is survive the Strike he hit me with while I Pushed him.

Strike

Aggressive Maneuver   **Tests:** Weapon skill, Brawling or Boxing
Countered by: Avoid, Block, Counterstrike; No Natural Defenses.
Effects: This maneuver describes an attacker lashing out to do harm to his opponent. A Strike can be performed with or without a weapon. The target character of a Strike does not have to be predetermined; the player may choose his victim just before rolling the dice. The attacker tests his skill against the current obstacle: Striking a stationary target within optimal striking distance is Ob 1. This is modified by fighting distances, movement, being knocked down, etc.

Defensive maneuvers—Block, Counterstrike and Avoid—played on the same action reduce Strike successes. If the Strike is reduced below the obstacle, it misses. See Weapons Mechanics for applying damage from Strikes.

The simplest and most elegant of them all, the Strike! I sprinkle my scripts with Strikes—often on the second action, but don't tell my opponent that. I test my weapon skill vs the obstacle. If I meet my obstacle, I tag my opponent. Successes over go to increasing damage. If I don't meet my obstacle, I miss.

Throw Opponent

Neutral Maneuver   **Tests:** Brawling or Boxing
Countered by: Avoid plus Natural Defenses Speed, Boxing or Brawling
Special Requirements: A Throw is best performed when on the Inside. It's +2 Ob to perform a Throw from optimal striking distance, and +4 Ob to Throw from lunging distance.
Effects: This maneuver is designed to take the target off his feet. Test Brawling or Boxing versus Natural Defenses (plus Avoid if scripted). If

the attacker gets more successes than the defender, the target is lifted off his feet and thrown to the ground. There are rules for throwing characters into walls described in the Materials section.

Like a Push, Throw successes can be spent on tossing a character away. Two additional successes can be spent to toss the character one area of fighting distance—inside to optimal, for example.

Alright, I'm on the Inside. My opponent is stronger than I am, so I script a Throw to work against his Speed. My Brawling vs his Natural Defenses Speed. I win by one success and down he goes. I trip-push him to the ground.

Stances

There are three stances a character may take in Burning Wheel melee: Neutral, Defensive or Aggressive. The moves in the list above each note which stance they favor. When performing a favored move while in Aggressive or Defensive stance, characters gain a +2D advantage.

Defensive Stance gives +2D to Avoid, Block or Counterstrike. Aggressive stance gives +2D to Strike and Great Strike.

Starting Stance

Characters are assumed to start a fight in Neutral stance: no bonuses or penalties to any maneuvers.

Changing Stance

Players may have their characters change stance in the exchange. It costs one action. Script: *Change Stance, Aggressive*, for example.

Neutral Maneuvers

Neutral maneuvers can be performed in Defensive and Aggressive stance without penalty.

Push tests straight Power without bonus no matter what stance you're in.

Aggressive Stance

In Aggressive stance, Strike and Great Strike are done at +2D. Block and Counterstrike are performed in Aggressive stance at +2 Ob. Characters in Aggressive stance may not Avoid. *Natural Defenses Speed* tests made while in Aggressive stance incur the +2 Ob penalty.

Defensive Stance

Avoid, Block and Counterstrike gain a +2D advantage in Defensive stance. Aggressive maneuvers (Strike and Great Strike) performed in Defensives stance suffer a +2 Ob penalty. On the action a player scripts *Change Stance: Defensive*, his character is considered to be Blocking (without bonus).

Stance and Position

Instead of using the stance dice as a bonus to actions in the script, a player may use his +2D bonus to aid his positioning test. Obviously, this must be declared at the top of the volley. *Stance dice used to position cannot then be used as a bonus to the actions, but all other action/stance penalties apply.*

No Charging or Hesitating, but Horse Riding Ok.

A character may not Charge, hesitate, be incapacitated, or be killed and maintain his stance. Any of these conditions automatically drops the character back to Neutral stance. A character *may* be Locked (but not incapacitated), on the Inside, on his back, riding a horse or even unskilled and take a stance.

Forfeiting an Action to Change an Action

Players can change upcoming actions in the exchange. First rule: you cannot change an *announced* action. That is, as soon as anyone has announced any action, no one can change any of their scripted actions for that volley. Once the GM has called for the volley to be announced, it's too late.

Second rule: Knock off an action (change it to "Stand and Drool") to change another action. Actions can be lost from or changed in any unannounced volley in the exchange.

Any tandem action(s)—positioning, prayer, song, speech—associated with the lost action(s) are lost as well. However, for the action being *changed*, positioning, prayer and speech may be changed as well. So if you have two actions in a volley and lose one to change one, positioning is lost and then regained and changed.
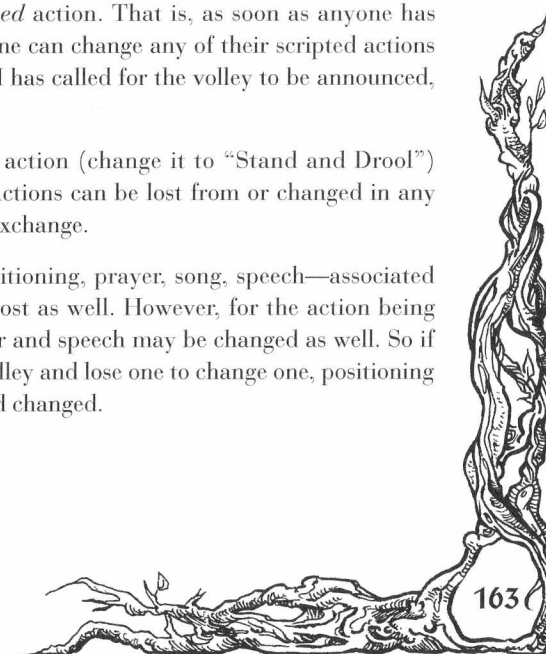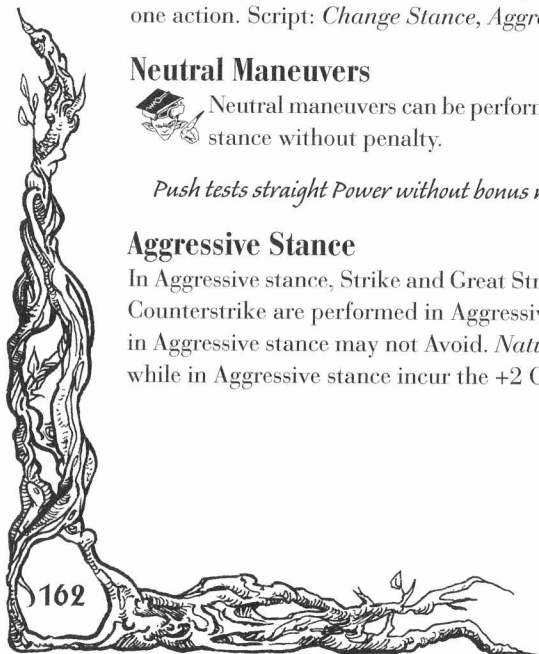
No Forfeiting or Changing in Volley 1

There's no forfeiting or changing anything in volley 1. After volley 1 has been announced and played, you may forfeit and change in volley 2 or 3. After volley 2 is played, if you have two actions in volley 3, you may forfeit and change. If volley 1 and 2 have been played, and you only have one action left in volley 3, you're stuck.

Forfeiting to Stand and Drool

A player may choose to voluntarily hesitate for his action. It does not cost an action to do this, but it must be announced/changed in accordance with the timing rules described above. The character does nothing at all, and all of the strictures for hesitation are in play. If a character's only action for a volley is dropped to Stand and Drool, the character may not position. If it is just one of multiple actions, position as normal, hesitate where desired.

Oh F&eK! Optional Rule

This rule allows players to forfeit an action to freely change their *current* announced action to an Avoid or Block. It's good to use while players get their feet under them in this system, or if you want play less gritty and more dramatic.

That's right, your opponent announces Strike and you have a Feint scripted. You're in trouble. Using this rule, you can lose an action in a later volley to change your current (doomed) action to Block or Avoid.

Initiative

In the standard melee set up, all actions scripted in the same interval of the same volley happen simultaneously: two Strikes scripted on *volley 1, action 1* mean the two characters could be killed outright together.

If a player absolutely needs his character to go first, he can bid for initiative. Bidding is done at the start of the exchange, before any actions are announced. A bidding player must announce to the group, "I'm bidding for initiative."

To bid, a player simply subtracts one action from his Reflexes total for the exchange. Once the action is bid, the character's *first* action of the exchange happens out of sequence, before anyone else acts. His remaining actions then happen in standard order. Also, the winning player may choose to have his "lightning draw" action go before or after positioning tests are made.
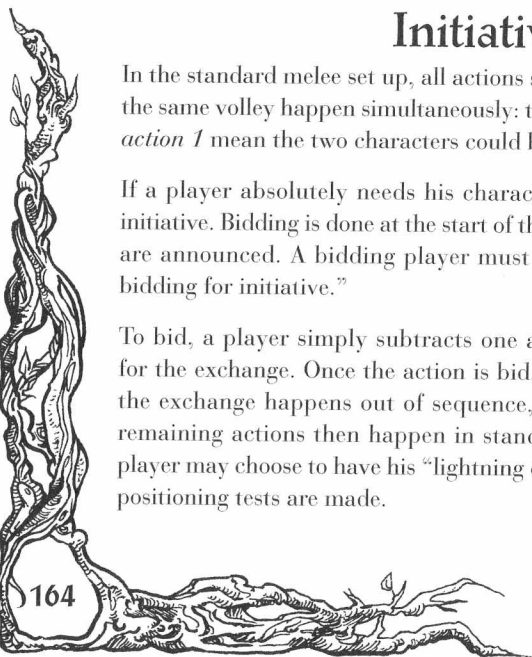
A player with a character that has a B4 Reflexes bids an action to go first. He subtracts one action from his total for the bid. He now has three actions in the exchange—one per volley. The first action (in volley 1) goes before all other first actions in the volley. After he goes, other characters take their first action.

Natural Defenses and Initiative

Even if outbid, slower or later-acting characters still have access to their Natural Defenses, but they don't have access to any maneuvers scripted.

Counterbidding

Another player (or the GM) may bid one of his character's actions to counterbid. A counterbid neutralizes a bid. The bidding characters then both act with one less action this exchange.

The original bidder can bid again, subtract another action, and retain his initiative. Now it's two actions to one. If the player wants to counter, he's got to throw in another action. It all comes down to whoever throws in the most actions.

Maximum Bid

Characters may only bid a number of actions equal to one less than their Reflexes attribute. A character with a B4 Reflexes can only bid three actions. He has to have one to act on!

I Did One Super-Fast Action, Now What?

Characters who don't have actions in volleys due to their bidding, count as Standing and Drooling for those actions.

Hesitation

If a character hesitates in the exchange, the number of heartbeats hesitated (as described in the Steel section) translates directly into actions.

A player has a character with a Hesitation of 4. He flubs his Steel test—no successes (oh, the traitors!). His character now hesitates for four actions, starting with the next action.

If he rolled one success—reduced his hesitation by one—his character would hesitate for three actions. If the character's Reflexes was B5 and he failed the Steel test on his second action, he'd lose all his remaining actions to hesitation.
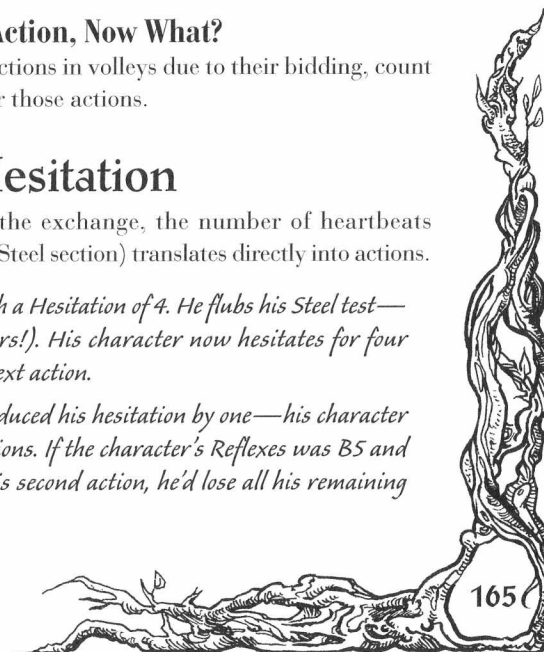
Players may choose their hesitation reaction as described in the Steel section. We highly recommend running and screaming (like a little girl).

Hesitation, Natural Defenses and Positioning

Characters who are hesitating (in any form) do not get Natural Defenses. Also, characters who Stand and Drool, Fall Prone, or Swoon count as Maintaining with zero dice (they automatically lose the test so long as their opponent meets any obstacle penalties).

A player who chooses "Run Screaming" as his hesitation option must Withdraw on the volleys he's hesitating. He gets no bonus dice from his weapons or from terrain when doing so. Run Screaming does not begin until the next positioning test. Until then, the character Stands and Drools.

Surprise and Ambush

In order to surprise another character, one must attack unexpectedly and suddenly. In general, this requires the ambusher and the target to make a versus test: Inconspicuous/Stealthy vs Perception/Observation.

If the ambusher wins the versus test, the victim must pass a Steel test. Any hesitation is subtracted from actions at the *head* of the exchange.

Hesitate from surprise for two actions and you lose your first two actions of the exchange. Better Run!

Setting Conditions

A player can set a condition for his character to act on.

Sir Tristam is protecting Brother Thomas as he prays for divine intervention. Tristam's player scripts: Set Strike— "If a zombie gets close to Thomas, I Strike it."

Doing so allows a character to ready an action and wait. It costs one action to ready or "set," and thereafter the character is prepared to act on the predetermined condition.

When setting up this action, the player must set a trigger for his action— "if attacked, if he moves, if I see…." While waiting, a character may not do anything else except position himself and speak. All energies are devoted to the concentration of preparation and readiness.

A character may remain ready for a number of actions equal to the character's Will. If the conditions are not met after this time, then the character spends his next action hesitating as he blinks, scratches and burps.

Setting a Condition in a Script

A player who has his character waiting on an action in a scripted melee, should write out what actions his character will take *following* the trigger of his condition. Using the example above, what would the character do after Striking the zombie? Note this in a script. The first action is the readied action, everything that follows is a "what if."

When the action is triggered in the exchange, play out only the remaining actions for the exchange at large. For example, if the action is triggered at the end of the second volley, only play out the first volley of your "what ifs" (which would be the third volley of everyone else's exchange). Then rescript with everyone else and start a new exchange as normal.

Advantage in Fight!

In order to keep martial conflict fluid, adaptable and interesting, it is vital to assign advantage dice—conditional and momentary bonuses that don't relate to the character's skills and stats. However, "faster than him!" is not an advantage per se. If benefit is reflected elsewhere in the mechanics, there is no advantage.

Sample Advantages

Weight advantage: Characters with a clear weight or stature advantage can claim a bonus die for Locks and overpowering maneuvers on the Inside.

Terrain advantage: Being above your opponent or defending a narrow corridor with a spear are both good cases for a bonus die in positioning.

Disadvantage in Fight!

There are myriad disadvantages in fighting conditions.

Melee

+1 Ob Disadvantages

Acting against a target in lunging distance. Moving quickly: Closing/Withdrawing while acting. Striking with the hilt of a weapon on the Inside. Defending from the knees. Driving rain or snow. An unarmed Block or Counterstrike versus an armed Strike. Muddy or icy ground, standing on unstable rocks or in water. Dim light or bad visibility: lantern light. Narrow or restricted fighting quarters.

+2 Ob Disadvantages

Using Natural Defenses from the ground, defending from the ground. Striking with a small sword on the Inside. Natural Defenses or positioning from the ground. Defending from your back. Poor visibility: candlelight, heavy rain.

+3 Ob Disadvantages

Striking with a sword or axe on the Inside. Near darkness.

+4 Ob Disadvantages

Attacking from the ground.

Missile and Throwing Weapons (for Fight! only)

Note: In melee, shooters and throwers must Acquire Target to get the Ob 1 base. Bows automatically Acquire during the Draw portion of the reloading cycle. Crossbows, thrown weapons and guns must Acquire as normal. Not taking the Acquire Target action incurs the Snapshot penalty (+2 Ob).

+1 Ob Disadvantages

Shooting while Maintaining, shooting a smaller than man-sized target, shooting in dim light (lantern light), firing from an uncomfortable, restrained or cramped position, hitting a target who is Closing or Withdrawing (hitting a moving target).

+2 Ob Disadvantages

Shooting at target behind cover or shooting at something smaller than a loaf of bread, shooting while Closing or Withdrawing, smoky or hazy visibility, firing a snapshot, firing a crossbow or pistol one-handed.

+3 Ob Disadvantages

Guessing a shot at a known target completely concealed behind cover, firing in near-complete darkness or thick smoke, firing at very small targets like mice or small birds.

Script Sequence in Brief

- In game, someone wants to fight. A player or the GM declares his intention to engage another character. The GM then describes the scene and the intent of the NPCs. An initial positioning test is made. The winner declares starting striking distance for his weapon. He may not start *on the inside*. Everyone writes out a script based on the situation at hand and their intent.

- GM calls for the first volley. Is anyone bidding for initiative?

- Players read out, in turn, their entire volley—positioning, speech and all actions to be played. No dice are rolled yet. Order of declaration doesn't matter. No one can change what they are doing at this point.

- Positioning tests are made and penalties are applied based on the new positions. There will be instances when actions become non-viable due to new positions. Just play out what's in range and move on.

- Actions are matched up—first actions against first actions, second actions against second actions. Attackers test their appropriate ability against the obstacle set by the GM. Targets defending themselves with appropriate actions or Natural Defenses roll and use their successes to reduce their attackers' successes. Simultaneous attacks happen at the same time and are unopposed. Simultaneous defense does not need to be rolled.

- The results of the actions are applied—wounded, hesitating, incapacitated, killed, knocked off balance or pushed to the ground. Weapons Mechanics, Armor and Shields, and Anatomy of Injury describe how to resolve these effects.

- GM calls for the second volley. Is anyone forfeiting? If so, players wait a moment while the vacillator rearranges his actions. Once that's taken care of, play out the volley sequence as above.

- Once volley 2 is played out and all actions are resolved, the GM calls for volley 3. Once again before calling for actions, he asks if any players are forfeiting actions to change other actions.

- Once all three volleys have been played out, the exchange ends. If there is still conflict to be resolved, another script is written and the process starts again. However, as soon as everyone is hesitating, fleeing, incapacitated or just plain giving up, the exchange ends. No need to write another one if there's no conflict.

- Note on hesitation: If a character is hesitating for longer than one exchange, the player doesn't have to script. Simply count the actions he's been out for. Likewise, if acting against a character who is hesitating for a long period, don't script. Just count out the actions used against him versus the time he's hesitating.

For example, if an Orc is hesitating for 7 actions, and our hero wants to fire an arrow at him, we know it takes 6 actions to fire an arrow. So the player will get one shot before the Orc recovers and will be back in it.

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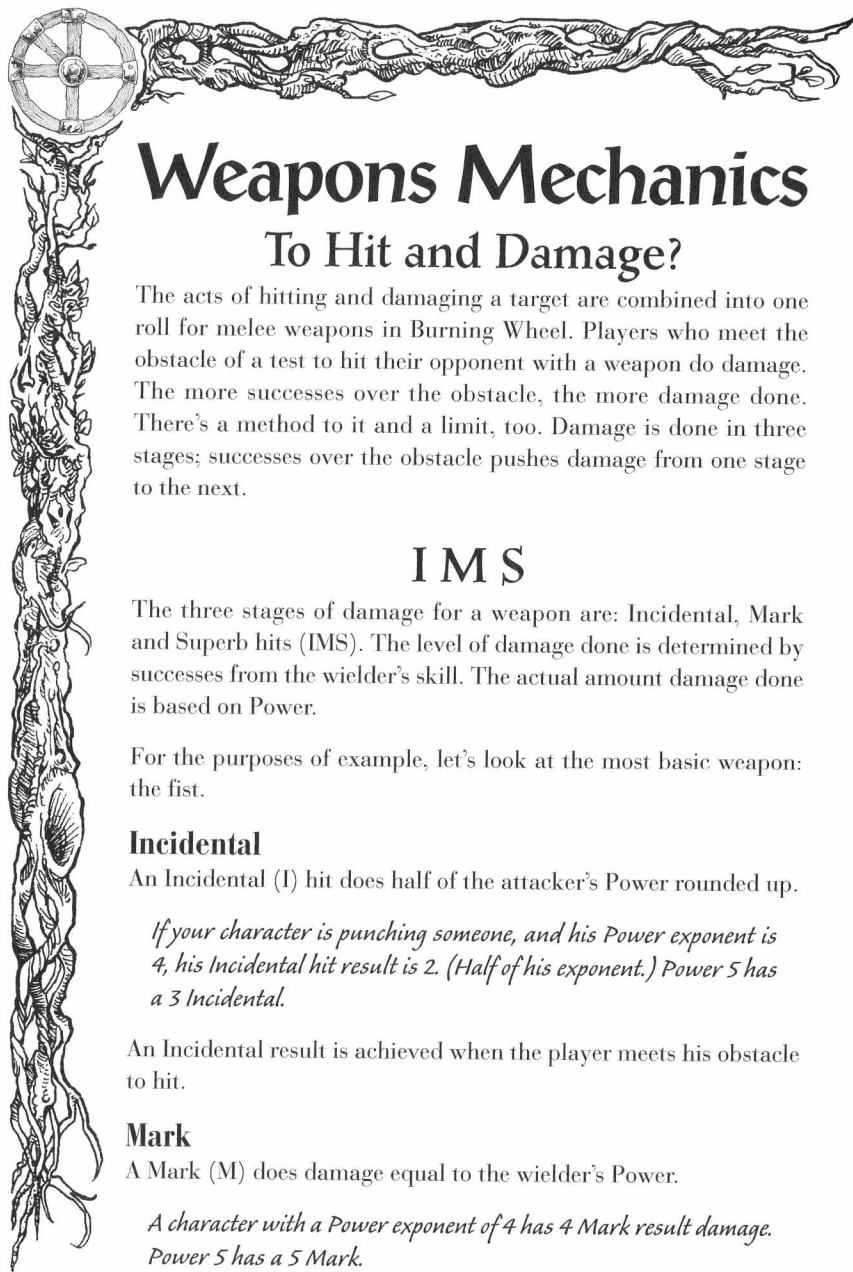
Weapons Mechanics
To Hit and Damage?

The acts of hitting and damaging a target are combined into one roll for melee weapons in Burning Wheel. Players who meet the obstacle of a test to hit their opponent with a weapon do damage. The more successes over the obstacle, the more damage done. There's a method to it and a limit, too. Damage is done in three stages; successes over the obstacle pushes damage from one stage to the next.

IMS

The three stages of damage for a weapon are: Incidental, Mark and Superb hits (IMS). The level of damage done is determined by successes from the wielder's skill. The actual amount damage done is based on Power.

For the purposes of example, let's look at the most basic weapon: the fist.

Incidental

An Incidental (I) hit does half of the attacker's Power rounded up.

If your character is punching someone, and his Power exponent is 4, his Incidental hit result is 2. (Half of his exponent.) Power 5 has a 3 Incidental.

An Incidental result is achieved when the player meets his obstacle to hit.

Mark

A Mark (M) does damage equal to the wielder's Power.

A character with a Power exponent of 4 has 4 Mark result damage. Power 5 has a 5 Mark.

A Mark hit is achieved when you get one or two—depending on the weapon—successes over the obstacle.

Superb

A Superb shot does damage equal to 1.5x the attacker's Power. Always round down any fractions when factoring this one.

A character with a Power exponent of 4 has a 6 Superb result. (One and a half times his Power.) Power 5 has a 7 Superb.

To achieve a Superb result, players need two or four successes over the obstacle, depending on the weapon used.

Shade of IMS

The shade of the IMS is equal to the shade of the Power of the weapon. To do gray shade damage, you need either gray shade fists or a gray shade weapon. Neither are easy to come by.

Coordinates not Points

The shade and exponent for the damage level of a hit are coordinates on a wound scale. This scale, and the effect of these hits, is discussed in the Anatomy of Injury section. For now, let's just concentrate on hittin' the bastards!

Missile Weapons

Missile weapons have their own fixed Power. They don't rely on the wielder's strength, just his skill. Read on.

Striking Your Opponent

When a player wants his character to take a swing at another character he tests his appropriate weapon, martial arts or Brawling skill. If he doesn't have an applicable skill, test Agility.

The base obstacle to hit an opponent in melee is Ob 1. This is modified by movement, fighting distance, whether or not a character is on his feet, weather, and various other disadvantages. The Disadvantage in Martial Conflict section in the previous chapter lists a number of applicable penalties.

Defender Declares his Posture

Before the dice are rolled, the defender or target of the blow describes how his character is standing and what area of the character is most vulnerable to attack.
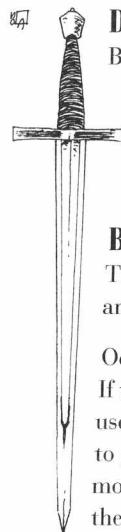
Defender Chooses Where He Wants to Get Hit

By declaring his position, and where he is vulnerable, *the defender tells the attacker where he will be hit*—he's got his arms up defending his head, so he's left his legs open, for example. Choosing from one of the locations described below, he announces it to his attacker: "My legs are open."

Body Targets

There are four main areas that may be targeted: head, torso, arms and legs.

Occasionally, it will be important to determine right arm or left arm. If the defender is strongly favoring a side, right and left limbs may be used as additional locations. In this special case it costs one success to go from leg to leg, and two to go from arm to arm. See below for more on this. If the GM determines the favoring to be detrimental to the character, he can apply a +1 Ob disadvantage.

Landing the Blow

Once the defender has declared where he is vulnerable, the *attacker* may use his skill to move the location of the blow. He may dedicate his *extra* successes from his attack roll to improve his aim and move the blow. It costs one success to move from the torso or the arms to any other location. It costs two successes to go from legs to head or from head to legs.

The target of a sword thrust declares that his chest is open—he's wearing a breastplate, so he should be able to absorb whatever comes his way. If the attacker spends one of his extra successes to aim his blow, he can move the shot from the chest area to the head, arms or legs.

Successes applied to aiming a blow do not count toward determining IMS damage for a hit. The attacker allocates his successes to location and damage before any defense is rolled.

Defending Against Aimed Shots

Blocks, Counterstrikes and Avoids knock off the attacker's extra successes. Thus, they can be used to alter the attacker's aim. If the blow is not entirely dodged or deflected, successes from defensive actions force the aim of the attacker back to the location the defender offered by knocking off his extra successes.

One character is Striking another who is Blocking. The Strike is Ob 1, and two successes are rolled. The defender declares that his torso is open to

attack. The attacker uses his extra success to aim the blow at the legs. The defender gets one success on his Block, eliminating the extra success. He tips the shot back up to his heavily-armored breastplate.

Melee Weapons

Sample Weapon

Sword	Weapon Power	Add	VA	WS	Weapon Length
	+3	2	1	Slow	Long

Weapon Power

All melee weapons are listed with their own Power. This is called Weapon Power, and is added to the character's own Power before the IMS is factored.

A character with a B4 Power wielding a Sword (+3 Power) does a B4 Incidental, a B7 Mark and a B10 Superb.

Add

A player may spend his extra successes with a melee weapon on two things: location and damage. The Add number tells the player how many extra successes must be allocated to damage in order to go from an Incidental to a Mark result and from a Mark to a Superb.

A weapon with an Add 2 requires two successes over the obstacle get from Incidental to Mark and two more over that to get to Superb (four all together).

A sword has an Add 2. If performing an Ob 1 Strike, the player delivers a Mark hit with three successes and a Superb hit with five successes.

If the base obstacle to hit was 3 (due to movement and injury penalties), five successes would give a Mark result, and seven would get a Superb.

Any successes not spent on aiming a blow must be dedicated to improving damage. There's no holding back once the swing is in motion.

Weapon Speed

Weapon Speed dictates how often a particular type of weapon may *Strike* in the exchange. There are three Weapon Speeds in Burning Wheel: fast, slow and unwieldy.

Fast weapons, like knives and fists, may Strike as often as desired by the player.

Slow weapons, like swords and axes, may not Strike consecutively in the exchange. One action must be interposed between each Strike. That action can be anything: Counterstrike, Push, Disarm, Feint, a Strike with an off-handed weapon, Strike with the weapon hilt or whatever. (Slow weapons aren't actually "slow," they are just slower than fast weapons.)

Unwieldy weapons, like chairs or heavy mallets, require a Set action prior to Striking. The character must raise the weapon and bring it to bear, after which he may bring it down on the head of his unsuspecting opponent. If a player wishes to Great Strike with an unwieldy weapon, he must script Set, Set, Great Strike.

Versus Armor (VA)

This attribute describes how well a weapon penetrates armor. This is discussed in the Armor and Shields section. For now, it's enough to know that the higher the VA, the better.

Shooting Your Opponent

The process for engaging in combat with a bow, crossbow, pistol or throwing knife is described in detail in the Range and Cover section—the obstacle is based on the current range and the amount of cover.

If used in the Fight! mechanics, missile weapons skill tests start at base Ob 1 to hit, plus obstacle penalties for movement, cover, light and weather. Range isn't a factor when you're this close in. Test the appropriate skill to determine if you hit.

Acquire Target vs Snapshot

In melee combat, missile and thrown weapons require that the Acquire Target action be used in order to get the base Ob 1 shot. An unacquired shot—we call them snapshots—is at a +2 Ob disadvantage (Ob 3 total). Snapshots are faster, but less accurate.

Target Location = Chest

For missile weapons, the target location is always considered the chest/torso. The target of missile fire can't choose where he is hit.

But I'm Behind a Wall!

If the chest of the target is hidden, use the largest exposed location as the default target. If a character's poking his head out from cover, he gets hit in the head, not the foot. If he's hiding his head behind a shield, then his legs are the target.)

Moving the Target Location

Shooting players may spend their *extra* successes to move the location of the hit. It costs *one* success to hit the arms or legs, and *two* successes to hit the head.

Missile and Thrown Weapons

Sample Missile Weapon

Crossbow	DoF:	1-2	3-4	5-6	VA
		I: B5	M: B8	S: B11	2
	Fight! Actions: Reload and Acquire Target, 17.				
Ranges:	Optimal	Extreme	Max. Range		
	2D	3D	125 paces		

Bow, Crossbow and Gun Damage

Missile weapons have fixed IMS damage stages. Since they are mechanical devices, they are not affected by the wielder's Power. They have their own effects. As such, there is no Add for missile weapons, instead they rely on the Die of Fate.

Die of Fate (DoF)

Successes over obstacle do not increase the damage stage. Instead they act as a bonus to the Die of Fate.

Egads, what's this?! A random die roll for damage? Yes. When a character hits with a missile or thrown weapon, we roll the DoF to see whether an Incidental, Mark or Superb hit is done. Missile weapons are slightly more unpredictable than melee weapons in this regard. But (and this is a big "but"), *anyone* who picks up a crossbow has a chance of inflicting serious harm on their target. Serious harm is not solely confined to the realm of the skilled user.

Bow/Crossbow DoF	*Thrown* DoF	*Gunpowder* DoF
1-2 Incidental	**1-3** Incidental	**1-4** Incidental
3-4 Mark	**4-5** Mark	**5** Mark
5-6 Superb	**6** Superb	**6** Superb

Extra Successes: Bonus to the Die of Fate

Successes over the obstacle with a missile or thrown weapon—that are not allocated to aiming—give a bonus to the DoF roll:

- One extra success gets a +1 to the DoF
- Doubling the obstacle gives +2 to the DoF
- Tripling the obstacle is +3

A player's character has a hunting bow and is shooting a target at optimal range (Ob 2). She rolls four successes. That is double her obstacle. When she rolls the DoF, she adds 2 to her result.

Alternately, our crackshot hunter could allocate two of those successes to hit her target in the head. Her remaining success would just meet the obstacle, so she would get a normal DoF roll to determine damage.

Versus Armor

Versus armor describes how well a weapon penetrates armor. The mechanics for this are described in the Armor and Shields chapter.

Thrown Weapons Damage

Thrown weapons differ slightly from missile weapons. Their Power *is* dependent on the wielder's Power.

Thrown weapons have a Weapon Power like melee weapons and use the same process to factor their IMS. However, they use the DoF to determine the actual damage stage. Thrown weapons have a list of types, damages and ranges in the Weapon Appendix.

Sample Thrown Weapon

Throwing Knife	Weapon Power	DoF:	1-2	3-5	6	VA
	+1		I	M	S	—
Fight! Actions: Draw and Acquire Target, 3.						
Ranges:	Optimal		Extreme		Max. Range	
	1D		1D		10 paces	

Ranges

As discussed in the Range and Cover section, shots at optimal range in the open are Ob 2, shots at optimal in reasonable cover are Ob 3, shots at optimal in heavy cover are Ob 4. Shots at extreme range in the open are Ob 3, under reasonable cover are Ob 4, under heavy cover Ob 5.

Balance Die

Occasionally, a weapon will be so well made that it is a joy to use—so light and balanced, it practically hits the target itself! Dwarven weapons are a good example of this.

Weapons of such quality and caliber have an additional attribute: balance dice. These are bonus dice which are added to the user's skill for all melee maneuvers involving the weapon—Strikes, Great Strikes, Blocks, Counterstrikes, Feints and Disarms. Missile and thrown weapons

of Superior Quality give a balance die to the user's appropriate skill for the purposes of hitting the target. Balance dice possess the same shade as the *weapon*.

Complications and Balance

If you're using the Persona Complications rule and a weapon with balance dice is involved in the complication, the weapon will always lose its balance dice before being broken completely—it gets chipped or warped, rather than being snapped outright. Balance dice so lost can *never* be recovered.

Gunpowder Die

Gunpowder weapons use a special die called the *gunpowder die*. Before rolling to hit, pick up a Die of Fate and roll it. If the die comes up as a 1, the firearm has misfired. Reroll the die: On a 4+, the gun jams or flashes and must be reloaded completely. On a 1-3, the gun misfires. Roll the DoF for the weapon and apply the damage to the shooter.

Sample Firearm

Arquebus	DoF:	1-4	5	6	VA
	I: B4	**M:** B8	**S:** B12		*
Fight! Actions: Reload and Acquire Target, 41.					
Ranges Dice	**Optimal**	**Extreme**	**Max. Range**		
	1D	2D	50 paces		
*VA by Range: Too Close to Shoot/Fight! VA 4, optimal VA 3, extreme VA 1					

Explosives

There may come a time in your game where primitive or medieval explosives come into play. Depending on the type of campaign you're running, the skills Firebombs, Alchemy, Artillery or Munitions can be used to create the explosives. Artillery, Throwing or even Inconspicuous can be used to deliver them.

Sample Bomb

Iron-Cased Bomb	DoF:§	1-2	3-4	5-6	VA
	I: B3	**M:** B6	**S:** B9		*
Fight! Actions: Grab, Light Fuse, Acquire Target and Throw, 7.					
Range Dice		**Weapon Length**	**Explosion Dice**		
Optimal: 1D Extreme: 1D		Longest	6D open-ended		
*VA is 4 in optimal range, 2 at lunging distance or extreme range.					
§ -1 to the DoF when thrown at extreme range or detonated at lunging distance.					

Bombs in Fight!

Light the Fuse

Lighting the fuse takes two actions with a ready flame. After the fuse is lit, the bomb explodes in the same volley/action of the *following* exchange. If it's lit on volley 1/action 1, it detonates in volley 1/action 1 of the next exchange.

Positioning with a Bomb

A *lit* bomb always counts as a *longest* weapon in Fight! While lighting it, no position dice are gained.

In order to time a throw correctly, the player must win his positioning test. If he wins the test, he puts the bomb in *optimal range* of his target. If he loses the test, he's at a +2 Ob to hit with the throw. If he does hit on a failed positioning test, he puts the bomb in *lunging distance* of its target.

Throwing a Bomb

Landing a bomb on target is an Ob 2 Throwing test, or an Ob 4 Agility test. Extra successes can be applied to the DoF. Disadvantages for movement, weather and light apply. Players must use the Acquire Target action or incur the +2 Ob penalty.

Run Away! Run Away!

If a bomb is thrown and not set to detonate on the following volley, the target characters may move away. To do so, they must Withdraw. Make positioning tests as normal, bomb rolls its weapon length dice versus the character's Speed. Characters who started in optimal striking distance for the bomb, must Withdraw two fighting distances. Those who started in Lunging distance need only Withdraw once.

Explosion! The Striking Distance of a Bomb

On the volley a bomb detonates, make a positioning test with explosion versus any characters who are in optimal or lunging distance from the initial throw. The explosion rolls 6 open-ended dice. Weapon length is irrelevant. Nor can the Reflexes and Speed multiplier dice be used in this test. It's raw Speed against the explosion. If the bomb wins, the character is caught in the explosion at the distance which he started. If the character wins, he miraculously ducks the wrath of the explosive.

Explosives Misfire Die

When the fuse is lit, roll the DoF. On a 1, the explosive misfires. If it was built on a failed skill test, it detonates immediately. Otherwise roll again, on a 4+, it's a dud. On a 1-3, it explodes in the next *volley*.

Bombs in Range and Cover

Due to the more abstract nature of Range and Cover, thrown bombs don't have to worry about many of the details above. The bomb is assumed to be lit and ready to go. It counts as a 1D range weapon with a 10 pace maximum range. Throwing it uses the range obstacles from Range and Cover. It also has three special properties: If up against another 1D range weapon, bombs get 2D to position; bombs negate 1D of the opponent's cover; if the bomber doesn't win the positioning test, the bomb explodes in his hand on a DoF 1.

Weapons in Brief

Melee Weapons

- Weapon Power adds to the character's Power when determining damage.

- Incidental damage is half of Mark (rounded up). Mark is the character's Power plus the weapon's Power. Superb is one and a half times the Mark (rounded down).

- Striking a target is Ob 1 plus disadvantages.

- The location hit by a Strike is determined by the *target*. He declares what area is vulnerable and open to attack. The attacker may spend extra successes to aim his blow and hit another, more desirable, location.

- Target locations are: head, arms, torso and legs. (If the defender is strongly favoring a left or right side, right and left limbs may be used as locations. It costs one success to go from leg to leg, and two to go from arm to arm.)

- Remaining extra successes are allocated to damage.

- The *Add* of a weapon determines how many extra successes must be allocated in order to push a weapon from Incidental to Mark and then how many more to go from Mark to Superb.

Missile and Thrown Weapons

Don't forget, use the Range and Cover mechanics for resolving missile vs missile love.

- Targets are hit in the chest by default. If the shooter wishes to target another location, he must spend his extra successes: One success to hit an arm or leg, two successes to hit the head.

- Remaining extra successes modify the Die of Fate roll.

- Missile and thrown weapons do damage using the DoF, each weapon type has a table showing what needs to be rolled in order to score an Incidental, Mark or Superb result.

- Missile weapons have fixed damages. Thrown weapons use the thrower's Power as a base, like melee weapons. Guns must roll a gunpowder die. ✠
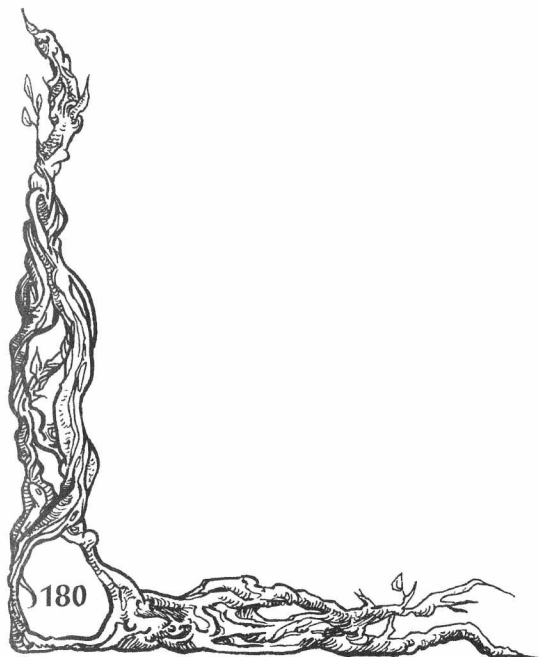
Armor and Shields

Armor protects its wearer from harm. While it doesn't always work, it often can save a character's life—staving off death so the character may live just a moment longer.

Shields are the middle ground between armor and a weapon. In this system, they are considered a defensive weapon: They add dice to the character's Block and Counterstrike maneuvers, count as cover from missile fire and can be used as an off-handed weapon.

Armor Locations

In Burning Wheel, armor is worn to cover one or more of six locations on the character's body: Head, face and neck (one location); right arm and hand; left arm and hand; torso, shoulders and hips (one location); left leg and foot; and right leg and foot. Each location, if covered with armor, receives its own dice to protect it from harm. Thus a character can wear a helmet, to protect his head, a full suit of chainmail, helmet and breastplate, or myriad other combinations.

Armor Types

There are five different types of armor available in Burning Wheel. In order of protective capability they are: leather, hides and quilting; plated leather; chainmail; plated chainmail; and full plate.

Leathers and Quilting– Gambesons, cloth and padded armor, and thin, boiled leather. This armor was cheap, easy to make and effective when enough was worn.

Plated and Reinforced Leather– Pieces of light chainmail or lamellar are built into or onto hardened leather coverings that are worn over a cloth gambeson. This was probably the most popular armor for foot soldiers world-wide. It was fairly cheap and very effective; it can stop all but the most powerful blows.

Chainmail– Interlocking rings form a shirt, hood, sleeves, skirt and leggings all worn over leather or cloth padding—which provides protection from impact (and from the armor itself). More often than not, the chain is covered by a decorative outer layer of cloth as well. Chainmail is versatile, effective, heavy and expensive.

Plated Mail– Using the same basic kit as chainmail, certain areas are reinforced with hard metal plates; usually a breast and back plate, as well as arm and leg greaves. This armor was extraordinarily expensive and very effective.

Full Plate– This is the Cadillac and armored tank of the Middle Ages rolled into one. It is the most frequently depicted armor in cinematic recreations of the Middle Ages—though its historical lifespan was actually rather short. This is the stuff of the knights in shining armor. It is rare, heavy, powerful and hideously expensive to maintain.

Armor Protection Dice

When a player's character is struck in a location covered by armor, he rolls the appropriate number of dice according to the armor type to attempt to ward off the blow.

Armor Types	Dice per Location
Skins, Hides, Leather and Quilted Armor	1D
Plated, Reinforced Leather	3D
Chainmail	4D
Plated Mail	5D
Full Plate	6D

If a character wearing leather armor sleeves is struck on the arm, he rolls one die to ward off the blow.

If a character wearing chainmail is struck in the chest, he rolls four dice plus one for the chest bonus. Five dice total.

Chest Armor

The chest location—the breastplate—is the most heavily reinforced section of the armor. For all types of armor, the chest/torso always receives a bonus die (+1D) to protect its wearer.

Thus chainmail actually provides 5D to cover the chest, and 4D for all other locations.

Helmets and Headgear

Each armor type has a specific set of headgear associated with it. Headgear for quilting and leather armor type consists of skull caps and hoods (1D). Headgear for plated leather consists of light helmets and pot helms (3D). Helmets for chainmail consist of spangenhelms,

sallets and bascinets sans grilles (4D). Plated mail helmets are bascinets with grilles or visors (5D). Full plate equivalent headgear is the fabled great helm—closed faced and double reinforced (6D). These are described separately so characters may combine different types of armor more easily.

Armor Test Obstacles

Armor dice act like any other ability in Burning Wheel. Players test the appropriate number of dice and attempt to get successes equal to the obstacle.

The base obstacle for all armor tests is 1 (Ob 1).

A character wearing a reinforced leather helmet who is punched in the head, would roll 3D versus Ob 1.

As long as the obstacle is met, the blow is warded off completely.
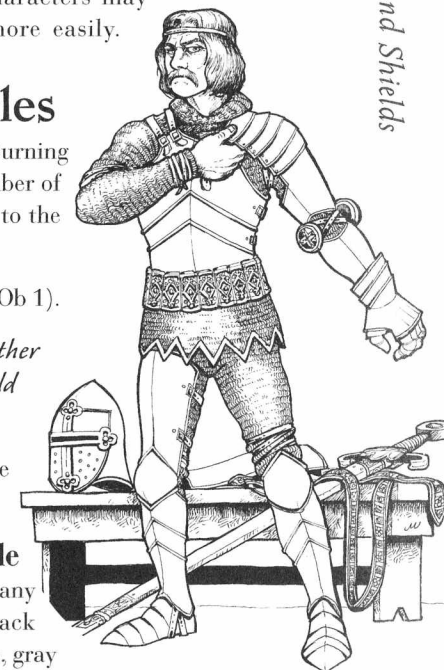
Armor Difficulty Number and Shade

Armor obeys the rules for shade just like any other ability. Therefore, mundane (black shade) armor is difficulty number (DN) 4, gray shade armor is DN 3, and white shade is DN 2. All armor is mundane unless explicitly stated otherwise. Heroic and supernatural shade armors are extremely hard to come by.

Weapons Versus Armor

Weapons are listed with a Versus Armor (VA) rating. This describes the weapon's ability to penetrate, crush or bypass armor. The number indicates the *obstacle penalty* for any armor test caused by that weapon.

An axe has a VA 1, so any armor tests made against it are at +1 Ob. Therefore, if a player's character is hit on the arm by an axe, he needs to roll two successes on his armor in order to ward off the blow. (Ob 1 + VA 1 = Ob 2.) If he fails, the blow penetrates and the character is injured.

A knife has a VA –. It does not raise armor test obstacles at all. All armor tests against a knife are Ob 1.

Power and VA

Characters with a Power exp 7 or higher add +1 VA to their attacks.

Great Strikes and VA

As discussed in the Melee Maneuvers section, Great Strike actions may be used to either increase the weapon's Power or increase the VA of the attack by 1. The player must choose before he rolls to land the blow.

Armor Damage and Armor Quality

Whenever a die comes up a 1 on an armor test, that particular location is considered damaged or rendered less effective until the armor is repaired. Next time that armor is tested (next action, if in melee), roll one less die.

Poor Quality Armor

All 1s count on every roll. This armor literally falls apart under stress.

Run of the Mill Armor

Only *one* 1 counts per roll (you can only lose one die at a time).

Superior Quality Armor

Only one 1 counts per roll, and that 1 may be re-rolled. If the reroll is a 2-6, the armor remains undamaged. If the die comes up a second 1, the armor on that location is reduced by one die.

Armor Shade and Damage

Gray shade armor can't be *damaged* by black shade attacks. White shade armor cannot be damaged by gray or black shade attacks. Simply ignore 1s rolled in these instances.

Repairing Armor

Leather, Quilting and Plated Leather may be repaired using the Armorer, Mending, Tailor or Tanner skills. Chainmail, Plated Mail and Full Plate may be repaired using the Mending, Blacksmith and Armorer skills. Repairs are made to individual locations.

Mending: First die, Ob 1. Second die, Ob 2. Third die, Ob 4. Fourth die, Ob 6. Fifth die, Ob 8.

Tailor, Tanner: First die, Ob 2. Second die, Ob 3. Third die, Ob 5.

Blacksmith: First die, Ob 2. Second die, Ob 3. Third die, Ob 4. Fourth die, Ob 5. Fifth die, Ob 6.

Armorer: First two dice, Ob 1. Third die, Ob 2. Fourth die, Ob 3. Fifth die, Ob 4. Sixth die, Ob 5.

Armor Training

To the unaccustomed, armor is heavy, hot and uncomfortable. Characters without the Armor Training skill who wear chainmail suffer +1 Ob penalty to all tests. Wearing plated mail or full plate without Armor Training incurs a +2 Ob penalty. Armor Training mitigates these penalties completely, though Clumsy Weight penalties still apply.

Clumsy Weight

Armor, by its nature, is bulky and uncomfortable to wear. While it is definitely designed to minimized its encumbrance to the wearer, it still isn't a free ride.

Arms

Leather and plated leather arms add +1 Ob to all Agility and Agility-based skill tests. Chainmail, plated chainmail and full plate add +2 Ob to all Agility and Agility-based skill tests. Plated chain also adds +1 Ob to Climbing, full plate adds +2 Ob. Weapon skills and Brawling are exempt from this penalty, Throwing and missile weapon skills are not.

Half arm pieces reduce this penalty entirely.

Boots

Heavily armored or clumsily made armored boots can act as a disadvantage to any Speed or Speed-based test, at the GM's discretion.

Breastplates

Plated leather breastplates add +1 Ob to Stealthy and Swimming. Chainmail "breastplates" add +2 Ob to Stealthy and Swimming. Plated chain and full plate breastplates add +3 Ob to Stealthy and Swimming.

Helmets

Pot helms, war hats (plated leather equivalent): +1 Ob Perception. Bascinets (any helmet that covers the neck and ears and uses a visor; chainmail equivalent), +2 Ob Perception. Great helms (reinforced, double-thick helm; plated chain equivalent), +3 Ob Perception.

Leggings

Plated leather leggings add +1 Ob to all Speed and Speed-based skill tests (like Stealthy). Chainmail, plated mail and full plate subtract -1D from all Speed tests and Speed-based skills. Re-factor Reflexes with this Speed penalty. Half-leggings eliminate the penalty for plated leather and reduce the metal leggings to +1 Ob.

Quilting and Leather

In case you didn't notice, quilted pieces (1D) have only one clumsy weight penalty (for Arms).

Mixing and Customizing Armor

Players may wish to customize their characters' harness. This can be done in two ways: mixing pieces and using half pieces.

Mixed Armor

A player who purchases a suit of armor may trade any of his pieces for lighter bits (from armor with fewer dice). You can buy Full Plate and replace the great helm (6D) with a bascinet (5D), for example. Use the clumsy weight penalties for the new, lighter piece. Players may also purchase heavier pieces and add them to their harness. In this case, use the detrimental clumsy weight penalties from the heavier armor.

Half-Leggings, Skirts and Half-Sleeves

In order lighten his load but still maintain some modicum of protection, a player may decide his character is wearing half pieces on the arms or legs. Half pieces provide coverage at half the armor type dice rounded up. Half pieces have reduced clumsy weight penalties, as noted in Clumsy Weight above. At any appropriate time during the game, a player may indicate his character is stripping to half leggings (or half sleeves) in order to reduce his penalties. Of course, he may have his character refit his armor when he has time to buckle on his bits again.

Armor and Artha

Armor tests may use artha like any other ability test, except that armor dice may not be doubled via a Deeds point.

Shields

Shields are the midpoint between armor and weapon. A fighter holds his shield on one arm, away from the body, and uses it to deflect incoming blows. Shields, while eminently useful, are heavy, clumsy and often fall apart rather quickly.

Like armor, there are a variety of types of shields:

Shields	Dice
Parrying Blade	1D
Buckler	2D
Target	3D
Heater	4D
Great Shield	5D

The parrying blade is included as an example of how varied a "shield" can really be. Any object that is quick in the hand, and strong enough to deflect a blow and be used as a weapon itself, can be used as a shield.

Shield Training

In order to best use his shield, a fighter must have the Shield Training skill. This training skill grants the character bonus dice to Block, and allows access to the Block and Strike technique.

Defense with a Shield

Using a shield in melee in conjunction with the Block or Counterstrike actions allows the trained fighter to add the shield dice to his defensive maneuver. In the case of Counterstrike, the shield dice are added to the defensive half of the maneuver. Shields are never used in conjunction with an Avoid.

Shields may be Feinted out of position. Full and actual *shields* may Block the Great Strike action (parrying blades and such may not).

Block and Strike

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, the trained fighter may perform a special action in the melee called *Block and Strike*. It is an offensive Counterstrike. Skill dice are divided between the Block half and Strike half. Shield dice are added to the Block.

Scripting the Strike action, a character with a B5 Sword skill and Shield Training using a Target Shield (3D) may Block and Strike on the same

action. He allocates four dice to his Strike, leaving one skill die plus three shield dice to simultaneously Block any incoming Strikes.

Block and Strike counts as a Strike against all counter and defensive moves. Also, fighters using the Block and Strike technique *may* be Feinted out of position for their Block (they'd still get to Strike, though).

Block and Strike and Stance

Block and Strike is an Aggressive maneuver, like Strike. However, in Aggressive stance, the Block half suffers the +2 Ob penalty like a regular Block.

Untrained Shield Fighters

Characters without Shield Training may only use shields to augment their Block actions, and do not have access to *Block and Strike*.

Shields and VA

A weapon's Versus Armor rating *reduces* the number of shield dice rolled to deflect an attack. Shield dice can never be reduced below 1D from VA. The dice remaining after the VA is subtracted are then rolled as the Block for the shield as per the rules described above.

I understand this is a slightly different mechanic than Armor and VA, but we found through playtesting that this was the best way to represent armor penetration and shields.

Shield Failure

Shields abide by the same damage and quality rules as armor. A 1 rolled on the shield dice indicates the device has become damaged. All subsequent tests with the shield are reduced by one die. For the most part, damaged shields aren't repaired, they are discarded. A shield reduced to zero dice is destroyed and useless.

Clumsy Weight for Shields

Shields are heavy, clumsy and often strapped to the fighter's arm. It requires one action to drop a buckler, two actions to get rid of a target shield and three actions to ditch a great shield.

This system assumes that a shield doesn't cause any hindrance while it's in fighting condition. But as soon as it is destroyed, the shield bearer is at a +1 Ob disadvantage to martial actions until he takes the actions to get rid of it. It's wrapped around his arm, weighing him down and getting in his way.

Shields vs Missile Weapons

Shields may not actively "block" incoming missile weapons. *You may not roll your character's skill to reduce your opponent's shooting successes.* However, shields do provide a modicum of cover from such attacks.

Shield vs Missiles in Fight!

When a shield-bearing character is targeted with missile fire, roll the *shield's* dice vs an Ob 1 test. Successes *over* the obstacle equal the shooter's obstacle penalty to hit the attacker. This is added to penalties for range, movement and whatever else.

So long as he is aware that he's being shot at, a player may declare that his character is covering an area with his shield—his unarmored head, for example. This area may not be targeted unless the shooter/thrower spends an *additional* success for aiming.

Pete's evil knight is advancing on Rich's Roden knife thrower. Pete's got a 3D shield. He rolls the dice and gets two successes—one over the obstacle. So his shield adds +1 Ob to Rich's Throwing obstacles in this melee.

A bearer of a great shield, which includes kite shields and massive, round metal ones, may declare he's completely hidden behind his shield. This incurs a +3 Ob penalty to hit him with missile weapons. No roll need be made by the defender. The shield-bearer may maneuver, but he may not perform any other actions—aiming, striking, shooting—while so hiding.

Missile VA versus Shields

In melee, if a missile weapon's VA is equal to or greater than a shield's dice, the shield provides no protection for its bearer against the missile. Otherwise, don't worry about missile weapon VA and shields.

Shields vs Missiles in Field Maneuvers

When using the Range and Cover rules, shields increase the cover rating for their bearer by one step—from no cover to reasonable cover, for example—so long as the number of shield dice is greater than their opponent's VA. If the missile weapon's VA is equal to or greater than the shield dice, no protection is offered.

Defensive Weapons

Unless otherwise noted, all shields are Power 2, VA –, Slow, Short weapons when used as a weapon in combat.

Anti-Shield

Shields got you down? Opponents blocking all your strikes? Arrows bouncing off? Well, here are a few solutions for your woes.

Articulated Weapons

Weapons like flails and three-section staves were designed to neutralize shields! A skilled user knows how to wrap the chain around a shield so the ball or stave smashes the shield-bearer in the skull! *No shield defense against these weapons.*

Shields at Inside Striking Distance

Knights smashing your baddies to bits? Close to *inside* striking distance and stab them through their visors! Shields provide *no* defense on the inside. However they can still be used to shield bash, so watch out!

Armor in Brief
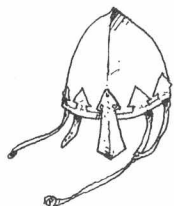
- When hit, test the armor on the location struck. Roll armor dice against Ob 1 plus the VA of the weapon.

  - Meeting the obstacle indicates the blow is deflected. If the test is failed, the character is injured by the blow.

  - Any 1s on the dice indicate armor damage. One less die is rolled next time.

- Armor is heavy and clumsy and causes obstacle penalties to sneaking, swimming, climbing and similar activities (sometimes even Avoiding).

Shields in Brief

- Shields add their dice to Block and Counterstrike.

- With Shield Training, shields can also be used to Block *as* the user Strikes. Add any number skill dice into the shield to defend on the same action as the character is Striking.

- VA reduces the number of shield dice rolled to defend. Dice can't be reduced below 1D.

- 1s rolled count as damage to the shield. 1D is subtracted from the shield's rating. Shields have the same "quality" characteristics as armor.

- Against missile fire, roll the shield's dice against Ob 1. Extra successes create an obstacle penalty for the shooter. If the VA of a missile would reduce the shield dice to zero, that shield can't be used to cover the defender from missile fire. ⊕
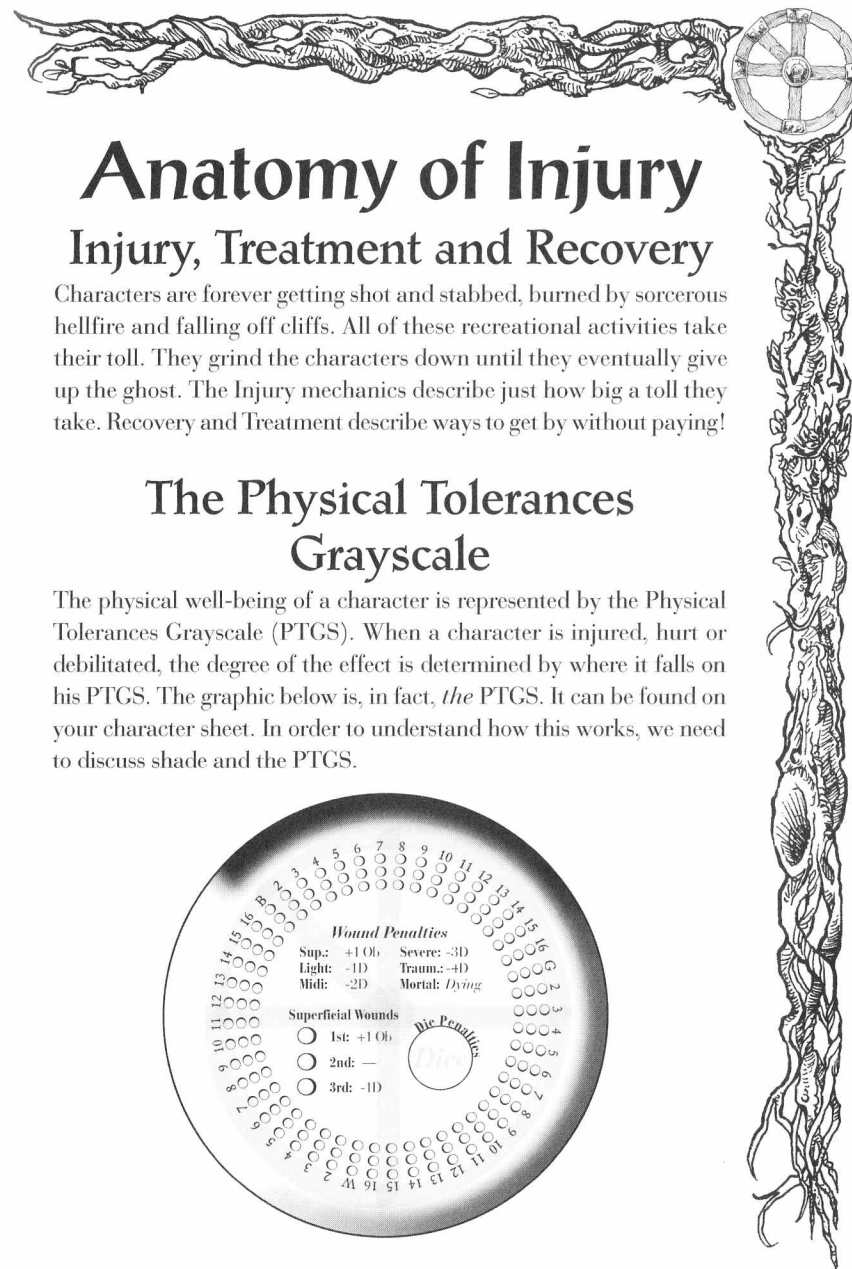
Anatomy of Injury
Injury, Treatment and Recovery

Characters are forever getting shot and stabbed, burned by sorcerous hellfire and falling off cliffs. All of these recreational activities take their toll. They grind the characters down until they eventually give up the ghost. The Injury mechanics describe just how big a toll they take. Recovery and Treatment describe ways to get by without paying!

The Physical Tolerances Grayscale

The physical well-being of a character is represented by the Physical Tolerances Grayscale (PTGS). When a character is injured, hurt or debilitated, the degree of the effect is determined by where it falls on his PTGS. The graphic below is, in fact, *the* PTGS. It can be found on your character sheet. In order to understand how this works, we need to discuss shade and the PTGS.

Wound Penalties

Sup.:	+1 Ob	Severe:	-3D
Light:	-1D	Traum.:	+D
Midi:	-2D	Mortal:	*Dying*

Superficial Wounds

- 1st: +1 Ob
- 2nd: —
- 3rd: -1D
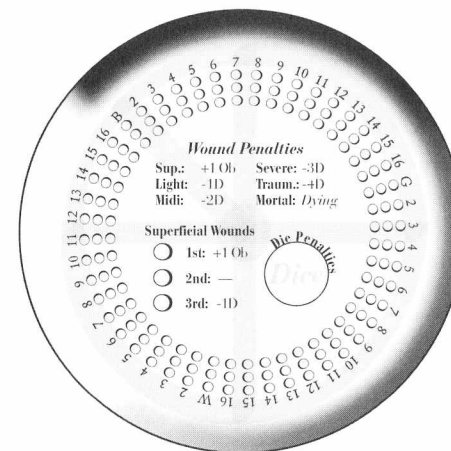
Shade

The PTGS is divided into three shades. Black is our shade, the mundane shade; gray is heroic, and white is supernatural.

When a character is injured, the player is given a shade and number to mark on his grayscale—B3, for example. This tells the player where to mark the wound. What a B3, G3 or W3 means to an individual character is determined by his tolerances.

Tolerances

Every character has six tolerances, or wound levels, that are spread out along his grayscale: Superficial, Light, Midi, Severe, Traumatic and Mortal.

Superficial Wounds are deep cuts, hard bumps, bruises and bad scrapes. *Light* Wounds are bad burns, fractures and cracking knocks; broken toes, a broken nose, a missing ear, or even the pain from an extremely hard gut punch. *Midi* Wounds are broken arms, ribs and legs; yanked muscles, twisted ligaments, missing digits and massive cuts. *Severe* Wounds are shattered bones, horrible burns, torn limbs and internal bleeding. *Traumatic* Wounds are missing limbs, shattered ribs, third degree burns and disembowelment. *Mortal* Wounds come in a variety of flavors, from decapitation, to a shot in the heart, to a good knock on the skull.

Tolerances are placed on a character's grayscale as per the rules discussed in *Step 11. Physical Tolerances* in the Character Burner.

Taking the Hit: Registering Wounds on the PTGS

Every time a character is injured, plot the IMS damage on the PTGS and *note what tolerance it falls on*. If the mark falls between two, then the player notes the effect for the left-most or lesser wound. Each new injury is marked separately from any previous ones.

To mark a B3 wound: "B" tells the player that the wound falls in the Black section of the PTGS and "3" tells the player to mark the circle beneath the number 3, like so:
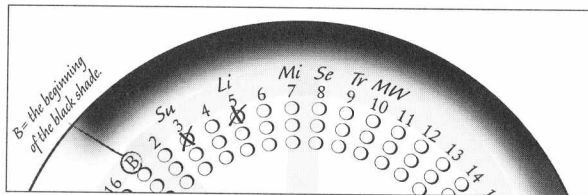
If a character is injured twice and suffers a B3 wound and B5, each is marked separately on the PTGS. Their effects are added together and to any wound modifiers he has already taken.

Wounds are always considered to be separate entities and are not "added together." However, the effects of wounds are compiled as an overall penalty for the character.

Once the wound is noted, consult the Anatomy of Injury chart in the center of the PTGS wheel to determine the effects.

Effects of Wounds

Superficial Wounds   +1 Ob

Superficial Wounds are small injuries that cause sudden, sharp and eye-watering amounts of pain. However, the shock from these wounds quickly fades. Taking a Superficial Wound gives the character a +1 Ob penalty.

Light Wounds   -1D

Light Wounds are minor injuries that cause pain and debilitation. Light Wounds subtract -1D from the character's abilities.

Midi Wounds   -2D

Midi Wounds are debilitating injuries that are not life-threatening, but still extremely painful. Midi Wounds subtract -2D from the character's abilities.

Severe Wounds   -3D

Severe Wounds are life-threatening, painful and often maiming injuries. A character who receives a Severe Wound is in danger of bleeding to death. Severe Wounds subtract -3D from the character's abilities. Untended Severe Wounds continue to *bleed*. See Bleeding for more on that.

Traumatic Wounds   -4D

Traumatic Wounds are life-threatening and crippling. Traumatic Wounds subtract -4D from the character's abilities. Untended Traumatic Wounds continue to bleed.

Mortal Wounds   Dying

Mortal Wounds instantly knock a character flat. There is no die penalty—the character is down.

Left of Superficial

Wounds that fall to the left of the Superficial marker on the PTGS are considered bruises, scrapes and cuts that do not affect the performance of the character. They will heal on their own without any trouble.

Right of Mortal

Any damage that registers on or to the right of the character's Mortal Wound tolerance is considered a fatal blow. If a character has a Mortal Wound tolerance of B10 and he takes a Superb hit from a heavy crossbow, a B13, he is killed. In fact, even a Superb hit from a hunting bow—B10—would lay him low. See the sections Mortal Wounds and Recovery for more on surviving this.

Wounded Dice

Wound penalty dice are subtracted from stats, skills, Reflexes and Steel. Health, Mortal Wound, Emotional Attributes like Faith, Circles and Resources are not affected. Do not refactor attributes or damage due to wounded stats. (Note that Reflexes is affected directly.)

The penalties from various wounds are cumulative:

A character who soaks up a Light and Midi Wound has three dice subtracted from all stats and skills, including Steel and Reflexes.

Superficial Wounds and +1 Ob

Superficial Wounds have a different cumulative effect. If a character takes a second Superficial Wound, his obstacle penalty remains at +1. The adrenaline is pumping, and at this stage another scrape doesn't matter too much. However, it gets worse....

Three Superficial Wounds

When a character receives his third Superficial Wound, the +1 Ob penalty is removed and replaced with a -1D penalty. Now those cuts and bruises start to take their toll.

The wounds are now considered single Light Wound for purposes of die penalties and recovery.

Zero Skills

A skill that is reduced to zero dice from wound penalties cannot be used by the player—it can't be tested, used to help or as a FoRK.

Zero Stats = Incapacitation

A character who absorbs enough wounded dice to reduce one of his stats to zero is considered incapacitated. The pain and trauma overwhelms him and he collapses.

A character with a B3 Forte as his lowest stat takes a Severe Wound (-3D). He immediately collapses due to the intense pain. Alternately, he could suffer three Light Wounds before giving up or even nine Superficial Wounds before he blacks out.

If it is a physical stat—Power, Forte, Agility or Speed—that has fallen to zero, then the character is rolling around drooling, in pain. He may still observe and even think. Maybe he can watch his enemy put the sword to his throat!

If the character is incapacitated by Perception or Will being reduced to zero, he is considered unconscious.

Incapacitation is not Death

Incapacitation is not a Mortal Wound or death. However, Severe, Traumatic and Mortal wounds bleed, causing further damage through blood loss. A character incapacitated by a Severe Wound or worse must be tended to or he will bleed to death. If an incapacitated character is not in danger of bleeding to death or has been treated for his wounds, he will regain consciousness as he recovers from his wounds.

Steel and Pain

An arrow came humming deadly down out of the sky and drove into the Black Destroyer's chest. Fortunately for him, it glanced off one of his ribs and didn't penetrate his vitals. He didn't flinch, but the pain was enough to make his eyes water.

Anytime a character suffers a -1D or greater injury, he must make a Steel test. The severity of the wound is subtracted from Steel before the test is made. This includes the third Superficial Wound (equalling -1D).

Hesitation caused from pain takes effect *immediately*, interrupting anything the character was doing. (The next action and those following are lost if he hesitates.)

Argh, My Arm! Optional Rule

Players looking to add a nice veneer of grim brutality to their games might consider these specific hesitation results:

- If a character is hit on the arm, is wounded and fails a Steel test due to that wound, he drops whatever he was holding.

- If a character is hit on the leg, is wounded and fails a Steel test due to that wound, he falls to one knee. If he fails the Steel test by *two actions* or more, he falls prone. If he opts to Run and Scream, he Withdraws with the +2 Ob penalty for fighting from the ground.

- If a character is hit on the head, is wounded and fails a Steel test due to that wound, he hesitates for an *additional* action.

Bleeding

If not tended quickly, wounds in Burning Wheel will bleed out. This can cause further debilitation and die penalties, and can also result in the character's death.

Midi— The wound must be treated within hours equal to twice the unmodified Forte exponent or condition progresses to Severe. The wound ceases to bleed at Severe.

Severe— If a Severe Wound is not tended to within hours equal to the unmodified Forte exponent, the wound progresses to Traumatic.

Traumatic— Traumatic Wounds not treated within hours equal to half the unmodified Forte exponent progress to a Mortal Wound. Remember, a Traumatic Wound means guts everywhere.

Mortal— Mortally Wounded characters bleed for a number of minutes equal to their *Health* exponent. After this time, if treatment hasn't begun, the character expires. See the *Will to Live* section below.

Blood Clock

A wound begins to bleed as soon as it is received. The clock starts tickin'…

After four hours of bleeding from a Severe Wound (-3D), a character with a B4 Forte suffers the effects of a Traumatic Wound (-4D).

If a wound bleeds from Severe to Mortal, the character is considered to have taken a Mortal Wound.

As wound modifiers are cumulative, so are the effects of bleeding. A character with two Severe Wounds bleeds twice as fast as one with a single Severe Wound.

The Feel of Physical Tolerances in Burning Wheel

The system described above is intended to be painful and ugly. Characters are meant to feel like corporal beings, vulnerable to harm. Most will suffer one good wound and find themselves unable to continue; after being pierced with a sword, a character's will to fight on drops dramatically. In game-mechanical terms: Less dice are rolled and a tough Steel test is required.

This *feel* is deliberate in the mechanics and meant to set the mood of the game. Pain is a real thing for characters in this game, and it is something the players should remain aware of. It is possible, of course, to build a character who is highly resistant to pain, but he would be the anomaly and not the rule. For most of us, one good injury and we are in trouble.

I take the time to describe this here because I know it influences play. It seems like a rule in our games: when swords are drawn nobody flinches. We assume we'll take our whacks and then it all be over, neat and clean. That is not the case in this game. Combined with the scripted melee system, injury is ugly and messy. It seriously affects game play—characters can be forced out of action for long periods of time, or even removed from play entirely.

After such a stark warning, this may seem odd to say, but Burning Wheel is not a *deadly* game. More often than not, a character is injured and drops out of the fight. It's uncommon for one to be killed outright. Which, again, is the exact intent of these rules.

So be aware that your characters exist in a world where a single sword thrust or a bow shot can *mean* something. And let that knowledge drive ferocious and desperate battles!
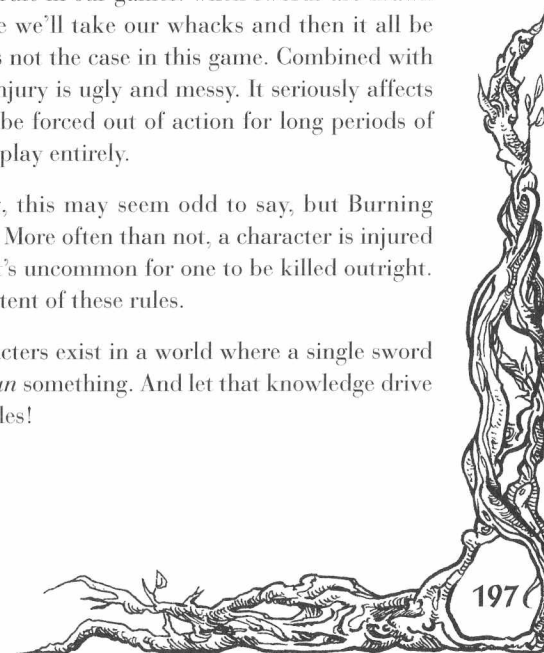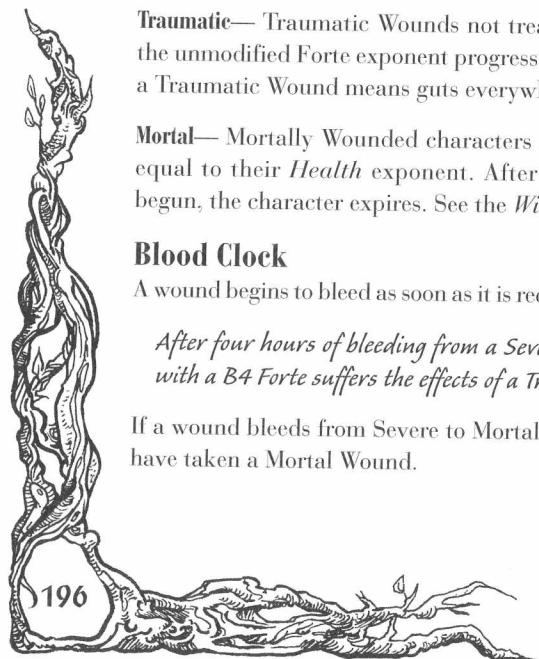
Mortal Wounds

When a character suffers an injury that meets or exceeds his Mortal Wound tolerance, he's in trouble. The wound instantly drops him—stops him dead in his tracks and sends him tumbling.

At this stage, he is considered *dying*. Honestly, I feel it's best to give characters the benefit of the doubt in this case. Sure it looks bad, but we'll give 'em one last chance. The hitch is that the character needs help. Without immediate help, he simply passes on. Help starts from within:

Will to Live

If a player's character is felled by a Mortal Wound, he has the option of declaring that his character cannot be saved—by any means, ever—and allowing him to pass on. The player simply states, "He doesn't have the will to live."

If a player wishes his character to continue on he must do two things: state, "He has the will to live" and spend a persona point of artha. If a player doesn't have a persona point, the character passes on regardless of his wishes. Cruel fate has taken its toll. If the persona point is spent on the Will to Live, then the character may receive treatment and hopefully recover. See the Artha chapter for how to earn Persona points, and see below for Recovery and Treatment.

Shrugging it Off

Clearing the Cobwebs: Reducing +1 Ob

A character may take a moment to clear the cobwebs from his head and reduce his current wound penalties. Reducing the +1 Ob Superficial Wound penalty is an Ob 2 Health test and requires two actions in the exchange.

This head clearing lasts until the scene is over—the exact parameters of this are left to the GM's discretion and the flow of your individual story.

Shrugging off a Superficial does not make the wound go away. It only temporarily reduces the pain modifier. If character shrugs off his first Superficial, but then takes two more, he still suffers the -1D penalty.

Also, once three Superficial Wounds have been combined to -1D, the character may not use the Clearing the Cobwebs rule. Also, if a character shrugs one Superficial and is then hit with another, he's back to +1 Ob. *C'est la guerre.*

Gritting Your Teeth

Through a supreme act of will and endurance, a character may temporarily shrug off -1D of pain modifiers (from any type of wound). Only -1D may be shrugged off from each wound. Shrugging off this much pain requires an Ob 4 Health test and four actions in the Fight! mechanics, or one volley of Range and Cover or Duel of Wits.

A character who is incapacitated due to wounded dice may attempt to shrug off one die of his penalties and stagger back to his feet. He may only make one such attempt, period.

As with Clearing the Cobwebs, Gritting Your Teeth lasts until the scene is over—the exact parameters of this are left to the GM's discretion and the flow of your individual story.

Shrugging it Off Isn't Recovery

Shrugging off wound penalties is not the same as recovering and healing from an injury. Wound penalties reduced by shrugging them off return in full force as soon as the scene ends. They need to be tended to and a recovery Health test must be made.

Recovery

Recovering from an injury is a hard deal. For the lesser wounds, it's possible for the body to take care of itself, but for Midi through Mortal, the character's own Health must be augmented by external aid. Typically, this aid comes in the form of medical skills like Field Dressing, Herbalism and Surgery. See the Treatment section for the full rules on recovering from Midi through Mortal Wounds.

Obstacles for Recovering from Wounds

Superficial Wounds—Ob 1

To recover from a Superficial Wound, a character must pass an Ob 1 Health test. If successful, the pain fades immediately. If failed, it remains throbbing for the duration of the test. The test takes 10 minus Forte in hours.

Light Wounds—Ob 2

Recovering from a Light Wound requires an Ob 2 Health test. If successful, the pain fades immediately. If failed, the penalty remains for 24 hours minus the Forte exponent.
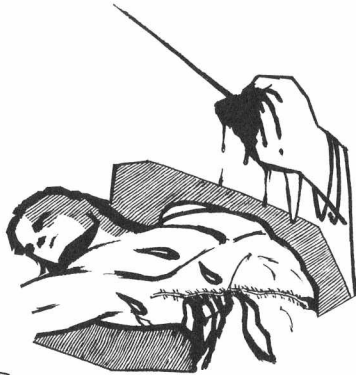
Midi Wounds—Ob 3

Midi Wounds require an Ob 3 Health test in order to recover. However, this test may not be taken until and unless the character receives treatment from Field Dressing, Herbalism, Apothecary, Surgery or an analogous skill. See below for more on tending the wounded.

A Midi Wound takes 2-12 weeks to recover from. The first die is recovered as soon as a successful medical skill test is made. The second die is recovered when the wound closes completely.

Severe Wounds—Ob 4

Severe Wounds require an Ob 4 Health test in order to recover. This test may not be taken unless the character receives treatment from Herbalism, Surgery or an analogous skill.

A Severe Wound needs 1-3 months to heal completely. The first die is recovered as soon as a successful medical skill test is made. The second die is recovered at the halfway point in the healing time. The third die is recovered when the wound closes completely.

After being stabbed badly, my character is laid up for a few months. He suffered a Severe Wound. The GM says it'll take two months to heal completely. I test my Health and barely make the Ob 4 test. Two months divided into two: I recover the first die as my character is tended; the second die comes at the end of the first month; the third die is recovered at the close of the full two months.

Traumatic Wounds—Ob 5

These terrible wounds require an Ob 5 Health test in order for the character to recover. However, the test may not be taken until the character receives treatment from Herbalism, Surgery or an analogous skill.

2-6 months of rest are required to heal from a Traumatic Wound. The first die is recovered as soon as a successful medical test is made. The second die is recovered in one-third of the healing time, the third die heals in two-thirds of the total time and the fourth die comes back once the wound is completely closed.

Mortal Wound—Ob 6

Recovering from a Mortal wound most definitely requires the aid of Herbalism, Surgery or an analogous skill. It is an Ob 6 Health test to recover from a Mortal wound.

A Mortal Wound heals differently than the other wounds. The character must heal from each type of wound in succession from Mortal down to Superficial. The necessary healing time is divided into *six* unequal parts: Mortal, Traumatic, Severe, Midi, Light and Superficial stages. The Mortal stage is the longest. For the duration of this period, the character is incapacitated and unconscious. This stage usually lasts 4-24 months. Test Health vs Obstacle 6. Subtract 10% of the time for each extra success, if any (90% maximum reduction). After the character has passed through the Mortal stage, he makes another Health test for the Traumatic stage and heals following the rules for Traumatic Wounds. After he has recovered from the Traumatic Wound, then roll for recovery of the Severe Wound. Roll for each wound, all the way down to Superficial, until the character has completely healed and recovered all his dice. On average, the entire process takes about 18-20 months. Not bad for a near-death experience!

Remember that in order to allow treatment to have an effect and to begin recovery, a player must explicitly state his character has the Will to Live and pay a persona point of artha.

Ugh. My character took a B12 to the chest from a longbow. That's a Mortal Wound. I've been playing him for a couple of years, and I definitely don't want him to go under. I pay the Persona point for Will to Live. Thankfully, one of the other PCs is a surgeon. He passes his test to treat me. So, I test my Health (plus bonus dice from the treatment roll) vs Ob 6. I pass that (with tons of artha). The GM determines that this'll take a year to recover from, minus time for my extra successes. Then I have to pass another Ob 5 Health test for the Traumatic recovery time, and sit out another three months. Then an Ob 4 for the Severe stage and another two months tacked on. Then an Ob 3 for the Midi stage and another month tacked on. So four big Health tests just to get me back to fighting condition. They take place across a year and a half.

Recovery Times

All recovery times may be reduced by using extra successes from the Health test. Each extra success over the obstacle reduces time by 10%. Time can be reduce by 90% maximum. Exact recovery times (1-3 months, 2-12 weeks, etc.) are either determined by the GM or left to a random die roll.
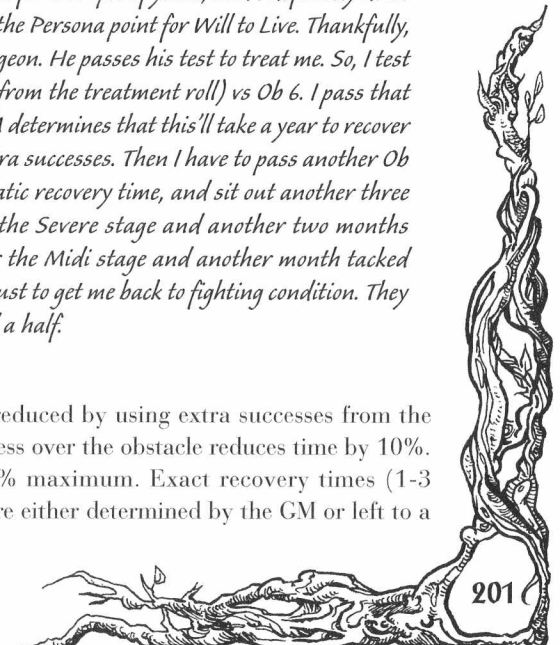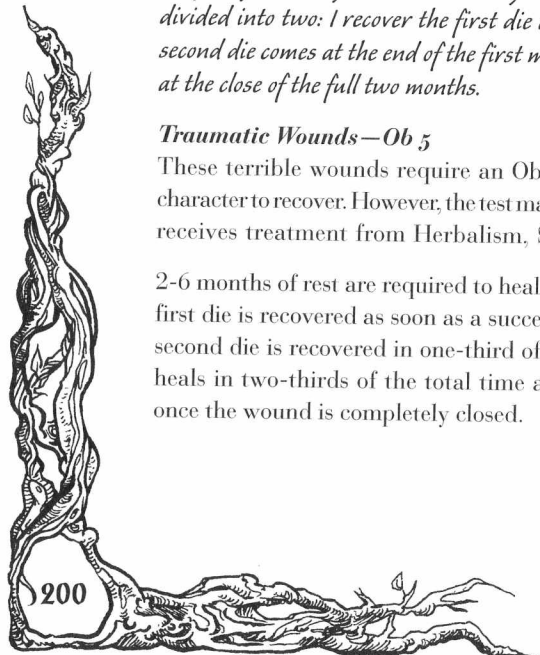
Treatment

Midi through Mortal wounds require *treatment* to recover those lost dice. Treatment here means help from someone trained in either Herbalism, Apothecary, Bloodletting, Field Dressing, Surgery, Khirurgy or the Song of Soothing.

Obstacles for Treatment

Skill Tested:	Per/Agi	Field Dressing	Herbalism	Surgery
Type of Wound		obstacle		
Superficial	2	1	1	1
Light	4	2	2	2
Midi	8	4	4	3
Severe	—	—	5	4
Traumatic	—	—	6	5
Mortal	—	—	10	7

Note: Bloodletting and Apothecary use the Field Dressing obstacles, Song of Soothing uses Herbalism, and Khirurgy uses Surgery.

Working Diligently with Medical Skills

Extra successes on the treatment test count as advantage dice for the injured character's Health test. (This is a special linked test.) Thus, even for Superficial and Light Wounds, it often behooves a player to wait until his character is treated before making the Health test for recovery.

Using his Field Dressing, the Sergeant quickly tends to his injured comrade's wounds. The player tests his B4 Field Dressing against the Ob 2 for a Light Wound. The player rolls an amazing four successes—two over the obstacle. He dedicates one to his friend's Health test and the other to reducing the time.

Treatment Time

Field Dressing requires 10 minutes per obstacle point to treat a wound. Herbalism requires 15 minutes. Surgery requires 20 minutes. These times may be reduced using the standard working quickly rules.

Successful Treatment, Successful Recovery

If both tests are successful, the character is on the path to recovery. All his dice will be eventually regained.

Failed Recovery or Treatment

Sometimes luck is against a character and something goes wrong in either the treatment process or with the Health test. See below for the disastrous results:

Failed Treatment for Superficial and Light Wounds

This isn't so bad. The character rolls his recovery Health test as normal, but does not have access to the bonus dice provided by treatment.

Failed Treatment for Midi through Traumatic

This is really bad. These tests require treatment in order for the recovery process to begin. Essentially, what's happened is either the doctor has thrown up his hands and said, "There's nothing I can do!" or fumbled around and made matters worse.

For Midi Wounds, one die is permanently subtracted from an appropriate stat, but the character can recover the other one. For Severe and Traumatic Wounds, the injured character is bleeding to death and better get *real* help quickly or he'll die!

Failed Recovery, Successful Treatment for Superficial and Light

The character is scarred up a bit and recovers in the *full time* required. The die penalties remain in effect for the duration of the recovery time.

Failed Recovery, Successful Treatment for Midi through Traumatic

At least the bleeding is stopped. The character heals in the *full length of time required*, but only recovers *half* of the dice lost. The remaining dice are permanently subtracted from an appropriate stat. If that stat happens to be reduced to zero, the character is permanently comatose. Better save artha for your Health tests!

Failed Recovery or Treatment for Mortal Wounds

There are two ways to play this. First, the hard way: if either recovery or treatment fails, the character dies. The second, the soft way: The treatment test must be passed, but if the Health test is failed, the character earns one of the following traits: Frail, Lame, Missing Limb, Blind, Deaf, or Sickly. In addition, one of his stats—appropriate to the wound—is permanently capped at 5.
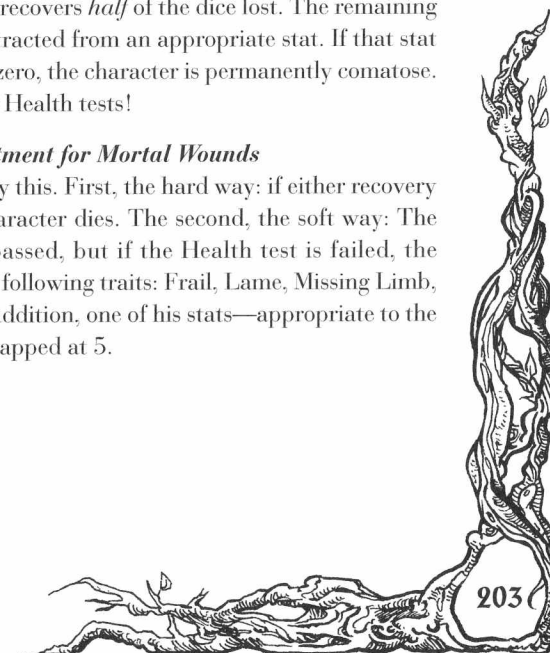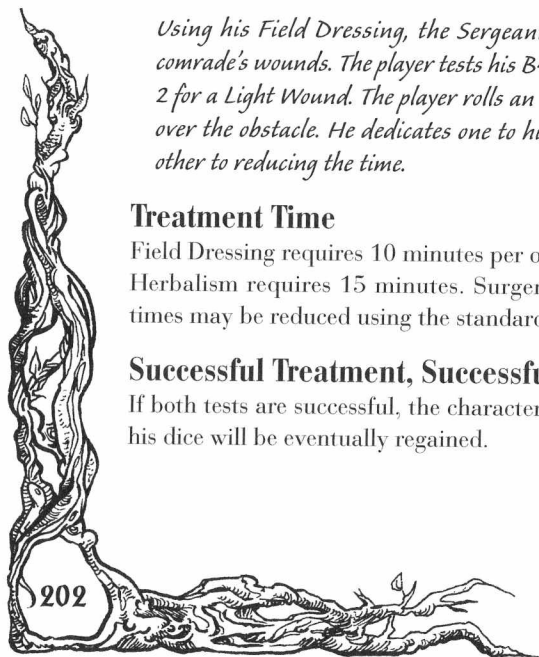
Stop the Bleeding

Your friend's bleeding to death. There's no doctor available. What do you do? Field Dressing, Bloodletting, Apothecary, Herbalism, Song of Soothing, Khirurgy and Surgery may be used to quickly attend to an injured character. *This does not begin the recovery process,* but it can stop the character from bleeding to death and aid him in holding on until help arrives.

In order to begin the recovery process and hope to survive, the character must receive *treatment* from an appropriate skill. If this does not happen, then the character will either bleed to death eventually or permanently lose dice to a stat.

Staunching the Flow

A doctor can staunch the flow of blood for *hours equal to the victim's Health exponent.* After this time, another Stop the Bleeding test must be made. If successful, the process begins again. If failed the character begins bleeding as per the standard rules.

Bleeding may only be stopped a number of times equal to the character's Health exponent.

Obstacles for Stopping the Bleeding

Skill Tested:	Per/Agi	Field Dressing	Herbalism	Surgery
Type of Wound		obstacle		
Superficial	—	—	—	—
Light	—	—	—	—
Midi	6	3	3	2
Severe	8	4	4	3
Traumatic	12	6	5	4
Mortal	20	10	10	5

Note: Bloodletting and Apothecary use the Field Dressing obstacles. Song of Soothing uses Herbalism, and Khirurgy uses Surgery.

Stop the Bleeding Times

Field Dressing, Apothecary and Herbalism all require 10 minutes per obstacle point of the test to stop the bleeding. Surgery requires 5 minutes per obstacle point. These times may be reduced using the standard working quickly rules.

Injury, Treatment and Recovery in Brief

Injury

• A wound from a weapon or spell is a coordinate on the PTGS. The letter tells what shade to place the wound in. The number indicates at which number the wound is placed. A B7 is placed seven steps into the black shade of the PTGS.

• Note the tolerance the wound is placed on or the nearest tolerance to the left. Consult the penalty chart for this wound. That's the penalty that the character now suffers.

• One or two Superficial Wounds is +1 Ob. Three Superficial Wounds is -1D. Light Wound, -1D. Midi, -2D. Severe, -3D. Traumatic, -4D.

• Midis bleed to Severe. Severe and Traumatic can bleed to Mortal.

• Ob 2 Health test shrugs off a +1 Ob penalty.

• Ob 4 Health test shrugs off -1D of penalty.

• Effects of wounds are cumulative. Two Light Wounds equal -2D. Also, Health and Emotional Attributes are not affected by wounds. Reflexes is affected directly by the wound penalty.

Treatment

• Superficials and Lights can be recovered from without treatment. Ob 1, Ob 2 Health test respectively.

• Midi through Mortal require treatment in order to recover.

• Extra successes from treatment add dice to the recovery Health test.

• If a character doesn't have the skill to treat a wound, he may attempt to stop the bleeding until a better doctor is found.

Recovery

• Test Health vs the wound's obstacle. Add dice from extra successes from the treatment test.

• If successful, +1 Ob is negated or 1D is recovered immediately.

• Remaining wounded dice are recovered over time. ✚
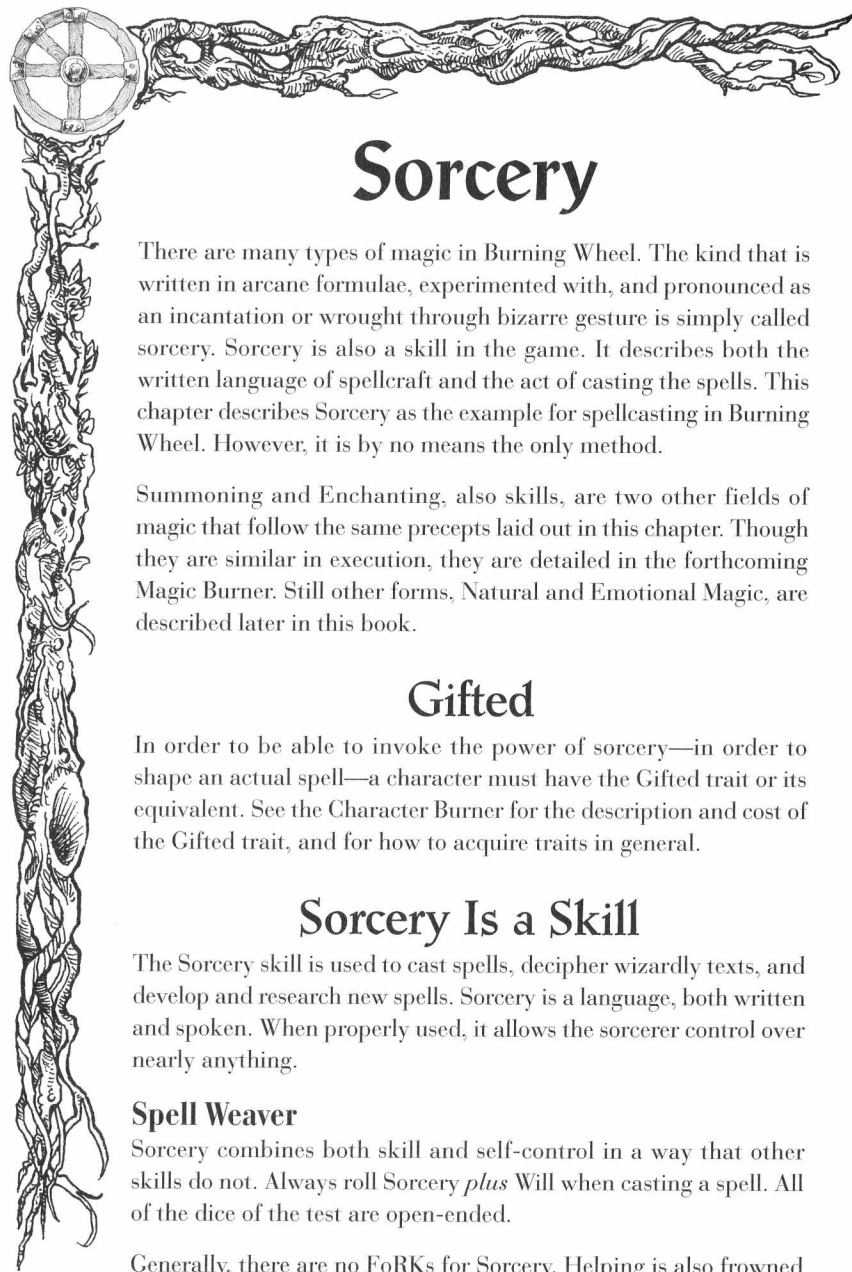
Sorcery

There are many types of magic in Burning Wheel. The kind that is written in arcane formulae, experimented with, and pronounced as an incantation or wrought through bizarre gesture is simply called sorcery. Sorcery is also a skill in the game. It describes both the written language of spellcraft and the act of casting the spells. This chapter describes Sorcery as the example for spellcasting in Burning Wheel. However, it is by no means the only method.

Summoning and Enchanting, also skills, are two other fields of magic that follow the same precepts laid out in this chapter. Though they are similar in execution, they are detailed in the forthcoming Magic Burner. Still other forms, Natural and Emotional Magic, are described later in this book.

Gifted

In order to be able to invoke the power of sorcery—in order to shape an actual spell—a character must have the Gifted trait or its equivalent. See the Character Burner for the description and cost of the Gifted trait, and for how to acquire traits in general.

Sorcery Is a Skill

The Sorcery skill is used to cast spells, decipher wizardly texts, and develop and research new spells. Sorcery is a language, both written and spoken. When properly used, it allows the sorcerer control over nearly anything.

Spell Weaver

Sorcery combines both skill and self-control in a way that other skills do not. Always roll Sorcery *plus* Will when casting a spell. All of the dice of the test are open-ended.

Generally, there are no FoRKs for Sorcery. Helping is also frowned upon. Also, when spending a Deeds point to double dice for a spell-casting test, choose Sorcery or Will to double—not both.
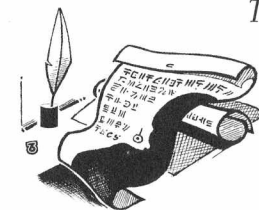
The Facets of a Spell

The eight parts of a spell are Obstacle, Actions, Origin, Effect, Area of Effect, Impetus, Element and Duration.

Sample Spell

Arcane Kindness	Ob 4^	10 Actions

Soothing rhythms emanate from the sorcerer and make agreeable his desires. This incantation grants bonus dice to Seduction, Haggling, Oratory, Persuasion and Circles tests. Margin of success is added as dice to the listed skills.

Origin: Personal
Element: Anima
Duration: Sustained
Area of Effect: Caster
Impetus: Enhance
Resource Points: 16

Spell Obstacle

There are four kinds of spell obstacles: those that are fixed, those that have a set or finite range, obstacles equal to one of the *caster's* stats, and obstacles equal to one of the *target's* stats.

What's This "^" Mean?

Some spells are listed with a caret (^) next to the obstacle. This indicates that extra successes on the casting roll increase the effectiveness of the spell. Be certain to count up extra successes; they determine how powerful the effect is. In Burning Wheel slang, the caret is called an "up." So an Ob 3^ spell is called a "3 up spell" at the table.

Spells without a caret are "flat" spells. Extra successes do not increase the effectiveness of the spell. Once the obstacle has been achieved, the spell has been successfully cast, and that's it.

Actions = Casting Time

A spell's casting time is expressed in actions. In general terms—outside of conflict—an action takes about one second. In conflict, we use actions to measure who gets their spell off first and precisely when that is.

Casting time may be modified by how the spell is cast. See Casting Time and Advanced Spell Casting in this chapter for different ways to cast a spell.

Spell Actions and Idiom

Your caster's idiom must be defined. What does he do during all those casting actions? There are two main choices: He may gesture and gesticulate or he may clearly pronounce the incantation. Either way, it's up to the player, but the method of casting must be chosen before the game begins.

Spellcasting is not a subtle or concealed art. If speech is the chosen idiom, then the spell must be spoken clearly. If gesture is chosen, then the movements must be complex and florid.

Effect

Effect is a mixture of the impetus, element, the caster's intent and the luck of the dice. The effect describes the final outcome of the combination of all of the facets of the spell. Effect is described in its own heading in this chapter.

Origin

Origin indicates where the spell can *start*—how far away from the caster the spell can be thrown and still have its intended effect. There are three origins: Personal, Presence and Sight.

Personal Origin

Spells with Personal Origin can only begin at the caster.

Presence Origin

If the caster could speak to the recipient in a normal speaking voice and be understood (regardless of other ambient noise), then the recipient is in the *Presence* of the caster. (Thus the caster's Presence does not go through walls.)

Sight Origin

If the caster can see it, he can affect it. This "sight range" includes extrasensory sight extended by Magesense, Eye of the Eagle and such.

Element

A spell's element indicates what sphere of the world it affects: Air is the element of the wind; Anima is the element of the bodies and minds of creatures; Arcana is the sphere of arcane power—magic; Earth is stone, wood and dirt; Fire encompasses the sphere of the tool most useful—heat and flame; Heaven invokes the sphere of light; Water surrounds rivers, seas, ponds and streams; White element is the dangerous sphere of heavenly fire, lightning and all her sisters.

Impetus

A spell's *impetus* indicates how it will affect its element: The Control impetus dominates and commandeers the element, often forcing it into unlikely or impossible positions and situations. The Create impetus involves fabrication of materials or substance. The Destroy impetus is one of the dark arts of sorcery. It combines with an element to destroy others. The Enhance impetus grants a boon to its element. It fortifies and strengthens to an otherworldly degree. Think of a magnet against a compass; such is the effect of the Influence impetus. The Tax impetus is another black art designed to drain or weaken the strength of its target element.

Area of Effect (AoE)

Some spells affect a single target—either the caster, or someone or something designated by the caster—some affect multiple targets or characters designated by the caster. Other spells affect a range, either predetermined or a variable area, such as the caster's Presence. Still other areas of effect are governed by the natural forces unleashed by the caster. These are called the Natural Effect. Unless otherwise stated, everything within the area of the spell is affected equally.

Areas of Effect are fairly self-explanatory and listed with each spell. One important detail to note: A sorcerer must declare the area of effect before the spell is cast, and this may increase the casting obstacle. See the Area of Effect section in this chapter for more on that.

Duration

There are four durations for spells in Burning Wheel. Spells that have an immediate, instantaneous effect; spells that have a continuing effect that rely on the caster to *sustain* them; spells that last for a predetermined time; and spells that have a permanent effect, completely separate from the caster. Duration is listed with each spell. See the Duration heading in this chapter for more.

The Basic Spell Cast

To cast a spell, first declare your intent. Then announce what spell you'll cast to accomplish this intent. The spell is the task. Let the GM know what you're up to or write it into your script.

Basic Casting

Roll the Sorcery skill plus Will dice vs the obstacle listed with the spell. The sorcerer must meet the spell obstacle in order to avoid a *Failed Casting*.

For flat obstacle spells, meeting the obstacle means the spell is completed successfully. For ^ spells, successes over and above the obstacle may be used toward the spell's effect or duration.

After the spell is cast, go right to *Tax*. If the spell was successfully cast, then go to *Effect*.

Casting Time

The actions listed with each spell denote the casting time. Using the Fight! mechanics, a sorcerer can cast one action of spells for each point of his Reflexes. Usually, he can only cast 3-5 action spells in melee:

Han has Reflexes of B4 and he casts a 4-action spell. This spell takes him one exchange to cast. If he starts on his first action, he'll finish on his last action of the exchange. (1st action, third volley.) If he casts a 5-action spell, he'll finish on his first action of the next exchange.

In Range and Cover and the Duel of Wits, we don't count time so meticulously. If a spell can be cast in 20 or fewer actions, it can fit into one volley.

Out of conflict, a sorcerer with a Reflexes of B3 can perform 60 actions in a minute, B4 can perform about 80 actions a minute, B5 can do 100, B6 can do 120.

x Actions

When a spell is listed with "*x* actions," multiply the actions by the obstacle to get the basic casting time.

Tax

The caster must resist a *Tax* put upon his body by the power he has invoked. After an incantation is cast, test the caster's Forte. His obstacle is the spell's obstacle.

If he passes the test, he suffers no ill effect. If he fails the Tax test, each success below the obstacle is temporarily subtracted from his Forte.

Chris has his character, Han, cast Mage Light at Ob 3. He must now test his Forte at Ob 3 to resist the Tax of the spell. His Forte is B6, and he gets two successes—one less than the obstacle of the spell. Chris temporarily subtracts 1D from Han's Forte; he will recover it when he has had a chance to rest for a few hours.

If the sorcerer's Forte is reduced to zero, he is rendered unconscious.

Overtax

If a sorcerer's Forte is reduced below zero, he has overtaxed himself—his body is overloaded with the power of the spell. For each point his Forte drops *below* zero, he takes physical damage equal to the obstacle of the spell in "pips" on the Grayscale. If multiple dice are lost, the "pips" are cumulative.

A witch's Forte has been reduced from B5 to B3 due to tax. If she then casts a spell and loses 4 Forte dice, her Forte drops to -1 and she takes a B4 wound (pips equal to the Obstacle 4 spell). If it dropped two below zero, then the damage would be B8 on the PTGS; if it dropped three below, she'd take a B12 wound.

The Sickness

Every mage suffers from the *Sickness* at one time or another. It is the feeling of weakness and frailty that overcomes him after being Taxed by spell casting. Fortunately, this draining weakness is only temporary. Forte dice lost to failed Tax tests are recovered over a course of hours determined by the wizard's Health.

Recovering from the Sickness

When a wizard fails a Tax test, immediately test his Health to see how long it will take to recover from the Sickness. Each success knocks off one hour from the standard recovery time.

Roll separately for each die lost. Minimum recovery time is one hour per Forte die.
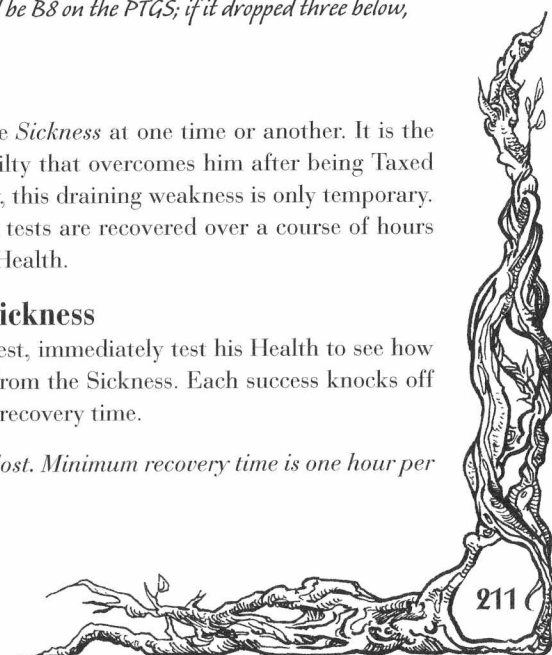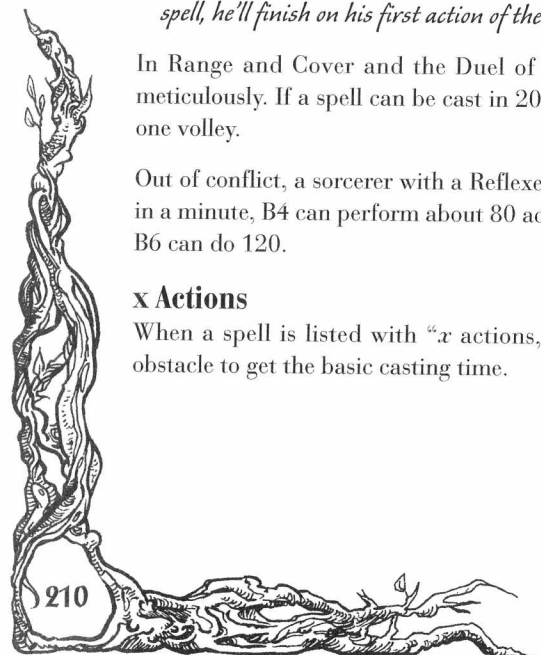
Standard Recovery Time

10 minus Health exponent = Number of hours per Forte die

Thus a Wizard with a Health of B5 recovers 1 point of Taxed Forte every five hours (10 - B5 = 5).

Chris wants Han to recover the Forte die he lost when he cast Mage Light. The young wizard's Health is B6, thus his recovery time is 4 hours per die. He rolls his Health and gets 2 successes, which knocks two hours off the recovery time.

Area of Effect

Spells can affect a large area or multiple targets. When casting a spell, meeting the obstacle indicates that the base area is covered. If a sorcerer wishes to expand his reach, he's got to increase his risk a bit.

The Magesense (Ob 4) has an Area of "10s of Paces." This means that as long as the spell is successfully cast the sorcerer may "sense" for about 10 paces around himself.

Spells with a Presence, Measured Area or Natural Effect Area of Effect touch all things in their purview equally. See Effect, next, for how that works.

Increasing Area of Effect

When casting a spell with a measured or variable area of effect, the caster must state, *before casting the spell,* how large the area of effect will be. Spell area of effect is increased by increments listed with the spell. *Each increment added increases the casting obstacle by one.*

Casting Magesense, Chris may state that he wants a 40-pace circle. That's 3 increments of area—10 paces base plus three 10-pace increases. His obstacle to cast is increased by +3 Ob to Ob 7.

If a wizard with Firebreath wants to ignite a tomb door across a chasm three paces wide, he'd have to increases his casting obstacle by two. The spell's base area is one pace, increasing it by two paces to three, ups his casting obstacle.

Increasing Area of Effect only increases the *casting* obstacle, *not* the Tax obstacle.

Be sure to read the Duels of Sorcery, Artillery and Steel section for more on using area of effect spells in Range and Cover, and Fight!. Area of Effect is of prime importance in those rules.

Single Target AoE and Personal Origin

Spells with the Single Target area of effect and the Personal origin are delivered by the touch of the caster.

Presence

Certain spells have an area of effect equal to the *Presence* of the caster. If a measure is needed, Presence is equal to the Will of the caster in paces. Otherwise, use the Positioning with Presence heading in Duels of Sorcery, Artillery and Steel.

Effect

If the spell does not have a ^ listed next to the obstacle, then the sorcerer need only meet the obstacle to gain the full effect. However, if the spell is listed with a ^, then the more successes a caster allocates into Effect, the more potent the spell.

Turn Aside the Blade's effect is to add an obstacle penalty to attacks directed against the caster. Each success over the actual obstacle of the spell is +1 Ob to all incoming attacks. 4 successes over means +4 Ob.

Effect successes are allocated after the dice are rolled. If a spell has two potential effects, the player may divide his dice between them as he sees fit. A player should note how many successes were put into spell Effect and Duration.

Destroy Impetus Effects and the Die of Fate

Destroy Impetus spell damage is factored like a melee weapon. The wizard's Will stat is the base Power of the attack. The spell is the weapon. Add spell Power to the Will Power to find the Mark result. (The Incidental is half Mark rounded up, Superb is 1.5x Mark rounded down.)

A wizard with a B5 Will has a base I: B3, M: B5, and S: B7 for Destroy spells. Additional successes create the Weapon Power. If, when casting Firebreath, a wizard gets three more successes than needed, he adds three to the base Power, or Mark result, of the spell. In this case, three successes is a Mark of B8, an Incidental of B4 and Superb of B12.

Exact Destroy effects are described in the individual spell entries in the Character Burner. Some spells modify base Power, subtracting dice or use a fraction of the Power; some spells add to Power in various ways; some are +1 Power per extra success, and some are +1 Power per two extra successes.

Han casts Shards at the feet of a charging Hound Assassin. Shards is an Ob 2 Destroy spell. Han rolls an amazing 9 successes—8 successes over his obstacle. The Damaging Effect base Power is 1/2 of Han's Will of B5, plus 1 pip for every 2 successes over obstacle. So that's B2 (1/2 Will) plus 4 (8 successes divided by 2)= B6 Mark result; Incidental B3, Superb of B9. Han rolls the DoF and gets a 5! A B9—Superb shot—to the drugged murderer! Yay for the good guys!

Spell Die of Fate

Like bows and crossbows, spells use the Die of Fate to determine IMS. All spells have a DoF of: I: 1-2, M: 3-4, S: 5-6. Up to three extra successes can be spent to modify the roll, +1 to the DoF per success. These successes cannot be allocated to Effect or Duration.

Effect and You

Unless the spell is a Natural Effect spell gone wild with successes, or unless he wishes it, a wizard is never in danger of being caught up in his own area of effect.

Natural Effect Scale

The Natural Effect area of effect is an interesting and quirky facet. It is meant to represent the range of possibilities present when unleashing the forces of nature via magic. A bolt of fire is one thing, but unleashing a howling, gale force wind is somewhat more unpredictable.

Unless otherwise stated, a spell with the Natural Effect area of effect abides by the following parameters when it is cast:

1 over—cosmetic, minor effects: a wind that kicks up dust, candlelight, a spark, ripples on water.

2 over—small, incidental effects: a breeze that douses a candle, torch light or flame, a wave that rocks the boat.

3 over—minor effects: a wind that breaks small branches from trees, a lantern light, a small fire, a wave that pitches small boats dangerously.

4 over—palpable effects: damage to trees and houses from wind, a campfire, a light bright enough to illuminate a room, dangerous and rough surf.

5 over—strong effects: a wind strong enough to toss people to the ground and damage houses, a bonfire, very bright light, a wave big enough to swamp small boats and knock people flat.
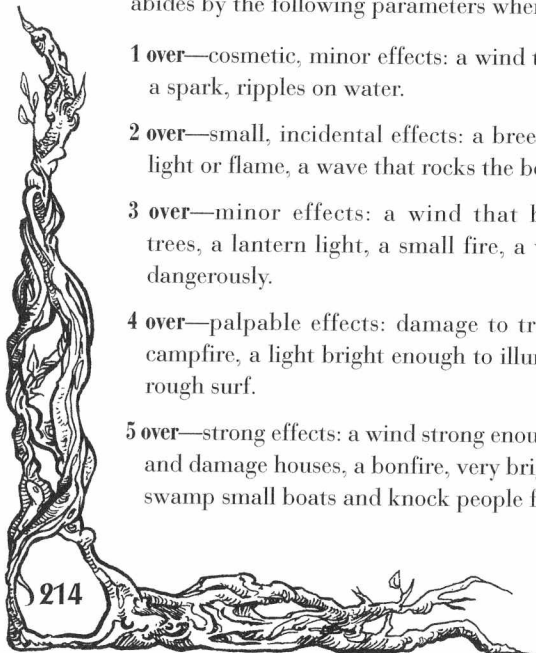
6 over—powerful effects: a wind strong enough to blow trees down and create twelve-foot surges, a bright beacon of light, a wave strong enough to shatter small boats and swamp mid-sized craft.

7 over—forceful: a wind strong enough to strip houses bare, twilight, a raging fire, a wave large enough to swamp mid-sized craft.

8 over—disastrous: a wind strong enough to rip the roof off a large house, dawn light, a wave powerful enough to swamp large vessels or shatter lesser craft.

9 over—devastating: a wind strong enough to level sturdy wooden buildings, cloudy daylight, an inferno, a wave large enough to capsize ships.

10 over—catastrophic: a wind that topples most structures, hellfire, sunlight, a wave that destroys seaside towns.

Natural Effect and Control

When used with Control, Natural Effect has a side effect. Depending on the spell concept, successes over the obstacle act as a Throw Opponent martial arts maneuver. To resist, make a Natural Defenses test (Power or Speed) at an obstacle equal to the successes over the spell obstacle. So, a Breath of Wind type spell with *Control* tosses people around, while a *Destroying* Breath of Wind does damage via the DoF.

Duration

Instantaneous

Instantaneous duration spells flicker into being for but a moment and are gone. Any effects they have on the environment remain.

Permanent

The magic of a permanent effect spell does not fade. It lasts eternally. The spells may only be stopped via a counter spell or an Arcana Destroy.

Elapsed Time

Spells with an "elapsed time" exist for a predetermined measure of moments, seconds, minutes, hours, days, months or years. A spell with an elapsed time duration will say something like "seconds," "exchanges" or "hours." The spell's base duration is equal to one increment of that time. So successfully casting a "minutes" spell indicates the spell lasts for one minute. This duration may be increased by allocating successes over the obstacle into duration. Each success so allocated increases the
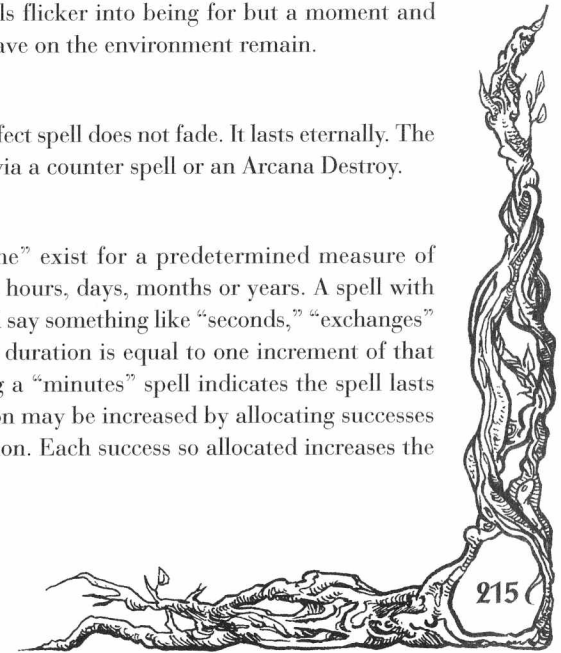
duration by one increment of itself. Two successes allocated to Minutes duration allows the spell to persist for three minutes—one base plus two more. Successes dedicated to duration may not be allocated to effect.

Sustained Spells

A sorcerer is rigorously trained in the art of concentration. He is able to slip into trance-like meditations almost instantly, and then, while maintaining the trance, come forward in his mind and interact normally with his surroundings. By dividing his concentration into separate compartments, a sorcerer can *sustain* one or more spells at a time.

To maintain a spell once it is cast, the player sets aside up one Will die to represent the spell. This die is placed at the top of the character sheet. *So long as the sorcerer is sustaining that spell, the Will die may not be used for any Will tests (including spell-casting or sustaining tests).* A sorcerer may maintain as many spells as his Will minus one—he must leave that last die in Will.

The spell list in the Character Burner indicates whether or not a spell can be sustained.

It requires one action to drop (stop sustaining) a spell.

While Sustaining a Spell, a Sorcerer May:

Fight, Maintain/Close/Withdraw, jump, play, talk, argue, read, study, think and cast spells.

While Sustaining a Spell, a Sorcerer *May Not*:

Panic (i.e., fail a Steel test, even by one die), be hurt, fall down hard, fail a Tax test (even by one die), completely lose an Eldritch Shield, go to sleep or otherwise lose consciousness.

If a sorcerer fails his Tax test while casting a spell with sustained duration, this does *not* count as a "may not." The failed Tax test only counts for spells that he was currently maintaining, not the spell he was raising.

Maintaining Concentration After a May Not

If any of the above "may nots" happen to the sorcerer while he is sustaining a spell (or spells), *then he must test his Will against the base obstacle of each spell currently being sustained.* Make the Will tests in the order the spells were cast. If he fails a Will test, that spell is dropped. If the Will test is successful, the caster maintains his concentration and sustains the spell. *Dropping a sustained spell due to distractions is not a Spell Interrupt or a Failed Casting,* but it can be bad news if the spell you were sustaining was Philosopher's Perch….
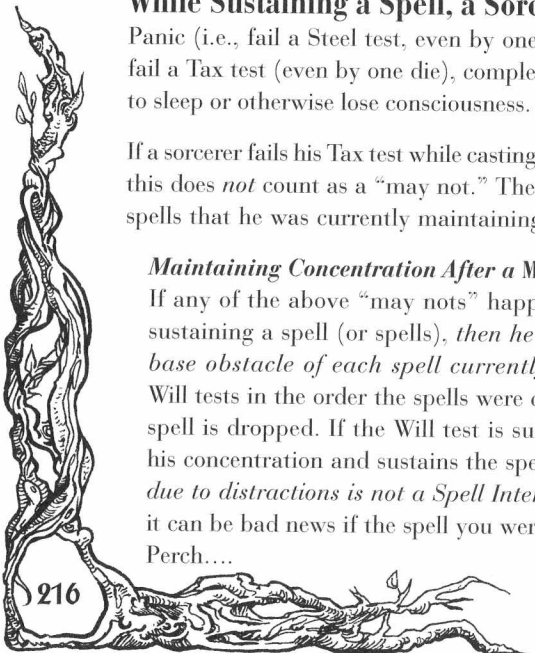
The Color of Will Dice

We here at Burning Wheel headquarters strongly recommend that wizard players keep a set of specially colored or styled dice to represent their Will. Only keep as many as the Will exponent. That way it is very easy to keep track of how many spells you are sustaining. Each die represents a potential spell. It is much easier than taking notes—if the special Will dice are not in your hand, then one can safely assume they are being used to sustain an important spell and are thus unavailable for casting other, less important, spells.

The Power Still Flows through Him.

While sustaining a spell a sorcerer must retest for Tax. The time between tests is equal to his Forte minus the spell obstacle in hours. *If this results in zero or a negative number, the spell may not be maintained.* The "Power Still Flows" Tax test is at the spell obstacle. This test counts as a standard Tax test for the "May Nots" of sustaining spells.

> *If Han (Forte B6) is sustaining Turn Aside the Blade (Ob 4), then he must retest for Tax every two hours (6-4=2). The obstacle for the test is 4 (the base spell obstacle). If he fails the test, then dice are subtracted from his Forte just as with a normal Tax test.*

Failed Casting

A sorcerer who botches a casting (does not meet the obstacle) is subject to three possible outcomes: Harmless dissipation, garbled transmission or unwanted summoning.

The casting player should roll the Die of Fate for the failed spell:

1	Unwanted Summoning
2	Garbled Transmission
3-6	Harmless Dissipation

Harmless Dissipation

Harmless dissipation indicates that the sorcerer has gotten lucky this time. His spell has no further effects, harmful or otherwise.

Garbled Transmission, aka: *"Wheel of Magic, turn, turn, turn. Tell me the lesson that I have learned!"*

Garbled Transmission means that the spell has misfired and has an unexpected effect. Consult the Wheel of Magic!
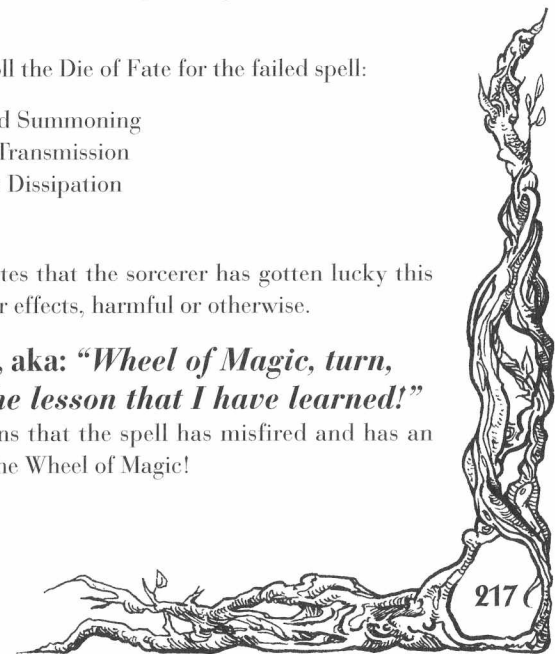
To use the Wheel of Magic, roll two differently colored dice. The darker die indicates direction on the wheel: Odd is counterclockwise, even is clockwise. The lighter die indicates how many steps the wheel shifts in that direction. Thus if I roll a 2/3, I move clockwise three steps.

Starting in the center ring, find the Element, Impetus, Origin, Duration and Area of the attempted spell. These are the starting points when using the Wheel of Magic.
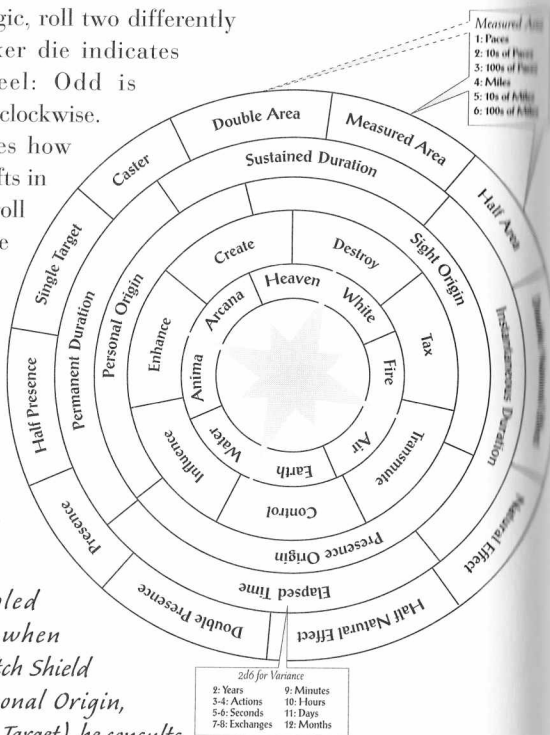
If Han gets a Garbled Transmission result when attempting to cast Eldritch Shield (Arcana, Control, Personal Origin, Sustained, Caster/Single Target), he consults the Wheel of Magic. Two six-sided dice are rolled. With a 2/3 result, the new spell would be: Fire, Create, Personal Origin, Permenant, with a Half Measured Area.

For Half Measured Area variance, we roll a d6 on the handy Measured Area table and halve the result. If you rolled a 6, that'd be "50s of Miles," a 3 is "50s of paces."

But what does that all mean? The GM gets first crack at interpreting spell failure, but he may turn the honor over to the player if he desires. I'd interpret it like this: The botched attempt at summoning the Eldritch Shield instead causes a vast circle of flame to spring up around the wizard. There's no need to harm him with it, but I'd trap him in it.

If the Destroy facet result is rolled on the Wheel, use the same mechanics described for Damaging Effects. When factoring the Power of the failure, add to the base Power for each success *below* the spell obstacle!

Measured Area
1: Paces
2: 10s of Paces
3: 100s of Paces
4: Miles
5: 10s of Miles
6: 100s of Miles

2d6 for Variance

2: Years	9: Minutes
3-4: Actions	10: Hours
5-6: Seconds	11: Days
7-8: Exchanges	12: Months

Unwanted Summoning

This result indicates the sorcerer has torn a rift in the fabric of reality with his senseless prattle. Spellcasting is a dangerous game, and this is about as bad as it gets.

The simple version of it: Roll a Die of Fate. On a 1, a really big bad demon comes tearing through. Anything else, and something weird or creepy scurries out into the darkness.

The other way is to consult the Offering Wheel of the Summoning chapter from the forthcoming Magic Burner (the beta's available on burningwheel.org). Roll a d6 to see what type of calling the summoner has put forth: Even is angelic, odd is dæmonic; 1-3 is a roll on the Inner Star, 4-6 is a roll in the Outer Circle. Roll a d6 to determine the precise type of calling: Start with the lowest Named and count up. For example if the dæmonic Outer Circle is rolled: a Lesser Imp is 1-2, Imp is 3-4, Greater Imp is 5-6. Or if the angelic Inner Star is rolled: a Lesser Seraph is 1-2, a Seraph is 3-4, and a Greater Seraph is 5-6.

Lastly, if the GM had something planned—something waiting in the wings—please use his discretion rather than this random determination.

Spell Interrupt

Spells must be completed uninterrupted. If a sorcerer is "distracted" while performing an incantation, the spell is ruined and a Tax test is required. The obstacle of the test is based on the portion of the spell that was completed. If it was half done, the test is at half the spell obstacle. *Also, the sorcerer is subject to Failed Casting.* See above.

Casting Interruptions Include, but are Not Limited to:

A spell is interrupted if the wizard: is hit in the mouth, physically (or magically) restrained, injured (with a wound penalty), blinded, falls asleep, fails a Steel test or has a sustained Eldritch Shield reduced to zero dice. Should one of these events occur, the spell is interrupted.
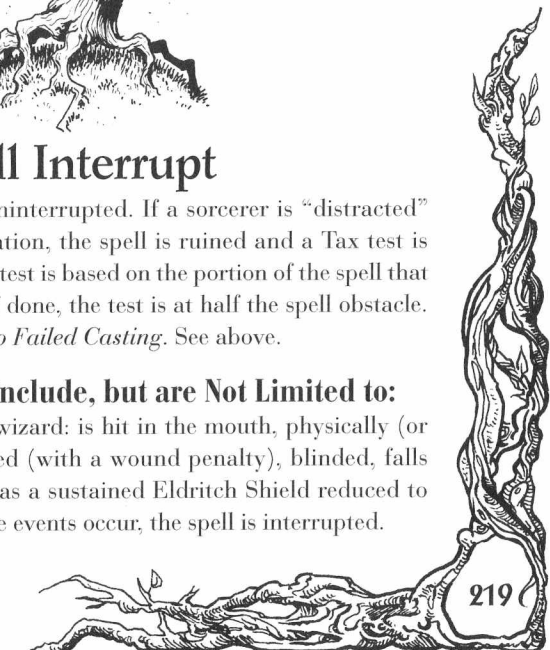
Advanced Spell Casting

A spell can be cast in five different ways: Normally, Carefully, Patiently, Patiently and Carefully, and Hastily.

Normally

This method uses the standard obstacle and actions for each spell. No special consideration is taken. This is *Basic Spell Casting* as described above.

Carefully

The sorcerer meticulously speaks the words of the spell, enunciating slowly and deliberately. This grants bonus dice to cast the spell while increasing the time taken. For every +1D, the sorcerer increases the actions in multiples of two.

> +1D = x2 actions
> +2D = x4 actions
> +3D = x6 actions, *etc...*

The maximum bonus dice from casting carefully is equal to the spell obstacle or the Sorcery skill exponent, whichever is lower.

Patiently

By adding specially designed phrases and pauses to the body of the spell, and by taking the utmost care, the sorcerer reduces the strain of Tax on his body. Casting patiently adds bonus dice to the Tax test. Increase actions by x3 for each Tax die granted.

> +1D = x3 actions
> +2D = x6 actions
> +3D = x9 actions, *etc...*

The maximum bonus dice from casting patiently is equal to the spell obstacle or the Forte stat exponent, whichever is lower.

Patiently and Carefully

A sorcerer may combine the two methods above to slowly release the spell to ensure his success and that it will pose little danger to himself.

> +1D Cast/+1D Tax = x5 actions
> +2D Cast/+2D Tax = x10 actions
> +3D Cast/+3D Tax = x20 actions
> +4D Cast/+4D Tax = x40 actions, etc...

The same limits apply as for both Carefully and Patiently.

Chris wants his character, Han, to cast Mage Light for a Lantern effect (Ob 3, 12 actions). He has plenty of time, so he decides to minimize his risks and cast the spell Patiently and Carefully. Chris wants to give himself two extra dice to cast and two extra to resist Tax—a x10 action multiplier. 12x10=120 actions (about a minute and a half of casting time for him).

His Sorcery is B5, his Will is B6 (11D total). He adds his two "carefully" dice to that and rolls 13 dice vs Ob 3 to cast. His Forte is B6. He adds two "patiently" dice to that and rolls a total of eight dice to resist the Ob 3 Tax.

Hastily

Hurrying a spell can reduce time, but it increases the difficulty of the casting and the chance of making an error. Add +1 Ob to the casting for each action extracted from the incantation. *A spell can never be reduced below half its original actions.*

> +1 Ob Cast/+0 Ob Tax = −1 action
> +2 Ob Cast/+1 Ob Tax = −2 actions
> +3 Ob Cast/+2 Ob Tax = −3 actions
> +4 Ob Cast/+3 Ob Tax = −4 actions

If Han was in a bind and wanted to raise an Eldritch Shield fast, he could cast the spell Hastily. The normal time for the spell is 9 actions. The young wizard wants that shield up pronto, so he casts at Hastily, -3 actions. That reduces the time to 6 actions and raises the casting obstacle by 3, and Tax by 2..

Coup de Magie

(Pronounced: *coo d' mahji.*) A sorcerer may withhold the final syllables of an incantation until he deems them fit to be released. This requires the utmost concentration—the sorcerer must focus all his Will to maintain the pregnant spell. He may hold the Coup de Magie *for actions equal to his Will exponent.* If he still wants to continue to hold the spell after this time, he must make an Ob 1 Will test. *Each set of actions that he holds the Coup de Magie raises the obstacle of the concentration test by one.*

With his B5 Will, Han can hold Coup de Magie for 5 Actions. After that he has to make an Obstacle 1 concentration test. If he passes, he may continue to hold the Coup de Magie for another five actions, after which he must make another Will test at Obstacle 2. This can continue until the wizard finally casts the spell or fails a Will test.
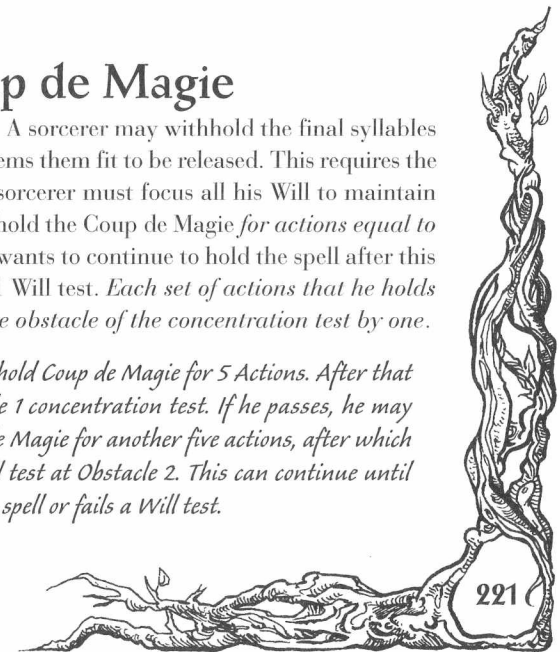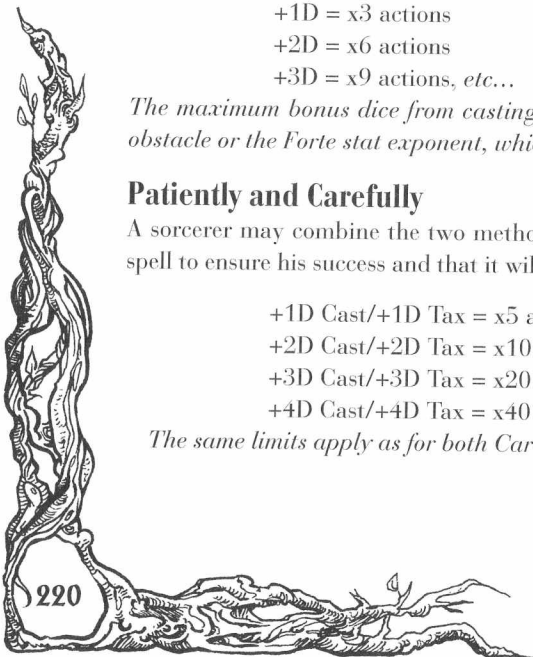
If the wizard fails the Will test for Coup de Magie, then the spell is lost, but no Tax or Failed Casting test is taken. But if he is "distracted" from Coup de Magie, he suffers full Tax as under Spell Interrupt. See Spell Interrupt for distractions.

Duels of Sorcery, Artillery and Steel

On occasion, you may find your sorcerer engaged in a duel of spells with an archrival, assaulting a castle wall or even being stalked by an unrelenting assassin through the cold woods. In these instances, spells are used to determine positioning.

Timing Spells in Fight! or Range and Cover

A sorcerer character may use melee and field maneuver actions as normal. In melee, spell timing is done with actions. In Range and Cover field maneuvers, spell timing is a bit more loose. Any spell of 20 actions or less may be cast in a single Range and Cover volley. If a spell requires more than 20 actions, the sorcerer *must* spend one volley maneuvering with a Maintain *before* he can cast. If a spell is more than 40 actions, then two Maintains must be scripted before the spell is finally cast, in the third volley. On the casting volley, a sorcerer may script a Close, Withdraw or Maintain as he sees fit.

Casting carefully, patiently and hastily must be declared before any positioning tests are made.

Fastest Spell

In a sorcerer vs sorcerer contest, the mage casting the shorter spell gains +1D to his positioning test.

Positioning with Spells

Spells count as weapons for the purposes of positioning. In the Fight! mechanics, each Origin and Area of Effect type grants a weapon length or advantage dice. In Range and Cover, Origin and Area of Effect give range dice. For these purposes, spells are always considered in optimal range.

Positioning with Presence in Fight!

In melee, when factoring weapon length for positioning, a Presence Origin or a Personal Origin/Presence Area of Effect spell is considered to have the *longest weapon* advantage against everything except missile weapons.

Presence Origin in Range and Cover

In Range and Cover, Presence Origin counts as a thrown bomb (1D of Range, 10 paces max, ignores 1D of cover).

Presence vs Presence

To find whose Presence is greater in a duel of sorcerers, use the caster's Will as a base. Add one pace for each of the following skills or traits that the caster possesses: Meditation, Conspicuous, Command, Aura of Fear, Aura of Determination, Aura of Malevolence, Commanding Aura, Aura of Holiness, Perfect Pitch, Sonorous Voice, Unctuous, Gift of Babel. Subtract one pace for each of the following: Inconspicuous, Stealthy, Misplaced Aura, Obscure Aura, Cipher or Entropic. The highest total gains the longest weapon advantage.
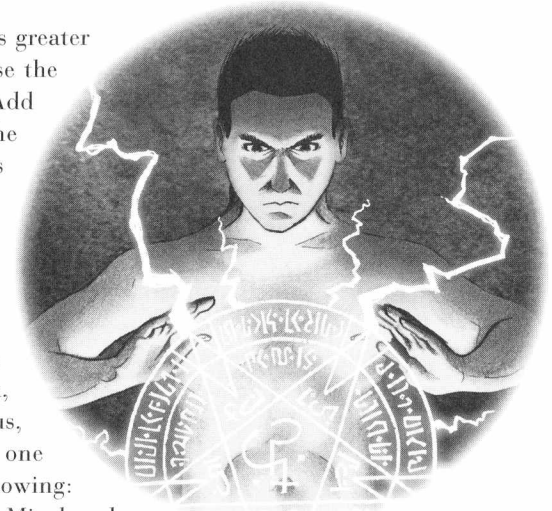
Positioning with Sight Origin in Fight!

In melee, Sight Origin spells *always* count as the longest weapon. If dueling with another sorcerer and using Sight Origin spells in melee, neither side gains an advantage.

Sight Origin in Range and Cover

In the Range and Cover rules, Sight Origin spells grant 5D of range dice!

Presence Area of Effect in Range and Cover

Presence Origin combined with Presence AoE grants 2D of range dice.

Natural Effect

Natural Effect AoE spells give 3D of range dice and always count as the longest weapon in Fight! (if applicable).

Measured Area of Effect Range Dice

When using a spell with the Measured Area facet, the caster gets a few positioning dice to start—using the base area of effect—and may add additional positioning dice by raising his casting obstacle: Paces AoE starts with +1D, *additional* dice costs +4 Ob each. 10s of Paces

grants +1D, each additional die increases the casting obstacle by +2. 100s of paces starts a 4D of range dice; increasing the casting obstacle grants 2D per +1 Ob. Miles AoE is just ridiculous—8D, and three range and cover dice are granted for each point by which obstacle is raised. 10s of Miles AoE is 12D to positioning, and four dice per obstacle increase.

Casting White Fire, Thor wants to give himself an edge in this duel of sorcerers. White Fire is Ob 3 and a 10s of Paces AoE. It grants 1D of Range dice. Thor decides to kick his casting obstacle up to 5 and get an additional Range die. In positioning, he'll roll his wizard's Perception plus 2D for his spell's range.

Winning the Positioning Test

If the sorcerer wins the positioning test, he may spend his extra successes as per the standard Range and Cover rules. One success must be spent to be able to cast (and he may only cast one spell per volley). If he casts, test Sorcery+Will vs the obstacle per the standard casting rules. Consult the effects of the spell.

He may also take other actions with his extra successes, including reading his opponent's aura and shrugging off wounds.

In melee, winning the positioning test allows him to set the fighting distance as per the standard rules. He may cast the spell whether he wins or loses the test, so long as he's not interrupted.

Tied Tests for Range and Cover

A tied result is the same as in missile combat—both parties may act if they so desire.

Rain of Fire vs Breath of Wind

Master Qing completed his terrible incantation and summoned forth an apocalyptic Rain of Fire. Garn Huri was ready. As he saw the sulphurous clouds gathering over his companions, he hurled forth a howling Breath of Wind.

Like the science of alchemy, Sorcery has catalysts, reagents, sharp acids and cold bases—a chemistry of reactants that can be set against one another to return the source to a neutral state.

Counter-Spells

Certain *elements* and *impeti* can be cast to cancel or diffuse opposing spells. The contest is much like the martial Strike and Block—the sorcerer with the most successes overcomes the defense. A spell's effect is lessened by the defense (or attack) of his opponent.

Roll for the counter-spell as a normal casting. The counter-spell's successes (over the obstacle) are subtracted from the target spell's successes. If this reduces the spell successes below the obstacle, then it is completely negated (but not a Failed Casting). If the *counter-spell* generates more successes, then its effects overwhelm the opposing spell. The extra successes over the defeated spell go toward the counter-spell effect and area.

Some spells have obvious counters, some do not, and some do not have counters at all. Rainstorm is a counter-spell for Rain of Fire, or even Breath of Fire. Mage Light is always at war with Dark of Night. Persuasion has no real "counter." It can't be blocked or cancelled. However, the effects of Persuasion can be "countered" with Persuasion:

Bad Wizard to warrior: "Drop your sword."

Good Witch to warrior: "Ignore him."

The sword is dropped, but the swordsman should ignore Bad Wizard's further commands.

Elemental Opposites

Fire vs Water, White vs Earth, Air vs Fire, Heaven vs Heaven, Arcane vs Arcane, and Anima vs Anima: These are just some of the counter-spell possibilities. The effects of these combinations are not cut and dried or easily predicted.

Impetus Opposites

Destroy vs Create, Enhance vs Taxing, Control vs Influence, Influence vs Influence, and Control vs Control.

Many spells cannot be countered directly. They must be attacked obliquely, usually by distracting the wizard as he casts or sustains the spell. Philosopher's Perch, for example, has no counter-spell, but a hunting bow and a sturdy arrow make a fine substitute for one!

Timing is tricky

As long as the counter-wizard is casting a viable counter-spell, and finishes it in the same volley as the opposing spell, he may attempt to counter. To better time counter-spells, players may attempt to assess

their opponents using Second Sight or Magesense, and the Aura Reading skill. See the Aura Reading skill description in the Character Burner for obstacles.

Spells like Rain of Fire, Breath of Wind and White Fire all have sudden and violent instantaneous effects. It is best to think ahead and defend yourself with an Eldritch Shield before engaging an enemy who can summon heaven's wrath and turn you to pile of ash.

The Eldritch Shield Spell

This spell grants the wizard the power to erect a magical barrier to block incoming Destroy and Tax impeti. This shield deflects spells like White Fire, Breath of Fire, Rain of Fire, Shards, Choking Hand, Lights of Simplex, Emperor's Hand, Fire Fan and Storm of Lightning. *Each die of the shield negates one die from the incoming spell's attack. The shield is reduced by one for each die it deflects.*

The Shield Was Blasted Away

If the Eldritch Shield is knocked down completely (reduced to zero dice) by an opposing spell, the witch must test Will to maintain any spells she is currently sustaining. If the witch drops the Eldritch Shield voluntarily prior to its destruction, there is no additional negative effect.

Sorcerer Advances Will

It's easy to get Will tests as a wizard. Of course, they usually come at crucial times when failure means death—but at least you'll get a test!

Being distracted while sustaining a spell requires a Will test in order to maintain concentration. These tests are made at the basic spell obstacle. If a sorcerer with a Will of B5 is sustaining Turn Aside the Blade (Ob 4), and fails a Tax test from another spell he cast, he must make an Ob 4 Will test to keep Turn Aside going. Pass or fail, that is a Difficult test!

Sustaining spells occupies Will dice—for each spell sustained, the sorcerer sets aside one die to represent it. Those dice can't be used for *any tests* while the spell is sustained—not for spell casting and not for Will tests. This effectively, if temporarily, lowers the sorcerer's Will. Thus, if our sorcerer from the above example (Will B5) is sustaining Turn Aside the Blade, Chameleon and Magesense, his current Will is B2. If he suffers a "May Not" and is forced to test in order to keep Turn Aside

up, he rolls two dice against an Obstacle of 4! That's a Challenging Will test, no? Remember, the Difficulty level of tests is determined by the *actual number* of dice rolled, not the exponent of the skill or stat.

Of course, he is going to fail that test, but at least he'll benefit from it. As always in instances of multiple tests, only log the most difficult one of the lot. In the example above, our sorcerer is going to make three Will tests. In this case, note only the Challenging test.

Learning New Spells

Think of the language of Sorcery as an evil cross-breed of English and Cantonese—an infinite collection of ambiguously defined words that either sound similar or that have different sounds but the same meaning, all garnished with a pronunciation of a thousand closely related tones.

Learning a new spell is a long, difficult, dangerous and complicated process. In order to begin, a sorcerer must either have a written copy of the incantation, or be under direct instruction from another sorcerer. Once this condition is met, there are three steps to learning a new spell:

First Reading

Make a Sorcery test vs the spell's basic obstacle. This is a standard skill test—FoRKs, help and working methods are all viable—it is *not* open-ended. Time for the test is the obstacle in months. Extra successes (working quickly) subtract 10% of time per success. If the test is successful, the character now has a basic understanding of the spell and may move on to Practicals.

If the test is failed, the character may not attempt to cast the spell, but may attempt the First Reading again.

Practicals

Here is the dangerous part. The sorcerer's mastery is far from complete. He only has a basic grasp of the spell—he must cast it to fully understand it.

When casting the new spell, the sorcerer is at a *double obstacle penalty*. So if a sorcerer is learning Turn Aside the Blade, an Ob 4 spell, his Practicals are at Ob 8. The sorcerer may cast his Practicals *patiently*, *carefully* or *hastily* using the base obstacle of the spell.

The sorcerer must cast the spell (pass or fail) as many times as his Perception Aptitude. Like skill tests, these tests must be game-legitimate. No sitting around your tower setting the couch on fire. After he has fulfilled his Aptitude requirement, he then moves on to Second Reading.

Second Reading

Second Reading is similar to First Reading, except now the sorcerer is trying to unlearn all the garbage and mistakes he made and get at the root of the spell—he is trying to get rid of that pesky double obstacle casting penalty! This is the same procedure as First Reading, except the time for the test is the obstacle in weeks. Extra successes (Working Quickly) subtract 10% of time per success. If the test is successful, the character now has mastered the spell and may cast it as normal.

If the test is failed, the character *must* go through another set of *Practicals* before he can do another second reading.

Sorcery Tests for Advancement

Inside the juicy center of learning new spells is a fat Sorcery test: First and second reading. If a sorcerer with a B5 Sorcery is reading a spell with an Obstacle of 4, he earns a Difficult sorcery test for advancement—in addition to potentially learning a new spell!

If a sorcerer wants to learn a spell whose obstacle is higher than his Sorcery exponent, he must either work carefully or spend artha to do so. But that's a challenging test!

Learning Sorcery as a New Skill

Sorcery must be taught to a character. He cannot pick it up on his own. It can be learned through written instructions (designed expressly for that purpose) or taught by another sorcerer. Any character may learn the Sorcery skill, but only those with the Gifted trait may cast spells.

Sorcery in Brief

- To cast a spell: Announce intent; declare spell used to accomplish intent.

- Determine how long the spell will take to cast. Spell actions are the same as regular actions. Count actions in Fight! 20 or fewer actions in Range and Cover or Duel of Wits.

- Determine the final Area of Effect of the spell. If increasing the area of effect, raise the casting obstacle appropriately. (Not the Tax obstacle.)

- Test Will exponent plus Sorcery exponent. The test is open-ended. Obstacle is equal to the spell obstacle plus any area of effect added.

- Meeting the obstacle indicates the spell was successfully cast. Extra successes can often be spent on increasing the effect. See spell descriptions for details.

- If the player doesn't meet the casting obstacle, the spell is failed. Roll a Die of Fate to see if the spell goes awry: 1 is Unwanted Summoning, 2 is Garbled Transmission, and 3-6 is Harmless Dissipation.

- After the spell is cast, immediately roll for Tax: Sorcerer's Forte vs the spell obstacle. This test is not open-ended. Margin of failure is temporarily subtracted from Forte. If Forte reaches zero, the sorcerer passes out.

- Taxed Forte dice (aka the Sickness) are recovered by testing Health. Each die is recovered individually. Time for the test is 10 minus Health in hours. It's an open test, and successes each subtract an hour from the time. Minimum time is one hour per die.

- Spells may be cast Carefully, Patiently and Hastily:

  —Carefully adds dice to casting and increases time. +1D = x2 actions. Maximum die bonus is equal to the caster's Sorcery exponent or the spell obstacle, whichever is lower.

  —Patiently adds advantage dice to the Forte test for Tax, but increases casting time. +1D = x3 actions. Maximum die bonus is equal to the caster's Forte or the spell obstacle, whichever is lower.

  —Hastily reduces the casting time and increases the spell obstacle. +1 Ob = -1 action. The first Hastily step only increases the casting obstacle. The second and subsequent steps reduce the time by one action and increase the casting *and* tax obstacles. ⊕

Emotional Magic

Emotional Attributes

Burning Wheel recognizes the mystical potential of deep and powerful emotion. Such emotions are given the status of an *attribute*—they become integral to the character and his development. They can be advanced like other abilities, though they do so under special conditions.

Emotional attributes give access to a potent range of abilities, but they come with a price—they can overwhelm the character if the player pushes too far.

There are four basic emotional attributes: Faith, Grief, Greed and Hatred. Faith is only available to characters who walk the Lifepaths of Man. Grief is a symptom of the Elves and their immortality, Greed plagues the Dwarves, and Orcs are subjects of their own overpowering Hatred.

In this chapter, we'll take a look at the most fluid and perhaps most powerful of the emotional attributes and emotional magics, Faith. Grief, Greed and Hatred are discussed in the appropriate character sections of the Character Burner.

Faith

Faith is much more than simple belief. It is a profound relationship with the divine that grants the ability to *work miracles*.

Many characters will espouse beliefs about their faith, but not every character possesses the Faith emotional attribute.

Spare a Quarter for an Old Altar Boy, Father?

Throughout this section, I use the term "priest" to describe those with miraculous ability. This is simply a term of convenience and is not meant to limit the province of faith to only those invested with religious rank.

Faithful

In order to have access to the emotional magic of Faith, the character must possess the Faithful trait. It costs 5 trait points in character burning.

Belief

The player *must* write at least one of his character's three Beliefs as a statement of faith. This can be as simple as, "God is the Father" or as subtle as, "The gods are present and powerful in all we do; I walk in their ways."

Should the character ever lose or change this Belief, his Faith is lost as well.

Pray

A Faithful character may pray for divine intervention. The prayer must be announced and spoken. He must chant his sutras or invoke his god in order for the power to be made manifest. The player creates the prayer on the fly and states his desired outcome. Then he tests his Faith. There is no Tax and no "prayer failure" chart.

Remember to keep to the basic rules here: State the specific intent of the prayer, then state the task. The intent is the desired outcome, the nature of the prayer is the task.

Outlandish intents are a fine cause for massively increased obstacles and a little divine wrath.

Faith tests are, of course, open-ended.

Mystery of the Divine

If the player meets his obstacle (as described in the list below), he gains the favor he asked for. The GM is obligated to add to that result one attendant, mysterious and inexplicable effect—a flash of light, a shooting star, the rivers run red with blood, birds speak in tongues. The breadth of the inexplicable effect should be commensurate with the effects of the prayer.

Failed in Prayer

Miracles aren't that common, and Faith tests are more often failed than succeeded. Generally, the end result should be that the pleas of the faithful go unheard by the distant gods. However, the GM is welcome to intercede during a failed Faith test. The character has sent forth a powerful call, and perhaps another entity has heard and responded? Perhaps the character has actually angered the deity with his prattle, and the irate god lashes out with a hex or plague? These effects should be used sparingly, but I'm confident when I say that the average GM will have no trouble playing god now and again.
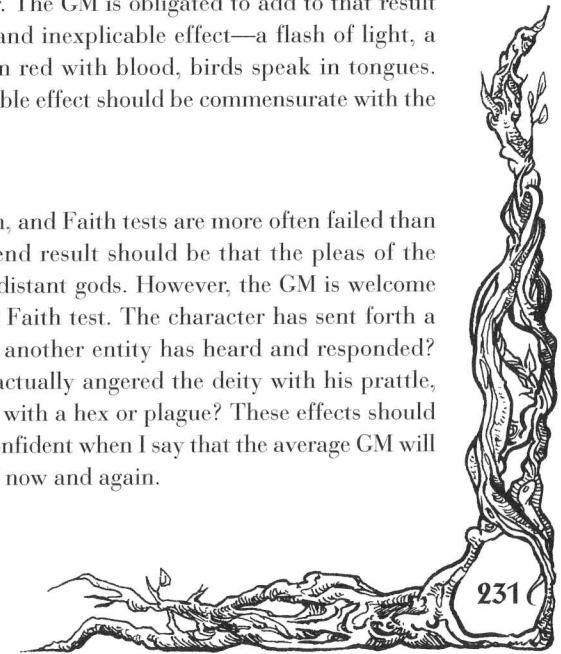
Believer vs Infidel

At the outset of the game, the priest player and the GM should determine if the prayers of the Faithful work on all characters in the game, or only those who carry a Belief, trait or superstition in the faith (or directly against the faith).

Allowing priests to affect all characters gives them great sway and power. This is fine for certain modes of play. Forcing priests to rely on only those who believe creates tremendous opportunity for dramatic conflict as the character attempts to convert others to his ways. Either way, the choice is yours.

Divine Intervention

What follows is a recommended list of prayer effects and their obstacles. Pick and choose those that are appropriate. For example, in one of my long running games only Major Miracles work. None of the lesser prayers have any effect whatsoever. Players and GMs should hammer out any guidelines before play.

Blessing— Ob 3. The priest may grant other devotees prowess and boons. He may bless a person, beast, device or tool (depending on his religious idiom) and grant +1D to a stat, skill, Health or Steel for the duration of an intent.

Aid— Ob 4. When the physical body lacks, a priest calls upon his master to grant him the forbearance and ability to succeed in his name. Add extra successes from the Faith test as dice to any skill, stat, Steel or Health test. Choose what is aided at the time the prayer is spoken. The prayer can be cast in advance and will "wait" to release itself until the proper ability is tested.

Hindrance— Ob 4-6. (Obstacle varies depending on the number of foes. Ob 4 for one, Ob 5 for two, Ob 6 three.) When the enemies of the Faith rush forward in great mass to overwhelm the faithful, god may raise his hand against them and cause them to stumble, fall or cower. This prayer momentarily immobilizes its targets—their limbs become leaden and their muscles flaccid. The effect lasts for actions equal to half the priest's Faith exponent.

Boon— Ob 5. The will divine can render the pure of spirit remarkable and potent. This prayer makes an ability open-ended until a scene is completed. Pronounce the ability and the task when the prayer is spoken.

Guidance— Ob 5. When the way is lost, the priest may ask to know the right path. This prayer can be used in a more metaphorical sense as well.

Minor Miracle— Ob 5. When it is dark, we pray for light; when sorcerers chant, we pray their spells be broken; when the blade is snapped, we pray that it be made whole; when blood ebbs from the wound, we pray that it be closed.

Purification— Ob 5. With the touch of his hand, the priest may drive out rot and lesser evil spirits (Will or Strength B5 and lower).

Consecration— Ob 6. A lengthy prayer can be offered to mark a place as holy and sacrosanct—protected from the ill will of spirits and demons. The consecration will bar spirits and demons whose Will is lower than the Faith attribute of the consecrating priest.

Inspiration— Ob 7. A priest may call upon his deity for a revelation or knowledge. This is a dangerous prayer because a divinity knows much and will often reveal that which the priest did not intend to learn.

Intercession— Ob 8. This mighty miracle brings the hand of god down to pluck the devotee from danger (or pluck the danger from the devotee).

A priest is about to be run down by a galloping knight. There is no hope of escape—but miraculously the knight falls from his saddle as he charges! Alternately, a priest is about to be shot down by an assassin—but the murderer's bow string snaps! Huzzah!

Miracle— Ob 10. When all hope is lost, when the cataclysm has come, we pray for the power divine to manifest and save us. This is the big one—the column of scourging fire, the parting of the seas, the raging storm that destroys the fleet.
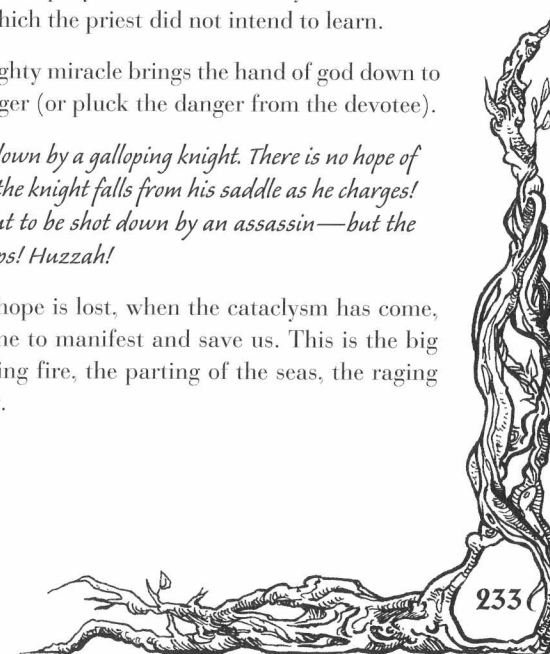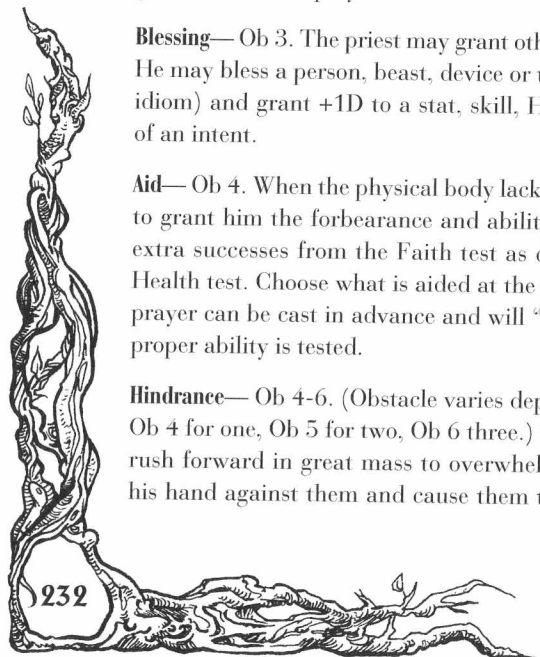
Prayer Effects

Unlike Sorcery and nearly every other ability in the game, when Faith meets its obstacle, success is total. There aren't degrees of success here. (Except for Aid.) When rot is driven out, it's gone. All of it. When the path is found, there's no question *for the priest* that he's found the truth.

Prayer vs Sorcery

In many instances, Faith and the Gift of Sorcery are at odds. In my campaign, I allow a Minor Miracle to be used as a "spellbreaker" type prayer. If the obstacle is met, the Minor Miracle can strip a wizard of a sustained spell or interrupt/neutralize the casting of a spell in progress.

Pray and Fight!

If a prayer is used in melee, it counts as speech (a tandem action) and does not cost actions. Be sure to follow the speech guidelines—*a few short words per volley at most*. In the Fight! mechanics, Faith counts as Presence Origin—always the longest weapon.

Prayer vs Bows

When using "battle" prayers in the Range and Cover rules, Faith is considered to have the following positioning dice: Minor Miracle, Purification, Hindrance and Blessing, +1D. Intercession, +4D. Major Miracle, +6D. Opponents of the faithful may not take cover dice.

Join Us in Prayer

Faithful characters may help other Faithful characters using the standard helping rules. Usually the religion limits the number of priests who can be involved in a prayer. For example, only one priest says mass, but it takes two to perform an exorcism. Believers may also help. Those with a Belief in the faith grant +1D helping die for every *20* accumulated Will dice.

If five believers are present each with a Will of 4, they grant 1D of help total.

Stigmata

As the priest's Faith advances, he becomes more intertwined with the divine. His Faith begins to have physical manifestations, setting him apart from the common believer.

At exponent 6 and lower, the priest will occasionally exhibit some bizarre and miraculous telltales—stigmata, speaking in tongues, weeping uncontrollably or some other aspect of his god/religion.

At exponent 7, he develops physical markings or undeniable evidence on his body. At exponent 8, one physical feature is distorted or exaggerated—baldness, elongated ears, becoming a eunuch, etc. At exponent 9, an aura or halo manifests. The exact manifestations are up to the player and GM, taking into account the context of the game and the idiom of the deity in question.

Transcends, Ascends or Descends

When a priest's Faith exponent reaches 10, he's become too holy and powerful to walk this plane. No longer can he be concerned with the small struggles and toils of men. Suddenly, his eyes are forced open to a wonderful and awful panorama. It is into this divine spectacle he steps and forever leaves the world of the living, gone to join his god.
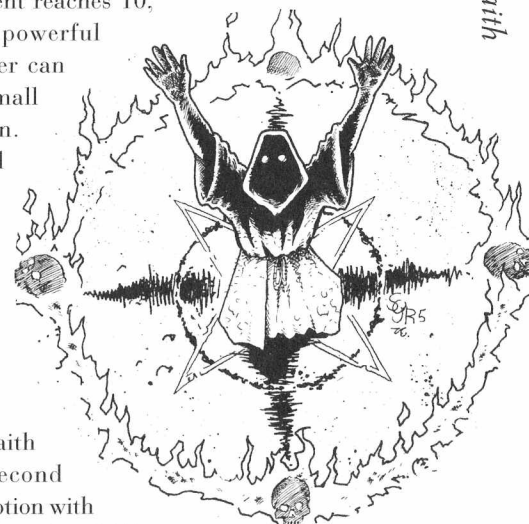
Aura and Faith

It is an Ob 1 test to detect Faith with Aura Reading and Second Sight/Magesense. (Ob 2 Perception with just Magesense or Second Sight and no skill.)

Faith effects can be detected just like spells: 10 minus Faith obstacle is the Perception obstacle for Second Sight or Magesense.

Advancing Faith

Only *successful* Faith tests count toward advancement. ⊕
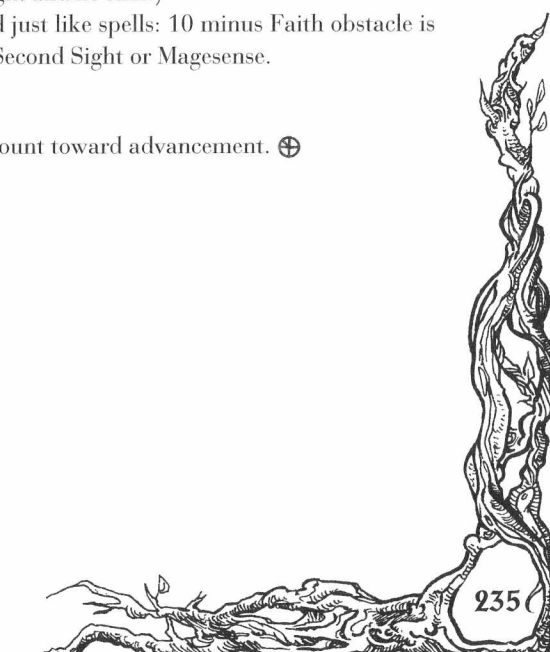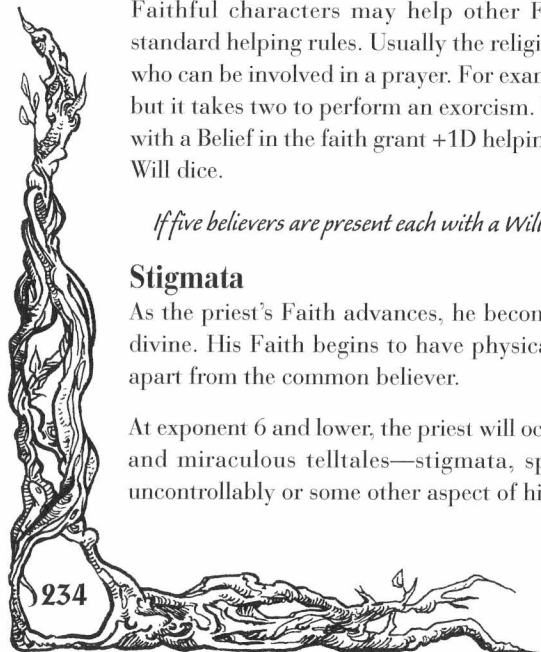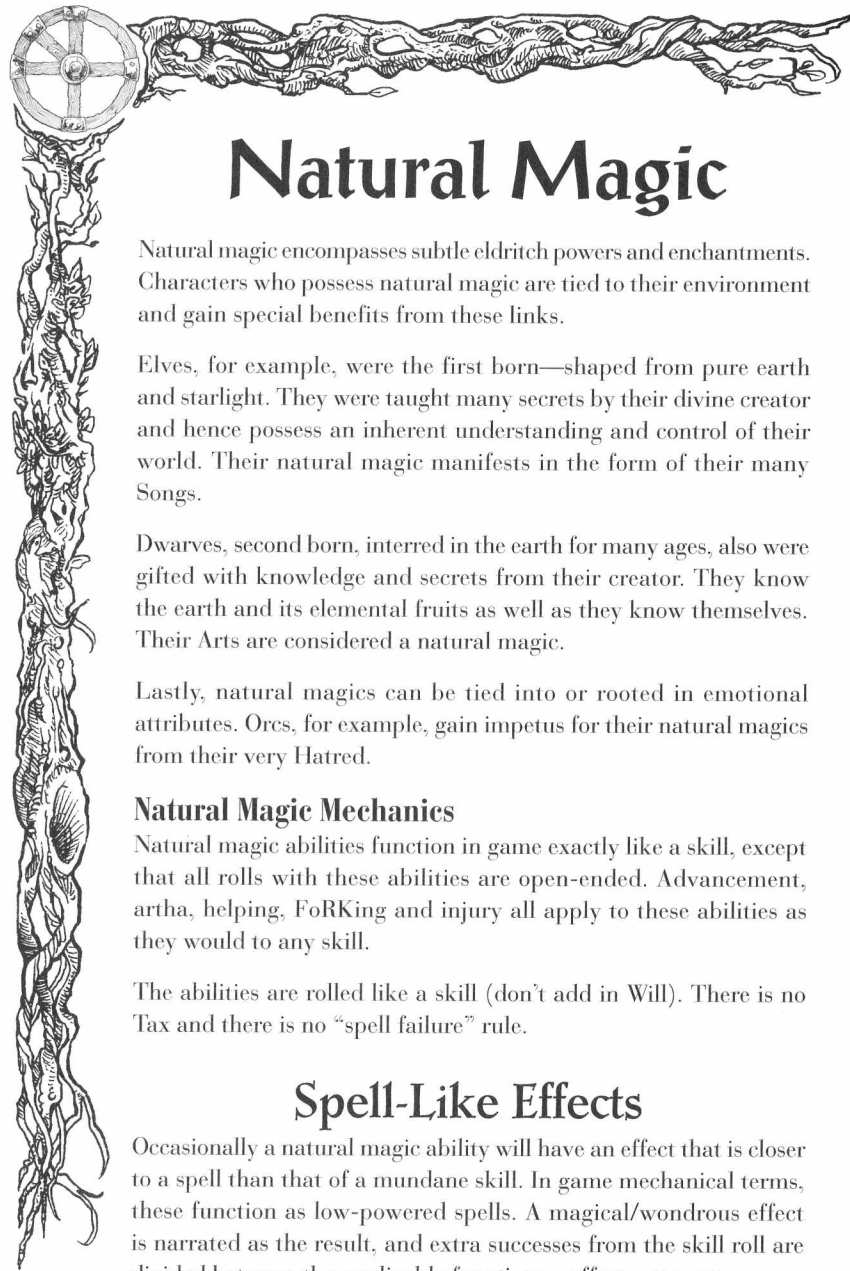
Natural Magic

Natural magic encompasses subtle eldritch powers and enchantments. Characters who possess natural magic are tied to their environment and gain special benefits from these links.

Elves, for example, were the first born—shaped from pure earth and starlight. They were taught many secrets by their divine creator and hence possess an inherent understanding and control of their world. Their natural magic manifests in the form of their many Songs.

Dwarves, second born, interred in the earth for many ages, also were gifted with knowledge and secrets from their creator. They know the earth and its elemental fruits as well as they know themselves. Their Arts are considered a natural magic.

Lastly, natural magics can be tied into or rooted in emotional attributes. Orcs, for example, gain impetus for their natural magics from their very Hatred.

Natural Magic Mechanics

Natural magic abilities function in game exactly like a skill, except that all rolls with these abilities are open-ended. Advancement, artha, helping, FoRKing and injury all apply to these abilities as they would to any skill.

The abilities are rolled like a skill (don't add in Will). There is no Tax and there is no "spell failure" rule.

Spell-Like Effects

Occasionally a natural magic ability will have an effect that is closer to a spell than that of a mundane skill. In game mechanical terms, these function as low-powered spells. A magical/wondrous effect is narrated as the result, and extra successes from the skill roll are divided between the applicable functions—effect, area, etc.

The individual natural magic abilities are described in the Character Burner. Dwarves, Elves and Orcs each have access to natural magic.

Example Natural Magic Spells

Air of Gates
Ob: See Description

This is a special song an Elf sings to a door or gate. The singer may ask one gate in his Presence, "What lies beyond?" And he will be answered.

Obstacle: Fence gates, Ob 1. Cabin doors, Ob 2. House doors, Ob 3. Doors of a great hall, Ob 4. Fortress gate, Ob 5. Castle gate, Ob 6. City gates, Ob 7. Gates of the realm, Ob 8.

Actions: 25 x the obstacle

Air of Gates is very much like a sorcerous spell. However, to invoke this magical ability, the Elf player rolls only the skill dice for Air of Gates. He does not have the benefit of adding in his Will. Nor does he risk Tax or any kind of spell failure. Note that the skill ability does have a pre-determined casting time.

or…

Black-Metal Artifice
Root: Will/Agility

This is the skill with which Dwarves create all their mundane and household metals. However, the Artificer knows a secret or two and may imbue even pots and horseshoes with intense quality. Using the obstacles listed below, a Dwarf can create various "tool kits." If he so desires he may increase his obstacles by +2 Ob and grant the final product a special +1D bonus to all skill tests in which the tools are used.

Obstacles: Horseshoes, Ob 1. Mason/Stone Art tools, Ob 2. Cook's tools, Ob 2. Blacksmith/Black-Metal Art tools, Ob 2. Armorer/Weaponsmith/War Art tools, Ob 3. Khirurgeon's tools, Ob 4.

FoRKs: White-Metal Artifice, War Art

Skill Type: Craftsman   **Tools:** Yes!

Black-Metal Artifice is a simple natural magic that turns a regular skill—Blacksmithing—into an open-ended and potent ability. ⊕
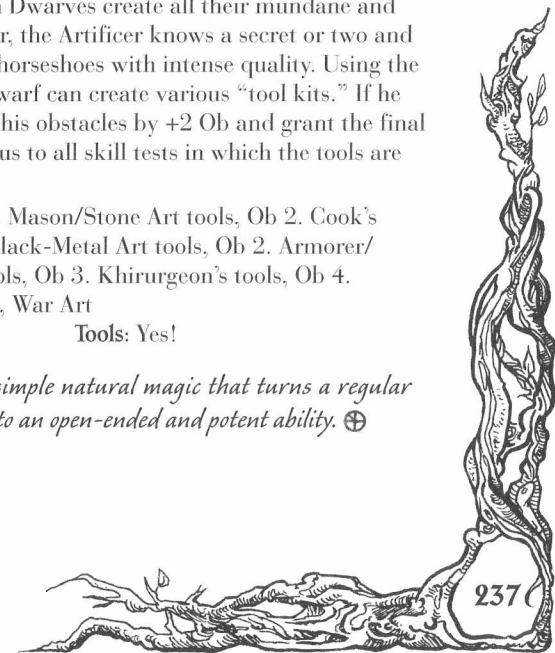
Measurement, Distance and Movement

The Pace

The *pace* is the standard measure of distance in Burning Wheel. It represents the distance of one stride, heel to toe, for an average man. For our purposes, it's a standard measurement. All paces, whether for Dwarf or Troll, are the same distance.

Distance

Ranges, lengths, depths, distances and rates of movement are measured in paces.

A hunting bow has a maximum effective range of 100 paces in Burning Wheel. Dwarves are a pace and a half tall, Men are just under two paces, Elves are two paces tall, Trolls are three.

For equivalency's sake, we say that a pace contains three feet and that there are 1,760 paces to a mile. However, it's best not to get too precise with actual distance in Burning Wheel. Paces are only meant to be used as a rough measuring stick.

Rate of Movement

We have a fairly simple system in Burning Wheel for figuring out how quickly a character can cover ground. Multiply the character's Speed exponent by how fast he is running. This tells us *about* how many paces he moves in three seconds (or one exchange in Fight!).

Each body type has a multiplier that represents its *maximum* rate while sprinting. Not his average rate, but his complete, knees-to-chin top speed.

An Elven Ranger with a Speed of B6 sprints 21 paces in three seconds. If that character needs to cross 100 paces of open ground quickly, we know that it would take him about 14 seconds.

Paces Sprinted in an Exchange

The math for Speed exponents 1-9 is figured in the table below. Elves, Men, Orcs, Trolls and Roden have a x3.5 Speed Multiplier

Speed	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9
(x3.5) Paces	3.5	7	10.5	14	17.5	21	24.5	28	31.5

When my character with a B4 Speed fails a Steel test and I opt to have him Run and Scream for a whole exchange, he must sprint away from the source of his distress. If we needed to measure that, we can say he ran about 14 paces before recovering his wits.

Dwarves, Spiders and Horses

Most creatures move at the rates described above, but a few types do not—Dwarves, Great Spiders, Great Wolves and Horses to name a few. Their movement multipliers differ from those of Orcs, Elves, Trolls and Men, but the basic concepts are the same.

Multiplier and Positioning

As mentioned above, some creatures are simply built to run faster than others. The Speed multiplier represents this. In the positioning rules for melee and missile combat, the character with the higher multiplier gets +1D to his positioning test. It doesn't matter how far the character could move if we measured it. What matters is that one character/creature is more mobile than the other.

If there are *more* than two multipliers in play, the highest should get +2D, the next highest +1D and the lowest gets no bonus. If one character's Speed multiplier is more than double his opponent's, the GM may grant him a +2D bonus to the positioning tests rather than the +1D bonus.

The Chase is On

If one character is pursuing another, make a versus Speed test. Do not measure Speed rate vs Speed rate. The chase is a single positioning test made to resolve an "I'm running away from him" conflict.

Advantages in the Chase

Grant +1D for each relevant advantage: Higher Reflexes, higher Speed multiplier, higher Forte, and a head start. If there's nowhere to hide—like being chased on salt flats—then the pursuer gains +2D.

Other advantages are applicable as well—like being better suited to the terrain—but those are situational and up to the GM.

FoRKs in the Chase

Applicable FoRKs like Streetwise, Stealthy, Inconspicuous. Climbing, Rigging or other appropriate Wises are perfectly legitimate.

Pursuer Wins the Chase Test

This means that your character has caught up to his quarry—at full tilt—and is in position to do one thing/action. Take a shot, dive tackle him, shout a warning, whatever. This must be taken as a separate skill or stat test at a +2 Ob disadvantage. Use the appropriate mechanics to resolve that action/conflict. If this fails to stop the quarry, then the chase is on again. Another Speed test is made.

Pursued Wins the Chase Test

If the pursued wins the test, he gets away. Abiding by the Let it Ride rules, there's no retesting. So after a lengthy chase, the pursued pulls away, diving into a crowd or just running off. You're going to have to find him another way.

Tied Results

Unless the tie can be broken by a call-on trait, another length is run and another roll is made.

Linked Tests for Extended Chases

If a player wants to undertake an extended, multi-part chase/race, the GM should outline the number of tests required to participate. Winning a test gains +1D to the next test. In an extended chase, two consecutive wins puts the pursued out of reach of the chaser. ⊕
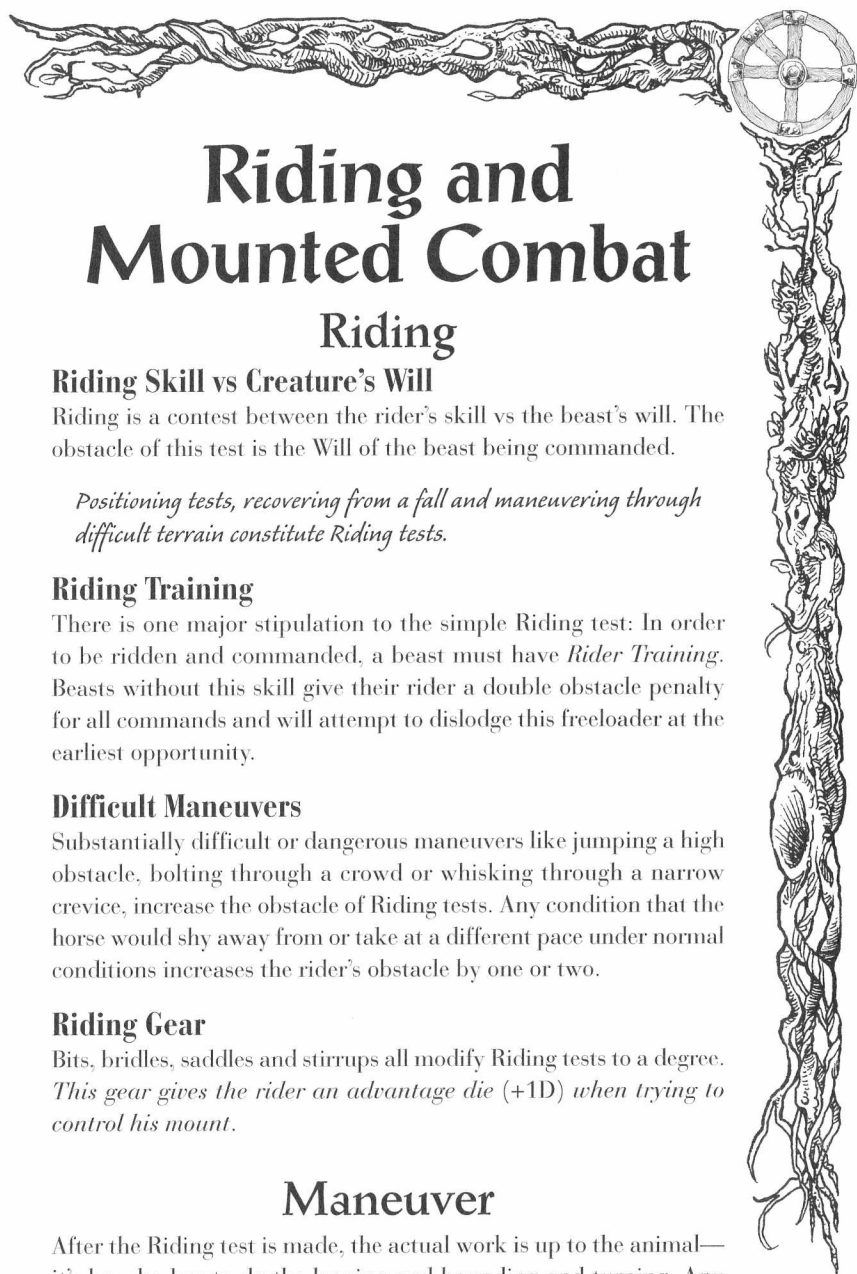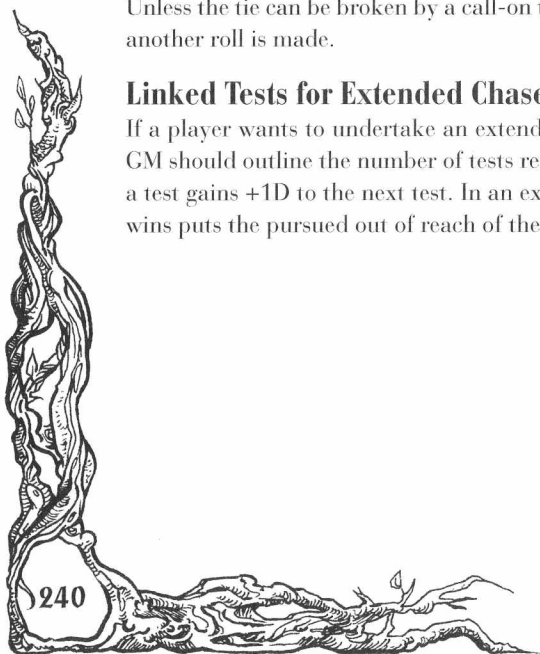
Riding and Mounted Combat
Riding

Riding Skill vs Creature's Will

Riding is a contest between the rider's skill vs the beast's will. The obstacle of this test is the Will of the beast being commanded.

Positioning tests, recovering from a fall and maneuvering through difficult terrain constitute Riding tests.

Riding Training

There is one major stipulation to the simple Riding test: In order to be ridden and commanded, a beast must have *Rider Training*. Beasts without this skill give their rider a double obstacle penalty for all commands and will attempt to dislodge this freeloader at the earliest opportunity.

Difficult Maneuvers

Substantially difficult or dangerous maneuvers like jumping a high obstacle, bolting through a crowd or whisking through a narrow crevice, increase the obstacle of Riding tests. Any condition that the horse would shy away from or take at a different pace under normal conditions increases the rider's obstacle by one or two.

Riding Gear

Bits, bridles, saddles and stirrups all modify Riding tests to a degree. *This gear gives the rider an advantage die (+1D) when trying to control his mount.*

Maneuver

After the Riding test is made, the actual work is up to the animal—it's he who has to do the leaping and bounding and turning. Any maneuver checks are made using the creature's Speed. The Riding test acts as a linked test for this.

Speed Test Obstacles for Maneuver

Sharp Turns	Ob 1
Clearing a low obstacle	Ob 1
1-pace high leap	Ob 2
2-pace high leap	Ob 4
3-pace sprinting broad leap	Ob 2
Walking, moving slowly	—
Moving quickly	+1 Ob
Moving at a full gallop	+2 Ob
Broken ground	+2 Ob
Forest or city streets	+1 Ob
Snow or sand	+2 Ob
Deep snow or mud	+4 Ob
Ice	+3 Ob

Botched Speed Tests

Failing a Speed test for maneuver usually indicates that the horse stumbles, weaves or balks. However, with a rider on its back, this becomes more complicated.

A horse that fails a Speed test on a Difficult or Challenging test (an obstacle one less than, equal to or greater than the horse's Speed) will either stumble and roll, or collide with whatever it's trying to get around.

Rolling

It is an Ob 4 Riding test to stay mounted after a roll. If a horse rolls on soft ground, the rider is in little danger. To determine if any damage is done to the rider, use the Thrown Against the Wall rules in the Materials section. Use the horse's Power and the ground for the weapon. For these purposes: Soft earth and mud have -3 Strength, plush grass has a -1 Strength, hard-packed dirt roads have a 0 Strength, Rocks and pavement have a 4 Strength.

Collision

Use the Thrown Against the Wall rules for collisions. The horse's Speed is the Power of the attack. The material collided with is the weapon. Other horses or animals have a 0 Strength for these purposes. So a collision with another animal essentially counts as a bare-fisted Strike. The successes by which the maneuver is failed count as the successes toward the Strike. One or two is Incidental, three or four is Mark, five or more is Superb.

Pursuit

When tailing, chasing or pursuing another ridden beast make a versus test between the pursuer's and prey's *Riding* skills. Modify the skills as listed below:

Advantages in the Pursuit Test

In General
+1D to the animal with the higher Sprint multiplier
+1D if the rider has Affinity for Animals or Low Speech
+1D to the animal with higher Reflexes
+1D to the rider with higher Reflexes
+1D to the beast with higher Speed

In urban and forested situations:
+1D if the mount has Stealth or Inconspicuous
+1D if the rider has the Stealth or Inconspicuous skills
+1D for the beastie with smaller body size

In rural and highway situations:
+1D to the mount with the highest Forte

Untrained Fighting From Horseback

Fighting while mounted is difficult and awkward, and requires special training to master. Characters without Mounted Combat suffer a +1 Ob disadvantage to all melee maneuvers while mounted.

A riding beast must also have Mounted Combat training. If the mount is untrained, then *it must make a Steel test at the start of every exchange while in combat.*

Avoiding

Avoiding while mounted is tricky. A character may spend his action to tell his mount to Avoid immediately. Horses may only Avoid with a Close or Withdraw action scripted. Wolves and spiders do not suffer this penalty. Mounted *characters* may attempt to duck blows directed at them with the Avoid action. This incurs a +2 Ob penalty.

Obstacle Penalties While the Beast Moves:

- +1 Ob if the beast is moving or Maintaining
- The rider suffers an *additional* +2 Ob if the beast is Closing or Withdrawing.

Mounted Combat Rules

*"Only fools constantly aim their blows against the man
and not against the horse."*

Saddles and Stirrups

In order for the rider to engage in Mounted Combat, the beast must be equipped with a saddle and stirrups. Melee maneuvers without them are performed at a double obstacle penalty.

Commanding Your Mount in Fight!

In the Fight! mechanics, positioning tests are meant to reflect the rider cueing his mount. No actions need be spent to position with your mount. However, telling your mount to act—Bite, Push, Avoid etc.—requires a Riding test and that an accompanying action be scripted. Unless otherwise commanded, a mount will continue repeating his last orders.

When scripting an action that rider and mount perform in tandem, like a Push or a Charge, use the mount to position and roll his applicable stat to act. The rider only needs to spend his action commanding his steed. He may also act himself if he's got a second action this volley. When acting in tandem like this, use the mount's Natural Defenses unless an attack is very specifically directed at the Rider. (A tackle from above, for example.)

Horses may not Counterstrike or Throw and are at +2 Ob to Lock. Wolves and spiders suffer no such penalty.

Positioning

Those trained in Mounted Combat may use their mount's Speed/Stealth for positioning tests. If the rider wishes to perform a Steel Close/ Withdraw (with his Steel, not the animal's), he must first pass a Riding test, with all attendant disadvantages, to keep control of the animal. If this test is failed, the animal bolts or shies and otherwise does not do what it's told. When positioning using a mount, make sure to take the *mount's* Speed multiplier into account. Also, use the mount's Reflexes for the bonus die if higher than the rider's.

Avoiding

Mounted combat Avoids follow the same rules as Untrained Avoids described on the previous page..

Scripting for Mounts

Mounts will follow the last order given until that order is changed; one of their Beliefs, Instincts or Traits is triggered; or they are forced to make a Steel test.

Most mounts will set conditional actions and wait for orders while moving ahead. This allows them to respond quickly to their master's commands. Mounts who have already set a script and are ordered to do something not in their little plan must forfeit like any other character.

Wolves and Spiders

Great Wolves and Great Spiders tend be a bit more independent minded than horses when dealing with violent conflict and their master's commands. Often, the rider of a willful wolf will find himself at the mercy of his mount rather than being in charge of the conflict!

These creatures are intelligent and script like any other character. However, since most are trained for maximum benefit in mounted combat, they will often script defensive actions while obeying their master's orders to move.

Mounted Combat Training for Knights

Mounted Combat Training allows the character to ignore the +1 Ob disadvantage for fighting from horseback. And it reduces the mounted Close/Withdraw penalty to +1 Ob. A trained character has no penalty while walking or Maintaining.

Lance… Lance….

A lance is a Power 4, VA 2, Longest, Unwieldy weapon.

Lanced Charge Positioning

The mounted combatant knows the mechanics of the lanced charge. A lance is a specially constructed spear that is held couched under the shoulder and against the torso while charging. In order to effect a lance charge, the rider must be seated in saddle, harness and stirrups. A Close must be scripted, and the mount is considered to be moving at top speed. To reposition for the next charge, a Withdraw must be subsequently scripted.

Lance to Lance

When performing a lance-to-lance charge—both opponents are Closing—it is best to use the conventions laid out in the Range and Cover chapter. Make the positioning test to Close with the beast's Speed, plus the rider's skill as help, plus FoRKs and advantages. The

winner has outmaneuvered his opponent and may Strike him with his lance. Resolve the Strike as per normal. A tie means both combatants Strike at the same time.

Unhorse Him!

When charging another mounted fighter while using a lance, successes to hit count as a Push attack in addition to the Strike damage. The Natural Defenses against the Push attack are Riding skill or Power (defender's choice), not Speed. If a character is pushed one pace in the saddle, then he is partially dislodged and must spend an action to reseat himself. If he does not, he suffers +2 Ob to all tests until he puts his arse back in the saddle. If a character is pushed by two or more paces while in the saddle, he is unhorsed and hits the ground. The ground hit also counts as a Throw for purposes of damage. Use the lance successes (subtract the Riding/Power Natural Defenses) as the successes of the Throw. The Speed of the lancer's horse is the Power of the attack.

Lance to Sword

In Fight!, if the mounted warrior using a lance *wins* a Close positioning test against an opponent wielding a shorter weapon, and the actions in play are his Strike versus an opposing Strike, Disarm, Charge, Feint, Lock, Push or Great Strike, the mounted lancer may perform his action *first*—before his opponent. Block and Avoid actions use standard simultaneous timing.

When using the Counterstrike action against a Lance-Strike, divide the dice between Block and Strike as normal. Resolve the lance Strike versus the character's Block half. Then apply any damage from the lance. Then the defending character, if he's still alive and not hesitating, may riposte.
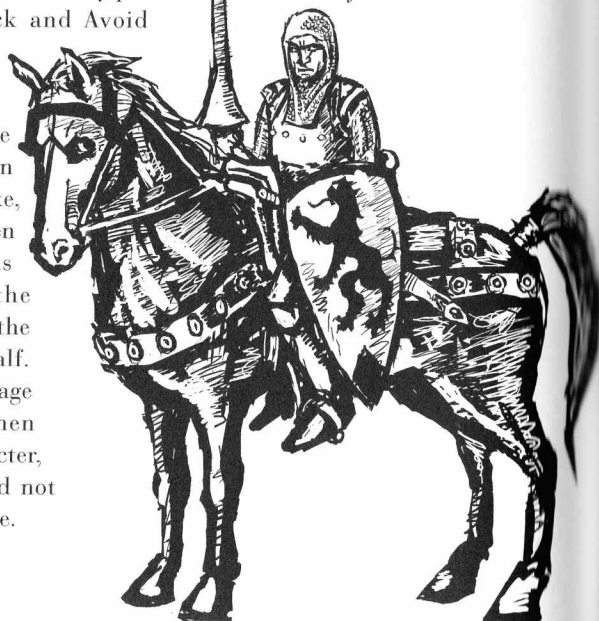
If the lancer *loses* a Close positioning test against a shorter weapon, the action timing is resolved using the standard mechanics.

The Weight of the Straight Blade

Downward-stroke hacking, slashing and crushing weapons gain a +1D advantage to their weapon skill due to their extra momentum and follow-through capability while mounted.

The Curved Blade

Swords built with curving blades maximize the height and full swing advantage granted by being mounted. Characters wielding a saber, scimitar or katana gain a +2D bonus to their weapon skill while mounted.

Spears

Spears are held over the shoulder and thrust into the target as the mount passes by at speed. Doing so while Closing gains +1D to skill, +1 Power and a +1 VA bonus. However, spears used in this manner to achieve this bonus are "dropped" after the Strike. They should rightly be lodged in your opponent's chest as you ride past!

It's Good to be King!

Attacks from horseback are directed at the head, shoulders, chest and arms of opponents on the ground. The legs *cannot* be chosen by the target as an available location against a mounted adversary. Choose arms, torso or head.

Beating the Horse and Horseman

A beast and rider count as one target for purposes of hit location with melee weapons. The rider may declare himself or his steed as the area to be hit—and he may specify which location. However, for the attacker, it only costs one success to move from rider to mount. Moving a blow to the head of a mounted rider costs two successes. Moving a blow along the length of the mount costs two successes (from head to haunches, for example).

Mounted Combat for Bowmen

Avoiding and positioning for mounted bowmen suffers the same strictures as described under Untrained Mounted Combat. They may use the beast's Speed to position. Ignore the +1 Ob penalty for acting while mounted. Use the following obstacle modifiers for shooting
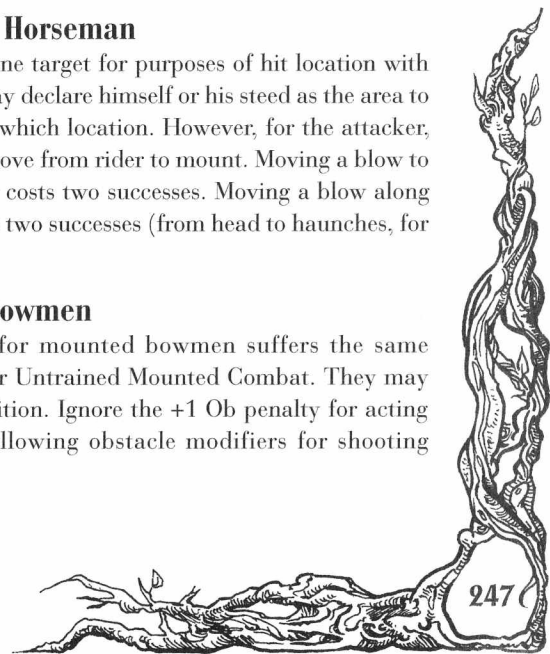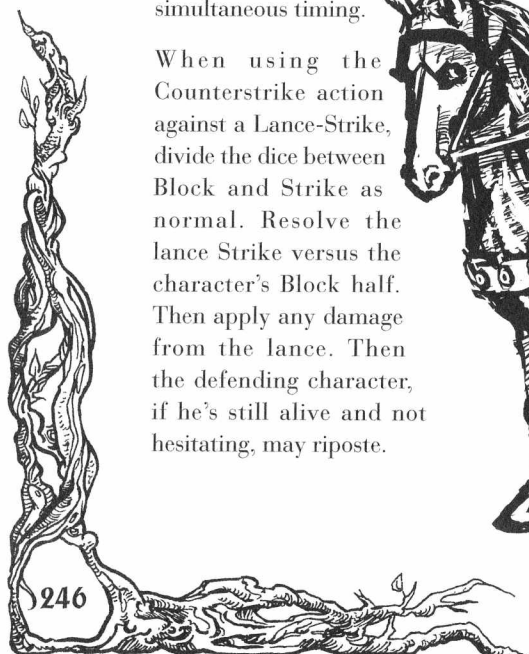
while mounted: +1 Ob shooting while Closing; +2 Ob shooting while Withdrawing. Mounted bowmen suffer a +1 Ob penalty to all other actions while Closing, Withdrawing or Maintaining.

Mounted bowmen may add a +1D advantage to their Bow skill due to their superior elevation when shooting unmounted or low to the ground targets.

They may not use the *Lance...Lance...* rules. They may use The Weight of the Straight Blade, The Curved Blade, Spears, It's Good to be King and Beating the Horse rules.

Shooting at the Mount or the Rider
It is up to the shooter to decide if he is targeting the rider or the mount. The chest/body is the main target for both rider and ridden. Moving the location costs one success as per the standard hit location rules.

Riding and Steel

When a mount fails his Steel test, he is free to react like any other character—flee, fall or stand and drool. However, the rider does have some say in the matter. A successful Riding test at an obstacle equal to the beast's Will allows the *rider* to choose the Steel test result. It takes one action to make this Riding test. Thus, a rider can change a Steel result already in progress.

Bolting, Shying, Rolling and Rearing
Failed Steel tests for mounts are: bolt, shy, rear or roll. Bolting is "run screaming," shying and rearing are "stand and drool." Rolling is a "fall prone" action and mounts will often do this if wounded.

If a mount rears or bucks, the rider must make an Ob 2 Riding test to prevent being thrown.

Horse Movement Table

Speed	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9
(x8) Paces	8	16	24	32	40	48	56	64	72
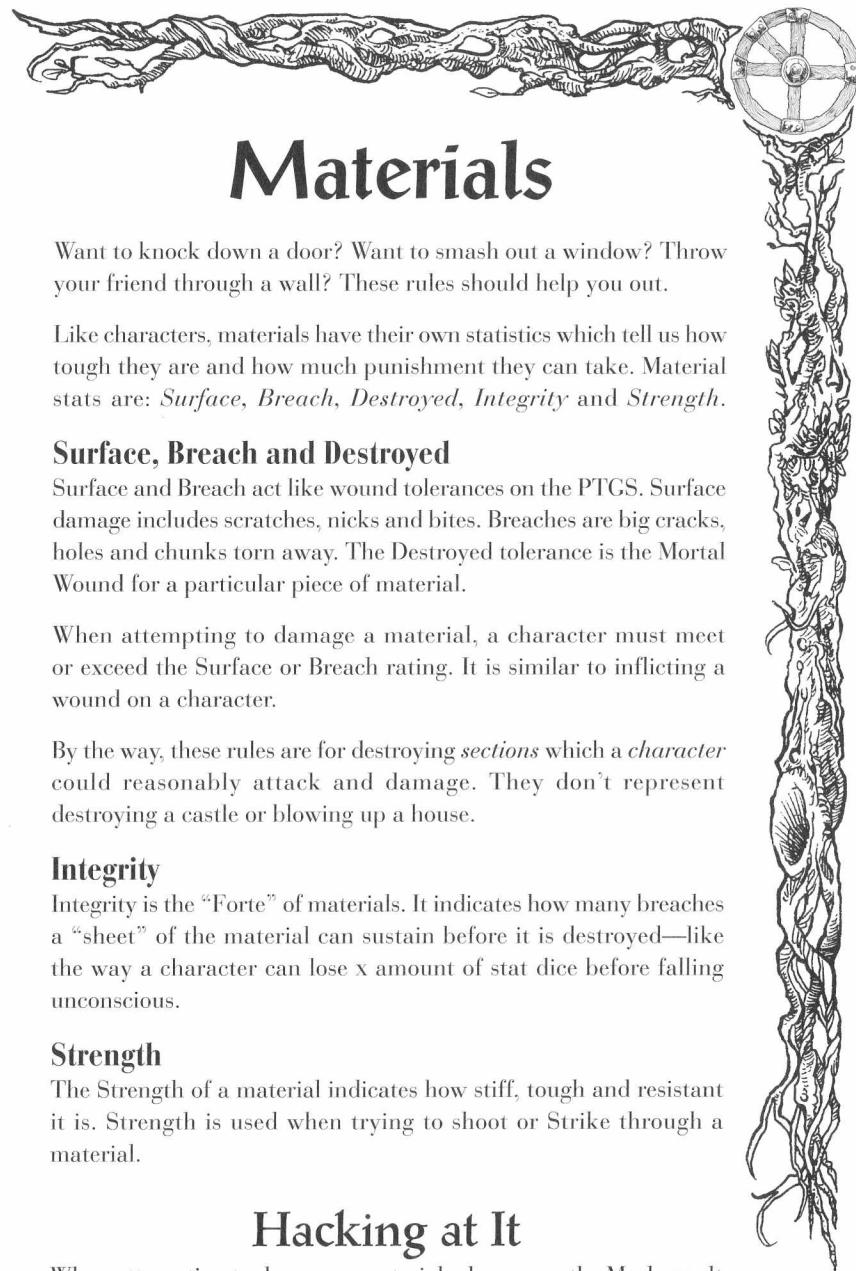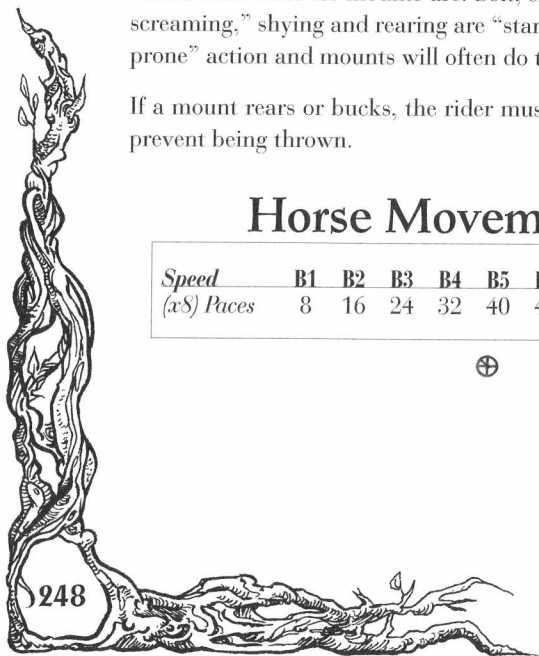
Materials

Want to knock down a door? Want to smash out a window? Throw your friend through a wall? These rules should help you out.

Like characters, materials have their own statistics which tell us how tough they are and how much punishment they can take. Material stats are: *Surface, Breach, Destroyed, Integrity* and *Strength*.

Surface, Breach and Destroyed
Surface and Breach act like wound tolerances on the PTGS. Surface damage includes scratches, nicks and bites. Breaches are big cracks, holes and chunks torn away. The Destroyed tolerance is the Mortal Wound for a particular piece of material.

When attempting to damage a material, a character must meet or exceed the Surface or Breach rating. It is similar to inflicting a wound on a character.

By the way, these rules are for destroying *sections* which a *character* could reasonably attack and damage. They don't represent destroying a castle or blowing up a house.

Integrity
Integrity is the "Forte" of materials. It indicates how many breaches a "sheet" of the material can sustain before it is destroyed—like the way a character can lose x amount of stat dice before falling unconscious.

Strength
The Strength of a material indicates how stiff, tough and resistant it is. Strength is used when trying to shoot or Strike through a material.

Hacking at It

When attempting to damage a material, always use the Mark result of the attack/weapon. There is no need to roll the dice; just use the Mark result. If the Mark is equal to or greater than the Breach rating, then the character has punched a hole in the material. If the attack is less than the Breach but equal to or greater than the

Surface damage rating, then the character has scratched, chipped or marred the material. Three Surface "scratches" equal one Breach, just as three Superficials equal -1D for wounds on characters. If the material suffers Breaches (loses dice) equal to its Integrity, that "sheet" or section is broken, shattered or destroyed. If the character's Mark result is equal to or higher than the Destroyed rating, this section of the material is wrecked, ripped or ruined, and no longer a problem or in the way.

Material Statistics

Type	Surface	Breach	Destroyed	Integrity	Strength
Cloth	B4	B5	B10	3	0
Pottery	B3	B4	B5	1	0
Thin Wall	B4	B6	B10	4	1
Glass Window	B3	B5	B6	1	1
Heavy Door	B5	B8	B12	2	2
Brick Wall	B6	B8	B13	1	3
Slate Flooring	B6	B9	B11	1	3
Granite Wall	B8	B14	B16	3	5
Iron Sheet	B7	B12	B14	4	2
Copper Sheet	B3	B4	B10	5	1
Earthworks	B3	B10	B16	8	4

Breaking Through

To punch through a wall, a character must be able to Breach the material. If the Power of the attack is enough to cause a Breach, then the attack goes through and may hit whatever is on the other side. The material Strength is tacked on to the weapon's Add when factoring how much damage was done to the target on the other side. It is hard to punch through walls and kill someone.

There is at least a +2 Ob disadvantage when punching through a wall (or something similar) to hit your opponent.

Roy has a Power of B8 (whoa!) and is trying to punch through a plaster and wood wall to surprise his dogged pursuer, Deckard. The Breach rating for this wall (thin wall: Surface B4; Breach B6; Integrity 4; Strength 1) is B6. This is less than Roy's Power, so he is able to punch through. Roy Strikes at Deckard with an Ob 3 (Base 1 plus 2 for the attacking through penalty). Roy gets 5 successes—normally enough to push the strike from an Incidental to a Mark (2 successes over the obstacle for an Add 2 strike). However, since he is punching through a wall, he combines the Strength of 1 of the material with his own Add of 2—the total Add

for his punch becomes 3. Since he only got 2 successes over his obstacle, it is not enough to push it from Incidental to Mark. However, he still smashes through the wooden slats and hits Deckard with an Incidental. A B4 for super-Roy! Definitely enough for the GM to call for Deckard to make a Steel test.
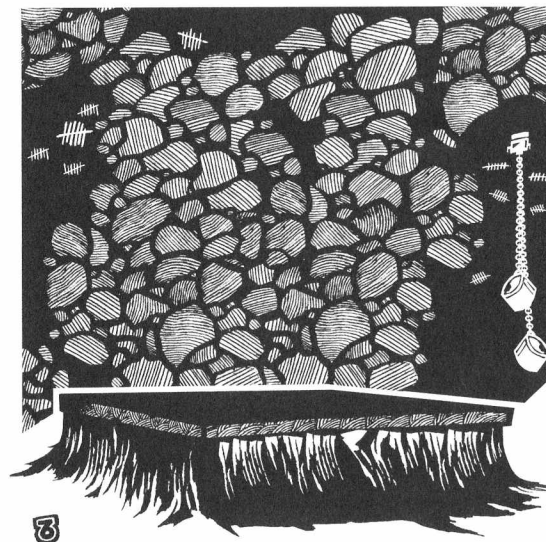
Shooting Through

Compare the Mark result of the missile or thrown weapon with the Breach rating of the material. If the Breach is higher, then the weapon cannot shoot through at all. If the weapon's Mark is equal or greater than the Breach, then the attacking character may attempt to hurt whoever is hiding on the other side.

Roll to hit. Factor obstacle penalties. Add +2 Ob to hit a covered part of a partially concealed character. It's +3 Ob to shoot through material at someone/thing you know is there, but can't see.

When shooting through materials, the Strength rating is subtracted from the DoF roll. If the total is zero or less the weapon still hits, but *no damage is done.*

If the weapon has a VA, subtract that from the Strength of the material. The result is the penalty to the DoF.

A hunting bow has a Mark result of B7. It may not shoot through a heavy door that has a Breach of B8. A crossbow has a Mark of B8, so it may shoot through the door. The material Strength is 2, minus 2 for the VA of the crossbow. So if the crossbow hits, the player has no penalty to the DoF.

Thrown Against the Wall

Using the Throw maneuver, a character can hurl his opponent to the ground and use the ground or wall as a weapon to do damage.

Extra successes from the Throw action count as an additional Strike, Ob 1 to hit. Add 2—one extra is an Incidental hit, three extra is a Mark, five extra is a Superb. The *Strength* of the material is the weapon. Add that to the thrower's Power and factor the IMS. Only hard armor—plating and helmets—can be used to ward off the blow. All throws have a VA 1. Power of 7 increases that by another +1!

The victim of a throw falls on his back by default. The thrower can spend an extra success to put his victim where he wants him.

Zhu Kwan throws Kyosho-Gin into the wall of the temple. Rick, Zhu's player, rolls four successes on his Throw. I roll two successes for Kyosho-Gin's Natural defenses. Therefore, he is thrown two paces. Zhu's Power is 6, the wall of this temple to Lord Earth is granite—Strength 5. Power 6 plus Strength 5 = Mark Throw result of B11, and an Incidental of B6. Zhu got two successes, enough for an Incidental hit. That's a B6 wound to Kyosho-Gin. Ouch. Had Rick got one more success, he could have killed his opponent with a B11 wound!

I state that Kyosho-Gin will fall on his ass. Rick can spends his extra success to dump him on his head. He's wearing a helmet so he'll get an armor test at a VA 1. ✛
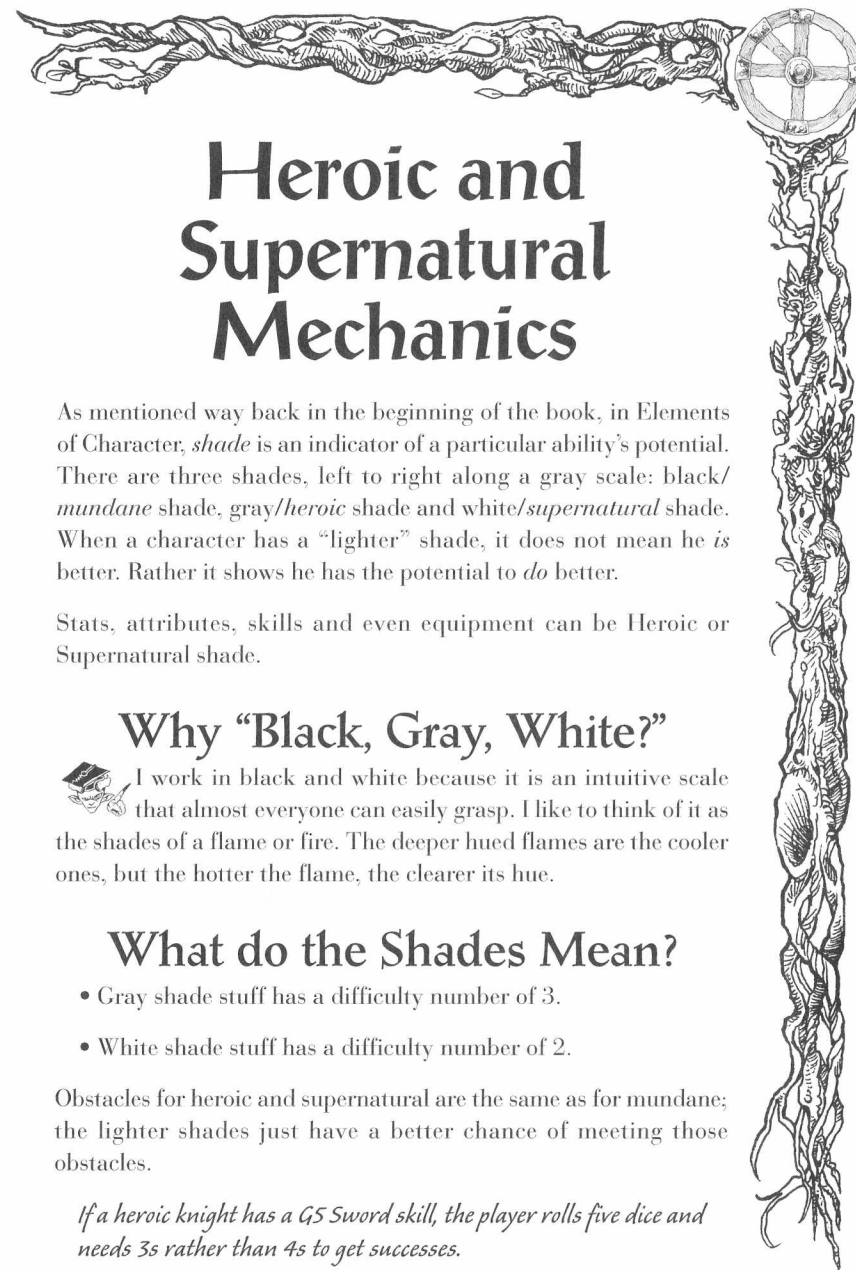
Heroic and Supernatural Mechanics

As mentioned way back in the beginning of the book, in Elements of Character, *shade* is an indicator of a particular ability's potential. There are three shades, left to right along a gray scale: black/*mundane* shade, gray/*heroic* shade and white/*supernatural* shade. When a character has a "lighter" shade, it does not mean he *is* better. Rather it shows he has the potential to *do* better.

Stats, attributes, skills and even equipment can be Heroic or Supernatural shade.

Why "Black, Gray, White?"

I work in black and white because it is an intuitive scale that almost everyone can easily grasp. I like to think of it as the shades of a flame or fire. The deeper hued flames are the cooler ones, but the hotter the flame, the clearer its hue.

What do the Shades Mean?

• Gray shade stuff has a difficulty number of 3.

• White shade stuff has a difficulty number of 2.

Obstacles for heroic and supernatural are the same as for mundane; the lighter shades just have a better chance of meeting those obstacles.

If a heroic knight has a G5 Sword skill, the player rolls five dice and needs 3s rather than 4s to get successes.

Heroic and Supernatural Stats

Roots

When a stat acts as a root for a skill, *the skill takes on the shade of the stat*. If the root comes from the combination of two or more stats, the shade is the darker of the two. Also, for mismatched shades, add two to the total before dividing.

A character with a G5 Agility and a B5 Perception opens a Surgery skill. Surgery is a Perception/Agility root—the root is half of the average of those two stats. Normally, half of the average of 5 is 2.5. This rounds down to a root of 2. However, with a gray stat the math is different: Agility counts as two greater because of its shade. So the actual numbers to average are 7 and 5. Half of their average (6) is 3.

Aptitude

Gray and white shade stats reduce aptitude—the number of tests needed to learn a skill. Gray shade reduces aptitude for skills rooted from the stat by one. White shade reduces aptitude by two.

Will

Hesitation for gray shade Will is 8 minus the exponent. Hesitation for white shade Will is 7 minus the exponent.

Forte and Bleeding

Gray shade Forte doubles the bleeding times, white shade triples them.

Power and IMS

Gray shade Power adds +2 when determining the IMS for bare fisted (or natural weaponry like claws) attacks. White shade adds +3. Gray and white shade Power do not give the characters gray and white shade damage. That requires an additional trait. If the character does have a trait to grant gray shade damage to his fists, no Power bonus is granted.

When gray or white shade Powered characters are using a mundane weapon, they may add their respective bonus. However, if the character gets no successes on a melee action—even if he starts positive but his opponent defends and reduces his successes to zero—the weapon he is wielding shatters. It's broken, gone. Get a new one.

Heroic and Supernatural Reflexes and Mortal Wound

Mortal Wound

If a character's Power and Forte are gray, his Mortal Wound is gray. Setting the Mortal Wound is discussed in the Character Burner, but suffice to say that a character with a gray Mortal Wound is very hard to kill.

Reflexes

Gray shade Reflexes is very potent in Burning Wheel. To achieve this level, a character must have a gray Perception, Agility and Speed.

In the exchange, for each action that he would normally get due to his Reflexes, he gets a second that happens at the same time.

A Character with a G3 Reflexes gets one action per volley. However, he may perform two maneuvers on each of those actions. So if his opponent Strikes, the gray-Reflexed character may Block and then Strike before his opponent would get his second action. Very nasty.

Heroic and Supernatural Skills

Having a reduced difficulty number is very useful and a potent benefit for skills. However, there is an additional benefit: Only gray and white shade abilities can create gray and white shade effects, whether the effect be a spell, a cabinet or a sword. If a lighter shade is desired, the character must have the skill shade to back it up.

The Aristeia artha, Minor Epiphany, can be very useful for this.

Heroic and Supernatural Gear

Equipment

Equipment that gives bonus dice, like balance dice, usually has its own shade. If it's the same shade as the wielder, it's no big deal—just roll all the dice together. If the equipment is a different shade, roll a different colored die to represent it.

Weapons

Gray and white shade weapons do damage in the gray and white shade on the PTGS. In fact, they are the only way to do gray and white shade damage. Need to kill that dragon? Better find a gray shade sword.

If a character wishes to do gray damage with his bare hands, he's got to find a way to turn his hands into gray shaded weapons.

Armor

All armor described in these books, except for Dwarven Mail and Masks, is black shade. Armor rolls its protection dice using its own shade.

Armor may only test against weapons of the same or darker shade. Standard armor, for example, won't protect against gray-shade weapons. Gray and white shade armor can't be damaged by darker shaded weapons. 1s don't count!

Pushing Pain into the Next Shade

As I just mentioned, you need gray shade weapons to do gray damage, and white to do white. However, it is possible for lesser beings to cross over briefly into the lighter shades. If, for example, an IMS from a Troll mattock ends up as B6, B12, B18, roll over any result higher than 16 into the next shade. So a B17 is a G1, a B18 is a G2. A G20 is a W4.

Pushing Past White

The grayscale graphic is a wheel, but W16 is the final point on the scale.
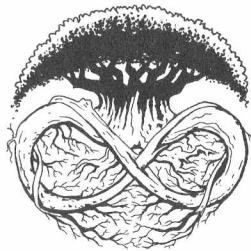
No character or creature can have a Mortal Wound higher than a W16; and W16 is a Mortal Wound for all.

Helping Dice and FoRKs

Unfortunately, once you hand your dice over to someone to help them out, those dice are rolled at the user's shade, not the helper's. There's only so much you can do for them!

This goes for FoRKs, too. FoRK dice are rolled at the shade of the skill being tested, not at the shade of the skill they are from. ⊕

Appendices

Wealth may be yours, wisdom too, and you may have beauty, but if pride touch them, all will turn to dross

—Inscription in the Great Gallery of
Le Krak des Chevaliers

Weapons Appendix
Melee Weapons

Weapon Type	Power	Add	WSpd	VA	Strike Dist.
Basic Weapons					
Bare Fist	–	2	Fast	–	Shortest
Club or Staff[1,2]	2	2	Fast	–	Long
Stone[2]	1	2	Slow	–	Shortest
Poor Quality Weapons					
Spear[1,2]	1	2	Fast	–	Longest
Sword	3	2	Slow	–	Long
Axe[1,2]	4	2	Unwieldy	1	Long
Knife, Shiv	0	1	Fast	–	Shortest
Run-of-the-Mill Weapons					
Hatchet	3	2	Slow	–	Short
Small Sword	2	2	Fast	–	Short
Spear[1,2]	2	2	Fast	1	Longest
Sword[2]	3	2	Slow	–	Long
Light Axe[2]	3	2	Slow	1	Long
Footman's Axe[1,2]	4	2	Slow	1	Long
Hammer[1,2]	4	2	Unwieldy	2	Long
Dirk	1	1	Fast	–	Shortest
Mace[2]	2	2	Slow	2	Short
Polearm Axe Strike[1,2]	4	2	Unwieldy	1	Longer
Polearm Thrust[1,2]	2	2	Fast	–	Longer
Superior Quality Weapons					
Spear[1,2]	2	2	Fast	2	Longest
Sword[2]	3	2	Slow	1	Long
Sweet Axe[1,2]	4	2	Slow	2	Long
Hammer[1,2]	3	2	Slow	2	Long
Dagger	1	1	Fast	1	Shortest
Great Mace[1,2]	2	2	Slow	3	Long
Polearm Axe Strike[1,2]	4	2	Slow	2	Longer
Polearm Thrust[1,2]	2	2	Fast	1	Longer

Notes: 1: Two-handed, may not be used with a shield. 2: May Great Strike

Miscellaneous Weapon Gear

Weapon Type	Power	Add	WSpd	VA	Strike Dist.
Hilt/Pommel[a]	1	2	Slow	–	Shortest
Spiked Pommel[b]	1	2	Slow	1	Shortest
Weighted Pommel[b]	2	2	Slow	–	Shortest
Beak[c]	2	2	Unwieldy	3	As Weapon

Notes: a: All weapons have access to a hilt/pommel Strike. b: Spiked or weighted hilts and pommels may be added to any weapon. A weapon may only have one type of hilt/pommel. c: Beaks can only be mounted on the backs of polearms, axes and at the reverse ends of spears.

Found Weapons

Found weapons can really be anything you can get your hands around and smash your opponent with. Any character with Brawling may use found weapons. Characters with a weapon skill can use found weapons so long as they are an analog of their skill. Found weapons all have an Add 2 and no VA. (Except for the pick, which as a VA 1.)

Weapon	Power	WSpd
Bedknob	1	F
Spike/Nail	1	F
Bottle	1	F
Mallet	2	S
Broomhandle	1	F
Lantern	2	S
Chair	2	U
Pick	4	U
Branch	2	S

Note: All Found Weapons have an Add of 2.

Missile Weapons IMS and DoF

Hunting Bow		
DoF: 1-2	3-4	5-6

I: B4 **M:** B7 **S:** B10 **VA** 1
Actions: Reload and Acquire, 5.

Great Bow		
DoF: 1-2	3-4	5-6

I: B4 **M:** B8 **S:** B12 **VA** 2
Actions: Reload and Acquire, 7.

Crossbow		
DoF: 1-2	3-4	5-6

I: B4 **M:** B8 **S:** B11 **VA** 2
Actions: Reload and Acquire, 17.

Heavy Crossbow		
DoF: 1-2	3-4	5-6

I: B5 **M:** B9 **S:** B13 **VA** 3
Actions: Reload and Acquire, 33.

Pistol		
DoF: 1-4	5	6

I: B4 **M:** B8 **S:** B11 **VA** *
Actions: Reload and Acquire, 41.

Arquebus		
DoF: 1-4	5	6

I: B4 **M:** B8 **S:** B12 **VA** *
Actions: Reload and Acquire, 41.

*VA by Range: Too close to shoot VA 4, optimal VA 3, extreme VA 1.

DoF Modifiers
- Exceed obstacle, +1 to the DoF
- Double obstacle, +2
- Triple obstacle, +3
- Extreme range, -1 to the DoF

Missile Weapon Ranges

Weapon	Optimal	Extreme	Max. Range
Hunting Bow	1D	2D	100 paces
Great Bow	2D	4D	300 paces
Crossbow	2D	3D	125 paces
Heavy Crossbow	2D	4D	300 paces
Pistol	1D	1D	10 paces
Arquebus	1D	2D	50 paces
Thrown weapons	1D	1D	See Chart*

*See the thrown weapons chart on the next page.

Specialty Bolt and Arrowheads

Arrowheads

Hunting Head	Standard IMS, VA and DoF
Bodkin Head	-1 IMS, +1 VA
Leaf Head	+1 IMS, -1 VA
Frog Crotch	+1 IMS, +1 DoF, +1 Ob to hit, -1 VA
Blunt Head	-1 IMS, -1 VA, -1 DoF
Barbed Tip	Same stats as hunting arrow, but the character takes an additional Mark result wound if the barbed arrow is improperly removed. It is an Ob 4 Field Dressing or Ob 3 Surgery test to remove a barbed arrow properly.

Bolt Heads

Helmeted	Standard IMS, VA, and DoF.
Mallet Head	+1 DoF, reduce ranges by 10 paces per category
Fisted Bolt	+1 IMS, +1 DoF, +1 Ob to hit
Spear Tip	+1 VA, -1 IMS

A Little Bomb Action

Iron-Cased Bomb	DoF:§	1-2	3-4	5-6	VA
		I: B3	M: B6	S: B9	4/2

Fight! Actions: Grab, Light Fuse, Acquire Target and Throw, 7.

Range Dice:	**Weapon Length**
Optimal: 1D Max: 1D	Longest when lit. +1D per volley held.

*VA is 4 in optimal range, 2 at lunging distance or maximum range.
§ -1 to the DoF when thrown at maximum range or detonated at lunging distance.

Thrown Weapons

Palm-sized Rock
DoF: I: 1-3 M: 4-5 S: 6
Weapon Power: +0   VA –

Javelin
DoF: I: 1-2 M: 3-4 S: 5-6
Weapon Power: +2   VA 1

Large Rock, Brick
DoF: I: 1-3 M: 4-5 S: 6
Weapon Power: +1   VA –

Thrown Hatchet
DoF: I: 1-4 M: 5 S: 6
Weapon Power: +2   VA –

Throwing Knife
DoF: I: 1-2 M: 3-5 S: 6
Weapon Power: +1   VA –

Thrown Axe
DoF: I: 1-4 M: 5 S: 6
Weapon Power: +3   VA –

Darts, Barbs, Spikes
DoF: I: 1-2 M: 3-5 S: 6
Weapon Power: +0   VA –

Roden Knives‡
DoF: I: 1-2 M: 3-4 S: 5-6
Weapon Power: +1   VA 1

Shuriken*
DoF: I: 1-2 M: 3-5 S: 6
Weapon Power: +1   VA –

‡*Roden Only*

*Ninja Only

DoF Modifiers
- Exceed obstacle, +1 to the DoF
- Double obstacle, +2
- Triple obstacle, +3
- Extreme range, -1 to the DoF

Thrown Weapon Ranges

Weapon	Optimal	Extreme	Max Range
Large Rock, Brick	+1D	+1D	24 paces
Palm-sized Rock	+1D	+1D	50 paces
Darts, Barbs	+1D	+1D	8 paces
Throwing Knife	+1D	+1D	12 paces
Shuriken	+1D	+1D	20 paces
Javelin	+1D	+1D	50 paces
Hatchet	+1D	+1D	12 paces
Axe	+1D	+1D	12 paces
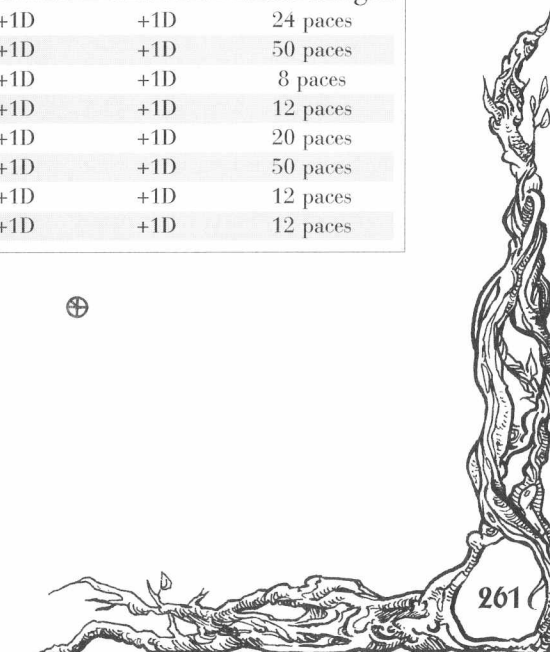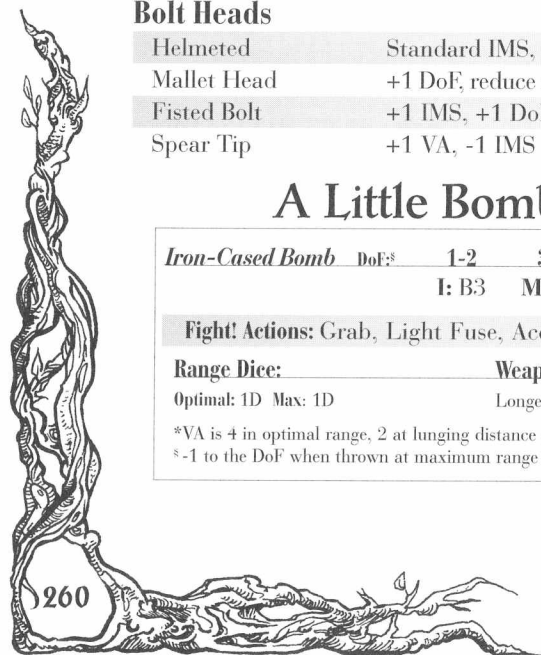
The Die of Fate

In my game, my players know that there is a 1 in 6 chance of anything happening. Whenever an outlandish request comes up, or an out-of-character dispute erupts, we settle it with a throw of the Die of Fate (DoF).

On a 1, the player gets what he was asking for. No other result counts.

Now I realize that this seemingly goes against everything set out in this book. There are no random encounters in a Burning Wheel game—"encounters" have a point and drive the overall conflict of the game forward. However, I understand that play at the table can get a little complex, and even a little ugly. Sometimes players and GMs need a way to resolve disputes in a short, fair manner.

To this I say: Roll the Die of Fate.

Dispute and Disagreement

If the GM and a player are having a dispute or disagreement about a particular detail of the game, the result should be resolved with a throw of the DoF.

The dispute must be surrounding something reasonable and feasible within the game context. A player cannot make a stand for beam weaponry in the Duke's toilet and hope to get a DoF roll. Gear mongering for superior quality arms in a village is also an executable offense.

Arguments over distances, placement, roads, terrain or the various historical features of the age can safely be resolved with the DoF.

Abilities ≠ DoF!

Any roll that falls under the province of a stat, skill or attribute should be resolved with an appropriate test, not a Die of Fate roll.

For gear, material possessions and the contents of property, anything not covered by Resources, Beliefs, Instincts or traits can be resolved with a quick DoF roll. Forgot to describe your traveling gear but want to now pull out that ever handy length of rope? Die of Fate roll, buddy.
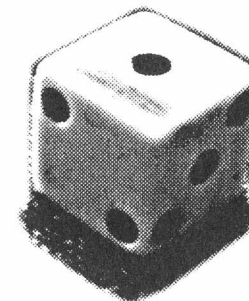
Weird Random Events

If ever there is cause to see if some weird random event happens in your game—as the result of a player action—roll the Die of Fate. On a 1, it happens.

In a game I was running, one of the players caused this huge magical lightning storm. It was crazy—the apocalypse! As GM, I decided that when venturing outside, each player had a DoF thrown for his character. On a 1, he was struck by lightning. Egads, that was tense! And the players loved it.

If it was a regular old lightning storm, I would never have used the DoF to see if there was a lightning strike. That kind of stuff is irrelevant. But because the player had caused this weird random event, the DoF was perfectly appropriate. Suffer the consequences for your actions, meddling fool!

Falling from Great Heights

When a character falls from a great, and fatal, height. Roll the DoF. On a 1, he walks away miraculously unscratched—or at least alive. On anything else, he takes a nasty wound, of course!

Details and Embellishment

If a player or the GM wants to bring a previously unintroduced, and slightly out of place, embellishment or detail into the scene, roll the Die of Fate. On a 1, he gets what he's after.

For example: There's a riot going on! Ssaem runs into a third-story room of the Happy Long Life Guest House. His player asks, "Are there any flower pots on the window sill? Anything to throw down onto the guards in the crowd below?" Er, I dunno. Roll the Die of Fate!

Or my favorite: "We've got to sneak into this house. There wouldn't happen to be any unlocked doors, would there?" Roll the DoF! On a 1 a window or door has been left open and you can just waltz right in. If not, then you've got to bribe the guards, persuade the servants, break it down, etc.

I guess I use it when the players ask for an easier way out. They know what they have to do and it's hard, so they make a simpler, easier suggestion. I let the DoF decide.

Always in the Open

Die of Fate rolls are always made in the open, in front of all the players, with the conditions of the roll clearly stated for all to hear. This is a hard and fast rule.

Never a Roadblock

The Die of Fate should never be the last resort or the only option. I don't ever want to hear: "Unless you roll a 1, it's all over." That's just the wrong way to go in Burning Wheel. Any and all crucial game-moving tests need to be placed on the player's shoulders in the form of tests against abilities where traits can be called on, FoRKs can come into play, help can be offered and artha spent.

A roll on the Die of Fate can't substitute for a true resolution mechanic. It only serves as a simple dispute resolution for players and GMs. It is about creating twists and turns, not cutting off options. ⊕
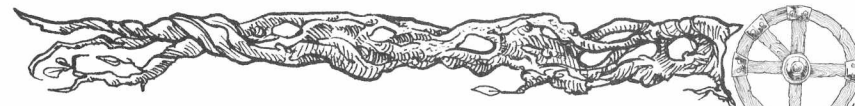
Playing the Game
Concept, Concept, Concept

When setting up a Burning Wheel game, the GM and the players come to an agreement about what this story/scenario is going to be all about. Essentially, they decide what type of game they want to play. Get all the players and GM on board with this concept. Do you want to play a dark, urban criminal underworld game? Say it. Do you want to play a hardy band of adventures seeking fortune and fame in ancient ruins? Say it.

As a GM, I often come to the table with a bunch of possible scenarios on offer. We play in an existing campaign world with a long history and pretty fixed parameters. When we start a new game, I offer unresolved conflicts or stories with loose ends. Do we want to take care of the Oni in this city? Do we want to destroy the goblin capital? Do we want to explore the culture of the Purple Desert? Or should we hunt wizards? I let the group decide exactly which one they want to do. I'm just one vote in this process.

Get this game concept out in the open right off. Sometimes, players will just have a concept for a character he wants to play. Such a concept narrows the scope of the scenario concept. Pay attention to them.

Danny: "I'd like to play a lizardman priest."

Luke: "Faith isn't a big part of what I had in mind. If you play such a character, would you mind scaling back the Faith powers for this game?"

Danny: "Nah, that's cool."

There wasn't any Faith in my original concept, but I immediately modified it so as to incorporate Danny's ideas.

Pick and Choose from the Mechanics

Once the concept for the game is determined, pick and choose elements from the overall game that are appropriate to it. The Burning Wheel rules are expansive. You don't have to include them all. If you want to play in a mundane world of hard knocks, then cut out Sorcery and Elves and all that. If you want to play in a magocracy, then magic is powerful and reserved for the elite. If you want a game of high-fantasy power politics, focus on Dwarves and Elves and the Duel of Wits. Toss out any skills, weapons, spells, etc. that are inappropriate to your concept. Save them for another game.
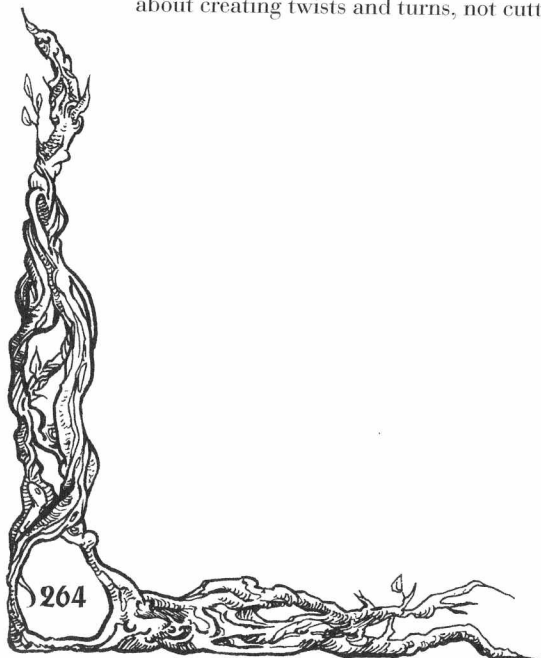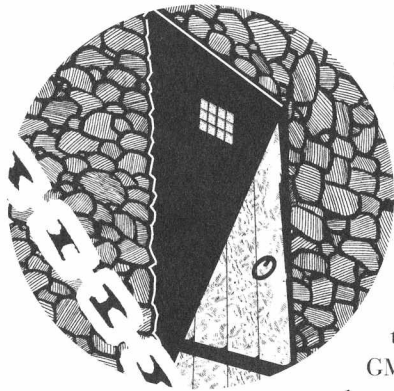
Set Up

Lifepath Limits

Once the concept is agreed upon, the GM's job is to set the lifepath limits and overall power level of the player characters. If the concept calls for a novice group, then the GM has the right and the obligation to set limits in the lifepaths so that everyone is on the same page. If the concept calls for twinked out munchkin power, then it is the GM's job to set the upper and *lower* limits of player characters. (I've had a number of players whom I've had to encourage to go further!)

Set Resources Cycle

The GM should set the time of the Resources Cycle. This determines how long it will take to recover taxed Resources dice. Setting this cycle most definitely influences the time patterns of the story to be. If the players are expecting a 24-hour scenario, then setting the cycle at a month ensures the players won't recover their Resources during the adventure. Setting the cycle at a year means characters are going to need a lot of time to have their goals and desires met. There'll be a lot of "seasons pass" narration.

Set Faith Idiom

If there are Faithful characters in the group, the GM and those players must decide upon the idiom of their faiths, whether it affects all creatures or just the believers, and any religious strictures placed on the characters.

They should also decide what stigmata traits the Faithful will earn as their Faith attribute advances.

Tying in Relationships

GMs: Don't let players buy useless relationships that won't have a bearing on the game. Force them to focus their relationships. Tie them into the concepts. Relationships don't have to always be at the forefront of play, but they must be part of the game. When in doubt, make it *personal*.

Nothing is more frustrating for a player than spending a load of points on a contact that never gets used. With his view of the big picture, the GM can and should advise players about which relationships are useful and which aren't.

On the flip side, if a player wants a relationship for his character that wasn't part of the initial game concept, expand the concept and work in this new relationship.

Tying in Beliefs, Instincts and Traits

If the game is about taking revenge on the wizards who tortured and scarred you, characters better damn well have Beliefs and Instincts that scream anger, hatred and vengeance (or even forgiveness, for extra drama).

Beliefs and Instincts that aren't tied into the concept are not only useless, but they are a handicap. Isolated or irrelevant Beliefs limit the amount of Fate and Persona artha you're going to get for playing that character.

Focus those Beliefs. Charge them. Prime them. Set them to blow. Make your character's life hard. Make it complex, entangled and difficult. Sure you could sit outside the story, be safe and watch, but what the hell fun is that? This is your game. Own it, live it, bleed it.

Instincts should be set to get you in all kinds of trouble. When a player writes out an Instinct, he's essentially saying one of two things about his character: Either, "I don't want to have to deal with this again" (usually for bits of game minutiae); or "I dare you to test me here, I want it and I'm ready." Use them. Test them. Force them to react. If a GM is creating situations where the Instinct alarm bells aren't going off, he's not doing his job.

Lastly, there's traits. With traits, a player is paying points to say, "my character is *this*." The other players and the GM better damn well include scenes and situations where those traits are prominent. They either get you into trouble or out of it. By writing the traits on the sheet—by spending the points—the player is committing to the trait. Use them, tweak them. Let them win and let them lose.

Role of the GM

Here is a short bullet list of my priorities when I sit down to GM Burning Wheel:

- To make sure the physical space of the game is comfortable and conducive to good play (no sleepy couches or TVs) and that folks arrive on time so we can get started promptly.

- To make sure the mechanics of the game run smoothly, make sense and gel with the story/actual play at hand.

- To get across *my* point/vision/idea (also known as the theme of the game).

- To challenge and engage the players.

- And to make sure that, whether the game is humorous or dramatic, everyone is involved and enjoys themselves.

In Burning Wheel, it is the GM's job to interpret all of the various intents of the players' actions and mesh them into a cohesive whole that fits within the context of the game. He's got to make sure that all the player wackiness abides by the rules. When it doesn't, he must guide wayward players gently back into the fold. Often this requires negotiating an action or intent until both player and GM are satisfied that it fits both with the concept and mood of the game.

Also, the GM is in a unique position. He can see the big picture—what the players are doing, as well as what the opposition is up to and plans to do. His perspective grants the power to hold off on one action, while another player moves forward so that the two pieces intersect dramatically at the table. More than any other player, the GM controls the flow and pacing of the game. He has the power to begin and end scenes, to present challenges and instigate conflicts. It's a heady responsibility, but utterly worthwhile.

Most important, the GM is responsible for introducing complications to the story and consequences to the players' choices. Burning Wheel is all about choices—from the minute you start creating a character, you are making hard choices. Once play begins, as players choose their path, it is the GM's job to meaningfully inject resonant ramifications into play. A character murders a guard. No big deal, right? Well, that's up to the GM to decide. Sure there's justice and revenge to consider—that's the obvious stuff—but there's also bigger picture elements to consider: whole provinces have risen in revolt due to one errant murder….

Role of the Players

Finally, there is the sacred and most holy role of the players. In Burning Wheel games, players have a number of duties:

- Prime among them is the responsibility to offer hooks to their GM and the other players in the form of Beliefs, Instincts and traits.

- Use the lifepaths to build skeletons of your characters' background, but don't fill in all the details. Let the character develop as play advances—certainly don't write a history in which all the adventure has already happened.

- Players in Burning Wheel must use their characters to drive the story forward—to resolve conflicts and create new ones. Players are *supposed* to push and risk their characters, so they grow and change in unforeseen ways.

- Use the mechanics! Players are *expected* to call for a Duel of Wits or a Circles test or to demand the Range and Cover rules in a shooting match with a Dark Elf assassin. Don't wait for the GM to invoke a rule—invoke the damn thing yourself and get the story moving!

- Participate. Help enhance your friends' scenes and step forward and make the most of your own. It doesn't matter if you "win," so long as the story spins in a new and interesting direction. If the story doesn't interest you, *it's your job to create interesting situations and involve yourself.* If a player's desires and priorities are disruptive for the group as a whole, then it's that player's job to excuse himself from the game and find another group.

Above all, have fun. It's easily said, but hard to enact. Listen to the other players, riff off of them; take their leads and run with them. Expand on their madness, but also rein them in when they get out of hand. Remember that you're playing in a group, and *everyone* has to have fun.

If you're all fired up, start reading the Character Burner. If you liked the ideas touched on here, that book is going to put you through the roof. Wait until you actually build Beliefs and Instincts!

Don't forget to call your GM. Start ranting like a mad imp! Or if you are the GM (like me) hopefully you're frothing at the mouth right now (like I am), bellowing, "Hell yeah!" ⊕

Extended Example

What follows is a detailed analysis of a few minutes of Burning Wheel play. The GM (Jason) has surprised one his players (me, Luke) with an encounter just after the other players have agreed to split up until their next job.

Jason: Ok, the rest of you make it home without event. Luke, I need you to make a Perception test. (Jason rolls the B3 Stealthy for an as yet unseen monster. He gets two successes.)

Luke: Me? Great. (I roll my character's B4 Perception.) Uh, two successes.

Jason: Two? (Slehr doesn't have Observation, so he is forced to use Perception to spot Stealthy characters. This incurs a double obstacle penalty. He needed four successes to spot the lurker. However, there's more to this situation than it seems.) Heh. It's quite dark in the alley. You see a dark shape lurking in the alcove that leads to your apartment. A hesitant voice whispers, "Slehr..." What do you do?

Luke: Damn it! Caught already. I dash in and cast The Fear. It's a one-action spell. (I test Slehr's B4 Will plus his B4 Sorcery. The spell is Ob 2.) 5 successes. Whoever that is has to pass a Steel test.

Jason: (Tests the NPC's B3 Steel against her 6 Hesitation). Ok, two successes means she fails by 4. She opts to run and scream. Make your Tax test.

Luke: I...she? Hold on. (I roll Slehr's B4 Forte vs Ob 2). I pass. I sprint after her. Can I make another Perception test?

Jason: No, you're under Let it Ride, buddy. However, with two successes on your Perception, you're fairly certain you know that voice. Make a Speed test. (Jason also makes a Speed test for the NPC. Her B3 Speed gets two successes.)

Luke: (I roll Slehr's B4 Speed.) Two successes. Do I catch her?

Jason: No. She gets two as well—a gap of about 5 paces remains between you two. She runs screaming out of the alley into the lantern light of the street. You're sure that it's your sister. Her face is locked in a rictus of terror. Nice job.

Luke: My sister? What the hell was she doing here?! How did she find my flat? You're such a bastard! Damn it! I stop. She's never going to accept my offer now. (I glare hard at Jason. The other players laugh softly.)

Jason: You're the one who cast The Fear on her. As you come to a halt at the alley entrance, you hear another voice behind you. It deliberately and sibilantly announces itself: "Teensssy sssorcccerrrerr; foolissssh man." Turning around, you're drawn to the source of the voice on the wall above you. An alien form clings to the shadows, poised to leap down upon you!

Slehr Marlson—assassin sorcerer

Stats: Perception: B4, Will: B4, Agility: B4, Speed: B4, Power: B4, Forte: B4.

Attributes: Reflexes: B4, Steel: B5, Health: B4, Mortal Wound: B10

Skills: Trouble-wise B3, Assassination-wise B3, Streetwise B3, Read B2, Write B2, Symbology B2, Knives B3, Sword B3, Throwing B4, Inconspicuous B4, Sorcery B4, Climbing B2 and Stealthy B2.

Traits: Bad Egg, Extremely Respectful of my (Sorcerous) Betters, Cynical, Desperate, Gifted and Streetsmart

Relationships: Minor (family, hateful): Uudo, my uncle and arcane master. Minor (immediate family, hateful): My sister, a local low-level official.

Circles: B2   *Resources:* B0 (that's a big goose egg)

Gear: Two knives, a sword, a dozen throwing knives, dark work clothes, nondescript street clothes, street shoes and soft work shoes, a private flat in the red-light district.

Spells: Binding, Wyrd Light and The Fear.

Beliefs: I shall be the Master of the Assassin's Circle. I shall rule this city from the Black (Wizard's) Tower. My sister is the key to my first step up the political ladder—climb her.

Instincts: When surprised, hit 'em with The Fear. Inconspicuous when in crowds; Stealthy in the shadows. Always (always) keep a throwing knife concealed on my person.

Luke: (Gulps.) It's a Red Widow, isn't it? What the hell is going on? A Red Widow and my sister on the same night. This is bizarre. Am I surprised?

Jason: No. She announced herself; no Steel test necessary. And yes, I did that to bypass your Instinct. You failed your Perception test to spot her, and I don't think your Instinct should bypass that failure. If you want to use your spell again, you're going to have to spend an action. Make a positioning test. (Jason rolls for the Great Spider. He's using the Hunter Seeker from the Creature Codex in the Monster Burner. However, this encounter is meant only as a scare, so the creature's exponents have all been dropped by 1D. She's got a Speed of B5, +1D for the Eight-Legged trait, +1D for higher Reflexes, +1D for the higher Speed multiplier. 8D altogether. Jason rolls five successes.)

Luke: You are such a freaking bastard. (I glower at Jason and consult my positioning advantages: Slehr has a Speed of B4, but no weapons drawn. I'll have to position with The Fear. It's a Presence Area of Effect spell. That grants him the Longest Weapon advantage.) What kind of spider is it? Does it have lariats or elongated forelegs?

Jason: No, just fangs and its eight legs. No spells either. Fangs are a "shortest" length weapon, so your "longest" spell is three lengths longer. That's a +2D weapon length advantage for you.

Luke: (Rolls B4 Speed plus 2D for weapon length). Ok, three successes.

Jason: The beast lands nimbly just in reach as you attempt to scramble back away from it. Its whole body is only about as big as your chest, but its spindly arms are easily as long as yours. Eight emotionless eyes give you a black look. She beat you by two. That takes her from out of striking distance through lunging, to optimal striking distance for her claws. She's got to get inside your reach to use her fangs. Write out your first exchange please.

Red Widow

	Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo		Hea	Ref	MW	Ste
	B3	B3(5)	B5	B5	B4	B4		B4	B5	B11	B6

Speed Multiplier: x4. Hesitation: 7 actions

PTGS: Su: B3   Li: B5   Mi: B7   Se: B8   Tr: B9   Mo: B10

Traits— Middling Stature, Alien, Arachnid Body, Eight-Eyed, Eight-Legged, Exoskeleton, Fangs, Keen Sense of Balance, Low Speech, Silk Spinner, Spider Sense, Virulent Venom, Wall-Crawler, Vile Language, Chitinous, Dark Sense, Strand-Runner, Orb-Walker, Single-Minded and Leaper.

Skills— Climbing B3(5), Cave-Wise B2, Stealthy B4, Hunting B2, Burrowing B3, Snares B3, Spider-Wise B2, Tracking B4, Brawling B5, Intimidation B3, Interrogation B3

IMS— Fangs: I B3, M B5, S B7, VA =. Slow, must be on the Inside.

Armor— Plated leather equivalent covering whole body.

Instincts— Toy with captured opponents or prey, Leap into the fray, Weave when waiting, Drop a drag line.

Beliefs— I serve the Queen-Mother. As below and so above, I am sworn to carry out my duty, those who resist shall be punished.

Luke: Fine. (I consider my options. I used Fear to position, so I'm obligated to use it in the script. That's ok, though. There are other harder choices to make. First and foremost, do I stay and fight or try to disengage and flee? Well, Jason's set this encounter for a reason. So even though it's a deadly opponent, I'm going to risk it. But I don't have a weapon in hand. Slehr's good with throwing knives and the sword, but I'm only going to have time to haul one out. Since she's close in to me and murderous with her fangs and webs, I think I'll go with the sword and try to keep her at bay.)

Slehr, first exchange

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Avoid Action 2: Cast: The Fear	Action 1: Draw...	Action 1: ...Sword
Maintain	Maintain	Maintain
movement	movement	movement

(I chose to Maintain for two reasons: I don't want the spider getting on the inside of my character's reach. But I also want to keep her in striking distance, so I don't want to Withdraw).

Jason: (Meanwhile, Jason scratches out a quick script for his villain. I don't know this yet, but the spider's been sent as something of a messenger. That colors his actions—she's not here to kill Slehr.)

Red Widow, first exchange

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Charge Action 2: Strike/Bite	Action 1: Lock	Action 1: Lock Action 2: Lock
Close	Maintain	Maintain
movement	movement	movement

Jason: Are you ready? Ok, Volley 1. Positioning first, then actions. I'm Closing with a Charge. She's going to try to knock you down then Strike you.

(Charge is a Close positioning maneuver done with Power. Jason chose it simply for the chance I'd be knocked down. He tests the beast's B4 Power, +1D for the Charge action's momentum bonus, +1D for the Eight-Legged trait, +1D for higher Reflexes, +1D for the higher Speed multiplier. 8D altogether. He rolls 4 successes.)

Luke: Heh. I'm Maintaining my fighting distance and I'm Avoiding for my first action and casting The Fear on my second. (I test my Speed for my maintain, +2D for The Fear's "longest weapon" bonus. My positioning test counts as Natural Defenses against Charge. Any successes here reduce the effectiveness of the Charge.) I get three successes. Wait, I've still got my Avoid! (Avoid is always coupled with Natural Defenses when ducking a Charge, Push, Lock or Throw. This time, I test my Speed straight without any bonus dice. Since I Maintained my position, I don't have any obstacle penalties.) Ok, one more success. Hah!

Jason: Ok, you drop your shoulder and duck her as she leaps. She loses her second action for that volley.

Luke: She hesitates? Sweet. I cast The Fear. (I roll my B4 Sorcery plus Will B4.) Four successes. She's got to make a Steel test. (Now I roll my B4 Forte to resist the Ob 2 Tax of the spell.) Damn, I only got one success. I'm Taxed by one die.

Jason: She's got a B6 Steel, but has a hesitation of 7. (Jason rolls and gets four successes. The spider will hesitate for three actions. He doesn't tell me this, though.) Ok, she's hesitating. (Jason now has two main options to consider: Stand and Drool or Run Screaming. Stand and Drool is a risk. However, I don't have a weapon in hand. So it's probably a safe bet.) Volley 2! Are you forfeiting anything?

Luke: No. I'm Maintaining and starting to draw my sword.

Red Widow, first exchange

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Charge ~~Action 2: Strike/Bite~~	~~Action 1: Lock~~	~~Action 1: Lock Action 2: Lock~~
Second action here is lost because of the failed Charge	These actions are replaced with Stand and Drool due to failed the Steel test.	
Close	Stand and Drool	Stand and Drool
movement	movement	movement
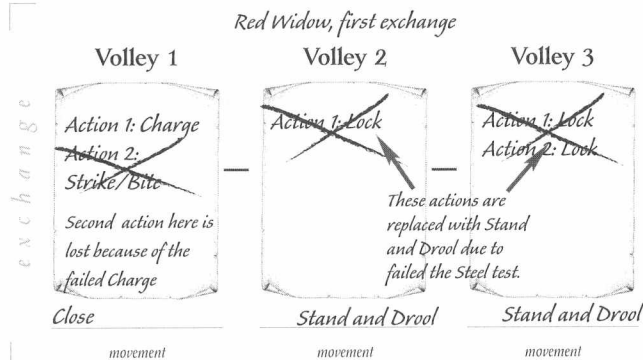
Jason: Ok, she keeps hesitating—Stand and Drool—so you automatically Maintain. Your sword's nearly out of its scabbard. (The spider is hesitating for three actions, so his Lock/Lock/Lock actions are all lost for this exchange. Note that Jason doesn't tell me what the spider's actions were.) Volley 3. Are you forfeiting anything?

Luke: I can't; I only have one action left. I Maintain and finish drawing my sword.

Jason: Ok, you dance nimbly around the venomous demon as you wrench your sword from your scabbard. You are easily within striking distance of her. That's the end of the exchange. Script again. Quickly, please.

Luke: Right. (Now I don't know whether or not she's still hesitating at the start of the new exchange. If she is, she won't be standing there much longer. I decide to risk it and start off with a Strike. I'll Maintain my position in the first volley. Second volley is tough. I don't have a lot of hitting power with this character. Once again, I'll Maintain the striking distance for my sword, Avoid and hit her with Fear. Assuming that The Fear makes her flinch, I'll hold my ground and whack her on the third volley.)

Slehr, second exchange

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Strike	Action 1: Avoid Action 2: Cast The Fear	Action 1: Strike
Maintain	Maintain	Maintain
movement	movement	movement
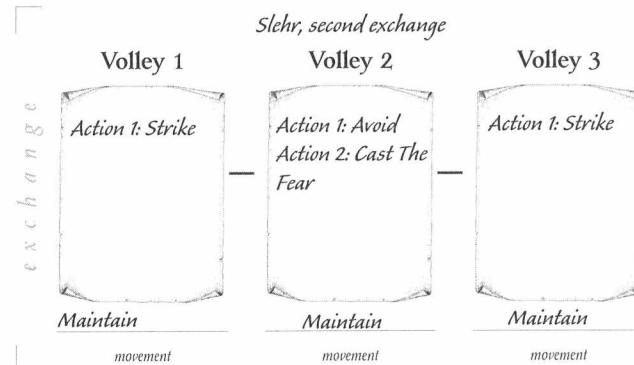
Jason: (Jason once again quickly notes the spider's five actions. He wants to quickly get inside Slehr's sword reach and lock him up with webbing.)

Red Widow, second exchange

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Avoid	Action 1: Counterstrike Action 2: Lock	Action 1: Lock Action 2: Lock
Close	Maintain	Maintain
movement	movement	movement
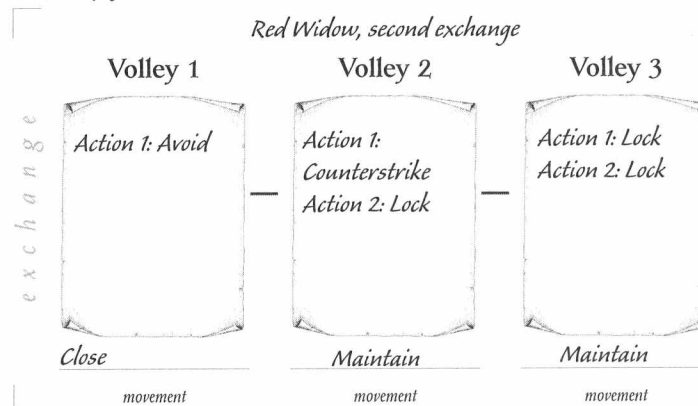
Jason: Ready? Ok. Volley 1. Positions first. I'm Closing and Avoiding.

Luke: Yeah, I figured. I'm Maintaining my positioning—I skip back as she comes in—and then I'm Striking.

Jason: Test your Speed for position. You get +1D for your Sword this volley. (Meanwhile, Jason rolls the spider's B5 Speed, +1D for the Eight-Legged trait, +1D for higher Reflexes, +1D for the higher Speed multiplier, and +1D for using Climbing as a FoRK. He adds the FoRK, because the spider is not constrained by the narrow confines of the alley. 9D total.) Five successes.

Luke: Damn. (B4 Speed +1D for the Sword.) I get three. I'm in trouble.

Jason: She Closes successfully. You're now both "on the inside." (Even though she won by two, she can't get any closer to me than inside my arm's reach.) I'm Avoiding while you Strike. You can hit with the blade of the sword on
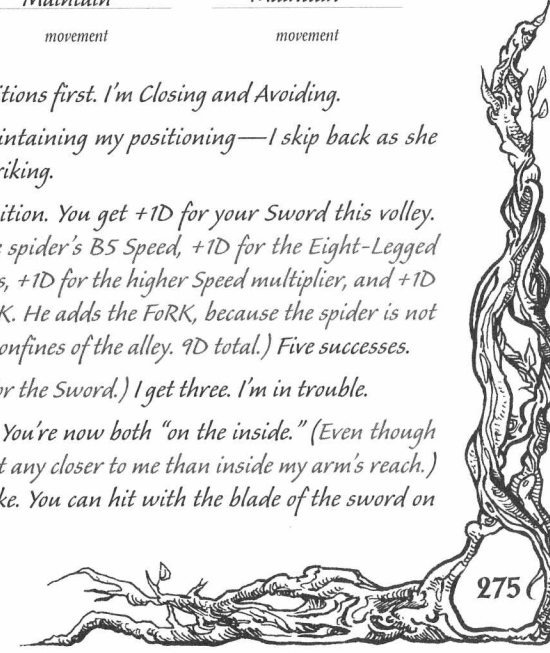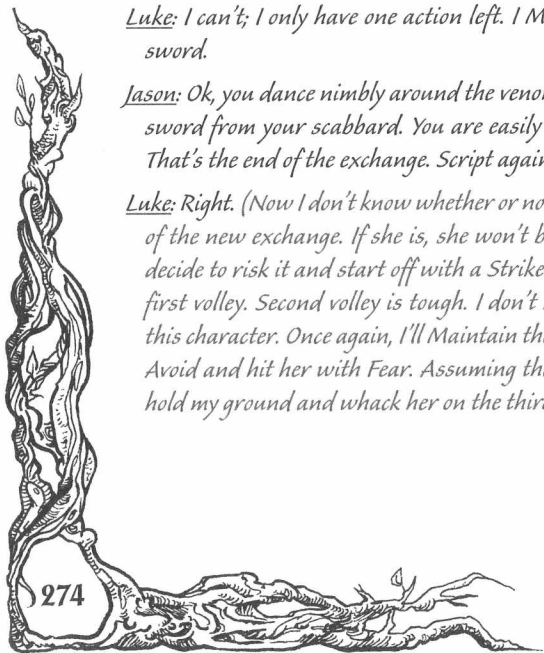
the inside, but you've got a +3 Ob penalty. A hilt strike is only +1 Ob. The spider has +1 Ob to her Avoid for Closing on this volley. (Jason rolls her B5 Speed and gets three successes. He subtracts one due to her obstacle penalty for Closing.) Two total. Her hardened cephalothorax is your target—she's protecting her abdomen.

Luke: I'm going to go with the hilt strike. Blasted thing. (I roll my B3 Sword skill. My obstacle is 1 base, +1 Ob for the hilt inside arm's reach. Plus I need two more successes to overcome the Avoid. An Ob 4 test altogether.) I got three 6s. (Which is not enough to meet my obstacle.) Huh. I'm going to spend a point of Fate to open-end. (Fate points allow you to reroll 6s as new dice.) Two more successes. Hah! I hit the evil thing. An Incidental hit. (My total obstacle was four. I got five successes after I spent artha. Meeting the obstacle to hit is an Incidental result. If I'd got another success—two over—it would have been a Mark. Also, note that this is a Challenging test for Slehr's Sword skill. Ob 4 vs exponent 3.) My Power's B4, the hilt Power is +1. B5 Mark, B3 Incidental. I'm going to use my extra success to aim my blow toward her fragile legs.

Jason: She's got the Chitinous Carapace trait. That counts as plated leather armor, even on the legs. 3D per location. Your hilt has no Versus Armor, so that's an Ob 1 armor test. (Jason rolls 3D vs Ob 1 and gets no successes! The blow penetrates.) Wow. You wound her. A B3 is a Superficial Wound. She's at +1 Ob now. Nice one. Ok, to recap: You dash back, but she's too fast for you and closes the distance with ease. However, as she darts up your body, you shift your grip on your sword and bring the hilt down on her leg joints with a sickening crack. That's it for volley 1. Any forfeits for volley 2?

Luke: Yeah....

Slehr, second exchange

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Strike	Action 1: Avoid ~~Action 2: Cast The Fear~~ I forfeit my casting action in order to change my positioning	Action 1: Strike
Maintain	~~Maintain~~ Withdraw!	Maintain
movement	movement	movement
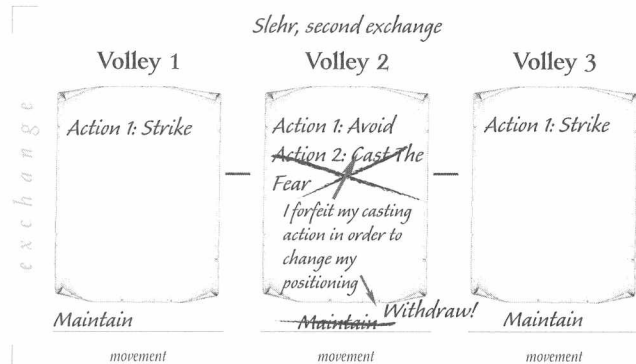
(My volley 2 is bad news. The actions aren't so terrible, but I feel I can't Maintain my position. She's inside my arm's reach—that means she's about

to Lock me. If I Maintain, she's going to keep Locking me. I decide to lose my Fear spell so I can change my action. However, I'll keep the Avoid and change my positioning from Maintain to Withdraw.) Ok, I'm Withdrawing.

Jason: I figured. She's Maintaining. Roll. (Jason rolls the B5 Speed plus the 1D from the Eight-Legged trait, the 2D from the Reflexes and Speed multiplier bonuses. The Climbing FoRK is no longer applicable because he's on top of my character, not racing around the walls. Even better, the spider now gets the weapon length bonus because she's got the shortest weapon on the inside. 9D total.) Yuck: three successes, minus one for her wound. Two altogether.

Luke: Just Speed right? She negates my weapon length bonus. (I roll my B4 Speed.) Wow. Four successes.

Jason: Nice. She clambers up your cloak, attempting to get to your neck and shoulders, but you tumble out of her grip—throwing her over and rising to your feet a few paces away. You moved two fighting distances: from inside to optimal and optimal to lunging. Her first action is Counterstrike, what's yours?

Luke: Woohoo! Avoid!

Jason: Ok, you square off for a split second, looking for an opening. She's faster than you, though. She makes a feint toward your legs...her second action is Lock. At lunging distance, the Lock action is +4 Ob. Hrm. Plus her wound penalty of +1 Ob. Five successes just to get started. Well, she can use her B5 Agility, cause she's a spider. Plus she gets +2D to Lock due to the Eight-Legged trait. That's ugly. (He rolls 7D.) Four successes. Close, but no cigar. (Note that since Jason didn't meet his obstacle, I don't bother rolling for my Natural Defenses.) That's it for volley 2.

Hold on, I've got to forfeit for volley 3. (Jason trades the spider's last action—Lock—and changes her first action to Avoid. He also changes the positioning to Withdraw.)

Red Widow, second exchange

Volley 1	Volley 2	Volley 3
Action 1: Avoid	Action 1: Counterstrike Action 2: Lock	~~Action 1: Lock~~ Avoid ~~Action 2: Lock~~ Jason forfeits his second Lock action and changes his 1st action and his positioning
Close	Maintain	Withdraw! ~~Maintain~~
movement	movement	movement
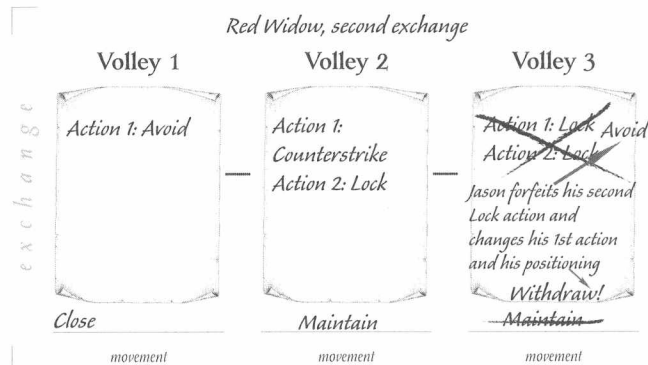
Jason: Ok, volley 3. She Withdraws. *(Jason rolls the spider's B5 Speed plus his Climbing FoRK, plus Reflexes and Speed advantages. Eight-Legged only helps when Closing, so it doesn't count this volley. 8D total. He gets four successes, minus one for her wound.) Three successes.*

Luke: Really? I have a Maintain scripted. *(I roll my B4 Speed plus 1D for the sword's weapon length. I can't use the superior weapon length of my spells because I don't have a spell-casting action scripted this volley. So 5D altogether.) I get three successes. Hah, she's not getting away. That keeps me in lunging distance. (I roll my B3 Sword. My obstacle is 1 plus 1 for lunging. I don't get a +1 Ob for her Withdraw; only the acting character is penalized for moving quickly.) Two successes, I hit! (I make a nasty lunging-thrusting motion across the table.)*

Jason: Ok, her action is to Avoid. *(Testing her B5 Speed, he discounts one success for her wound, and one success for Withdrawing this volley.) She gets three successes total, subtracting two of them due to her penalties, leaves her with one left. (One success is enough to reduce my Strike below its obstacle, thus causing Slehr to miss.) She narrowly skitters out of the path of your clumsy thrust. That's it for the exchange. She's going to Withdraw next volley. Do you want to pursue?*

Luke: Yes and no. If she's going to Withdraw, I want to draw a throwing knife and go to Range and Cover.

Jason: Fair enough. Test for range positioning. Let's start in optimal range for your knives. *(Jason quickly notes that his spider will be Withdrawing with Speed. She gets her B5 Speed plus her climbing FoRK, plus the +2D Speed withdraw bonus, +1D for higher Reflexes, +1D for the higher Speed multiplier. 10D total.) I rolled four successes, counting her wound.*

Luke: Ok. I get +1D for a throwing knife in optimal range. *(I decide to do a Perception Maintain. B4 Perception, but it's open-ended. 5D including the knife. Rerolling my 6s, I get four successes.) Ok, I get four. A tie. We hold our positions, but I get to shoot, right?*

Jason: Yes, optimal range in the open is Ob 2, and add +1 Ob for dim light. You need three successes.

Luke: I spot her as she retreats, skip forward nimbly and hurl my throwing knife. *(I roll my B4 Throwing skill.) Three successes. Wow. I'm on! (Now I roll a Die of Fate to see what IMS result I get. The DoF for a throwing knife is: 1-3 Incidental, 4-5 Mark, 6 Superb. I roll a 3. An Incidental result. Slehr's Power is B4, +1 Power from the throwing knife makes that a B5 Mark, B3 Incidental.) Another B3 to the insect. No VA.*

Jason: It's an arachnid. You met your obstacle so you can't shift your aim. The knife hits its "torso." Plated leather is 3D plus 1D for the chest area bonus. 4D total. She gets two successes. The knife glances off her carapace and bounces into the shadows.

Luke: Damn it. Is she fleeing? If she is, I let her go. Slehr heaves to his knees, panting and gasping. He's shaking in terror.

Jason: Yes, the Red Widow recedes into the shadows. Before she's out of earshot, you hear her terrible voice whispering, "Ssstay fhrm sss girl, Ssslehr. Ssstay fhrm sss girlll, or I ssshall drink yur blood."

Luke: Girl? My sister? What the hell has she got to do with the Red Widows?

Jason: As you glance around, you notice a gossamer glimmering shape floating above you in the lamplight. Apparently the widow was idly spinning webs as she was waiting for you. Test your Symbology.

Luke: Can I FoRK in Streetwise or Trouble-wise?

Jason: Sure. *(Jason allows the FoRKs because the information involved in this test surrounds intimate underground knowledge of the city.) Both. It's an Ob 2 test. You can get a difficult test for your Symbology if you don't FoRK, though.*

Luke: Nah, I'll roll 4D and take the Routine; I want to know what this is. *(I roll my B2 Symbology plus 2D from the FoRKs.) Two successes.*

Jason: You've seen that symbol twice before—on some vestments your uncle kept "hidden," and on one of the members of the Thieves Guild you encountered tonight.

Luke: Uh-oh.

Jason: Let's cut to the next day. Jon, Jamie, Sam, are you going to the prearranged meeting? ✠

Burning Rogues
Simple NPCs

Luke: I got 3 successes on my Observation, how many did you get on your Stealthy?

Danny: Two! I have a B6 Stealthy. I'm a bad player.

Luke: Nice. Well, they easily trail you back to where your group is hiding. As you begin to report what you saw, 10 murderers, thugs and assassins burst through the clearing. By their appearance and manner, these guys are not amateurs—these are hardened veterans of dozens of raids and battles. Test your Steel, you're all surprised.

"Ten murderers, thugs and assassins!?" That's going to be a big battle. And that's a lot of characters for the GM to handle. Did I spend seven and a half hours creating the stats, skills, attributes, Beliefs, Instincts and traits of these individuals? Hell no!

One-Off NPC Skills

Characters that will just be used once—like a merchant to haggle with or a murderer to struggle against—are assigned an overall exponent based on their competence and expertise. Regular folks are exponent 3 in all skills, trained professionals are exponent 4, experts are exponent 5. For a character that requires more depth than a single skill, assign a hierarchy of three or four abilities: what they specialize in is at 5, their secondary and tertiary abilities fall at 4 and 3 respectively.

The assassins in the example above have B5s in their relevant weapon skills. A merchant at market is defined by his B4 Haggling and his B3 Falsehood.

Use the lifepaths as a quick reference for what skills various character types have available to them.

One-Off NPC Stats

For stats, NPCs start at base 4s. If they are very old (50+) or very young (<15), then 3s may be assigned to applicable stats. If the character is experienced or particularly able, then certain stats are raised to 5s.

These numbers are assigned on the fly as the game progresses. Or at the most, sketched out in the GM's notes regarding the session.

I determined ahead of time that all the assassins and slavers guarding the wizard were very tough customers. They have straight 5s!

One-Off NPC Physical Tolerance Grayscales

This is a bit more tricky, but I follow some simple guidelines to keep things moving:

If the NPC has B3 stats: a B3 is Superficial, a B5 is a Light, a B6 is a Midi, a B7 is Severe, a B8 is Traumatic, and a B9 is Mortal.

If the NPC has B4 stats: a B3 is Superficial, a B5 is a Light, a B7 is a Midi, a B8 is Severe, a B9 is Traumatic, and a B10 is Mortal.

If the NPC has B5 stats: a B3 is Superficial, a B6 is a Light, a B8 is a Midi, a B9 is Severe, a B10 is Traumatic, and a B11 is Mortal.

If the NPC has B6 stats: a B4 is Superficial, a B7 is a Light, a B9 is a Midi, a B10 is Severe, a B11 is Traumatic, and a B12 is Mortal.

These can be tweaked to suit your taste. Unless you're playing a free-for-all with Troll Warlords, Elven Etharchs and Dwarven Wardens, I don't recommend using one-off NPCs with exponent 7 or 8 abilities.

One-Off NPC Gear

NPCs have whatever gear and weapons are appropriate to their station. As a rule, I've found it best to remain conservative when doling out NPC gear. Whatever you give them eventually makes its way into the players' hands. Giving a host of Elven Rangers Gray Mantles and Elven Bows means that eventually all of the players in your group mysteriously and accidentally acquire said cloaks and bows.

One-Off NPC Traits

Maybe, if the NPCs are important to the scene or story, part of some distinct group or all from a particular lifepath, I will assign them a trait. Otherwise, I don't worry about it.

He Who Bears the Lash __must__ have Where There's a Whip, There's a Way; otherwise he wouldn't be the lash-bearer!

One-Off NPC Beliefs

One off NPCs get one simple, single Belief that is relevant to the scene at hand and that I can come up with off the top of my head. Nothing else matters.
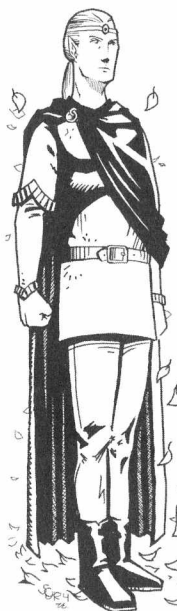
The assassins believe: "Cross us and you're dead." Pretty simple; it drives the scene. The Dwarven gatekeeper believes, "No one crosses this threshold without my thorough inspection." That puts him directly in the players' path—they've got to confront him in order to move on—which is exactly what I want from that NPC.

The Belief is meant to be a guide and reminder to the GM to keep the scene focused and moving.

One-Off NPC Instincts

Ultra-simple Instincts are key here. They center around any assumptions surrounding the character's behavior—whatever detail is needed to make the character go. If you can't come up with anything on the fly, off the top of your head, then the NPC doesn't need an Instinct. Skip it and move on.

Assassins have the "Sleep with one eye open" Instinct. Guards have the "Shout when surprised" Instinct.

Deeper NPCs

All my NPCs start from the above guidelines. That evil sorcerer behind the throne? He's got a B6 Will and a B8 Sorcery and the Persuasion spell. I have no idea what his other skills are, nor do I care.

However, in case the character becomes a recurring presence in the game, I make note of him and start building off that base. I add traits and skills as needed as I go—whatever's relevant to the scene. Eventually, he'll get pretty near fleshed out.

Crucial Opposition

If there is a character whom the players must confront, and I know of his presence and motives beforehand, I give him a full burn. A player character's mentor turned evil or the horrid sorcerer nemesis, for example. He gets all the perks of traits, Beliefs and Instincts. He even gets artha. This process is vital for those game moments where the whole group will be struggling to topple some monumental opposition. A high stat or skill is nice, but in order for an NPC to stand up to all the wild stunts players will pull, he's got to have the full benefit of traits, Beliefs and Instincts—not to mention spells and gear!

And if, after I'm done, I still feel my NPC is underpowered, I tweak him a bit. An extra spell or two, a pile of gold, a gray stat, whatever it takes. I'm the GM, it is one of my duties to present challenging opposition. Doing so does not require me to obey every single standard of character burning.

Monsters

If you're interested in taking your game beyond the character types presented in the Character Burner, I strongly urge you to acquire a copy of the Monster Burner. It contains in-depth rules for creating creatures of all types, plus lots of pre-burned monsters.

Burned Rogues

What follows is a list of characters created using the lifepaths, plus a few creatures from the Monster Burner.

Dwarves

Clansman Brewer

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B5	B6	B5	B4	B5	B5	B6	B5	B11	B4	5	B4	B3	x3

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Age— 160 **Lifepaths**— Born Clansmen, Miller, Brewer, Husband

Skills— Grain Appraisal B4, Milling B3, Brewing B5, Grain-wise B4, Beer Appraisal B3, Nogger B5, Beer-wise B4, Clan-wise B3, Family-wise B3, Haggling B2

Gear— Sturdy shoes, clothes, dwarven brewing tools.

Resources—A 20-acre grain plantation, a brewery (workshop). Relationship with the Longbeard

Beliefs— Everyone deserves a good drink after a hard day of work. Only Dwarves know beer. The wife is always right. I will deliver the very best 10 barrels of nog to the Longbeard.

Instincts— Always check grain stocks for vermin and spoilage. Always taste beer before barrelling it (just to make sure). Always give the wife a gift on our anniversary.

Traits— Greed B2, Accustomed to the Dark, Bearded, Oathsworn, Shaped From Earth and Stone, Stout, Tough, Dispute Settler, Calm Demeanor

Master of Arches

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B5	B5	B6	B4	B5	B5	B6	B5	B11	B4	5	B8	B3	x3

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Age— 167 **Lifepaths**— Born Artificer, Ardent, Tyro Artificer, Artificer, Master of Arches

Skills— Dwarven Rune Script B2, Firebuilding B3, Soothing Platitudes B3, Stone Artifice B4, Etching B4, White-Metal Artifice B5, Gem Artifice B4, Lithography B3, Sculpture B3, Hallmaster B4, Symbology B3, Etiquette B3

Gear— Dwarven tools, finery, clothes, sturdy shoes, printed chronicles of Dwarven architectural designs

Resources— Artificer's workshop, Dwarven hall, 2D affiliation with the Artificer's Guild, reputation among the hold as the Master of Arches, reputation within the Artificer's Guild as a promising gem crafter. A relationship with Kurkrin, my apprentice.

Beliefs— A well-placed arch can hold anything. Gems are the true love of my life. I have promised Kurkrin that together we shall build the king the grandest hall ever conceived.

Instincts— Double check my work (always work carefully).

Traits— Greed B4, Accustomed to the Dark, Bearded, Oathsworn, Shaped From Earth and Stone, Stout, Tough, Determined, Humility, Hard Work, Confident, Linguist

Penniless Banner-Bearer

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B5	B4	B4	B4	B5	B5	B4	B11	B6	5	B0	B2	x3

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Age— 73 **Lifepaths**— Born Clansmen, Tinkerer, Foot Soldier, Banner-Bearer

Skills— Stuff-wise B2, Mending B2, Scavenging B4, Foraging B3, Brawling B2, Hammer B4, Armor Training, Conspicuous B3, Banner-wise B3

IMS—Hammer: I B4, M B8, B12, VA 2, Add 2, Slow, Long.

Gear— Dwarven-made chainmail, Dwarven hammer, sturdy shoes, clothes

Armor— Dwarven-made chainmail: 4D arms, legs and head; 5D chest. 3D shield.

Relationship— Dour grudge-keeping father.

Beliefs— Poverty is not for me. I'll win riches and fame upon the battlefield. I swore to my dead mother that I would not keep grudges like my father. I swore an oath to my father that I would earn my fortune through honest craft.

Instincts— Always scavenge for food and money after a battle. Always polish my gear (try not to look destitute). Always write home to father before battle.

Traits— Greed B1, Accustomed to the Dark, Bearded, Oathsworn, Shaped From Earth and Stone, Stout, Tough, Resigned to Death, Lucky, Obsessive

Young Chronicler

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B6	B5	B5	B4	B4	B5	B6	B4	B11	B4	5	B2	B3	x3

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Age— 116 **Lifepaths**— Born Noble, Abecedart, Chronicler, Ardent

Skills— Dwarven Rune Script B2, Chronology of Kings B2, Etiquette B3, Illumination B2, Ancient History B3, Obscure History B3, Clan-wise B3, Dwarf-wise B2, Poetry B5, Calligraphy B4, Symbology B3, Oath-wise B2, Sing B4, Soothing Platitudes B3, Accounting B2

Gear— Finery, skill kit (map-making), sturdy shoes, clothes, traveling gear (just in case), small apartment

Resources— 1D reputation at court as an excellent poet. Significant relationship with the Dwarven princess. Powerful enemy in the Dwarven king.

Beliefs— Oath to the king: I will carry out the King's orders no matter what the risk to life and limb. We must uncover the meaning of the words of our forefathers to see us through these trying times. Oath to the princess: I shall find a way to let us wed.

Instincts— Always record significant events at the first opportunity. If the king speaks, listen. If runners arrive, rush to the throne room to hear their words.

Traits— Greed B2, Accustomed to the Dark, Bearded, Oathsworn, Shaped From Earth and Stone, Stout, Tough, Humility in Face of My Betters, Loyal

Elves

Elven Adventurer

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B5	B4	B5	B4	B4	B5	B4	B10	B7	6	B0	B2	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 96 **Lifepaths**— Citadel Born, Seafarer, Soldier-Protector, Spearbearer

Skills— Spearcraft B4, Weathersong B3, Rope Chant B4, Alarm B3, Spear B4, Sword B2, Bow B4, Knives B2, Fletcher B2, Mending B2, Pilot B3, Elven Script B2, Sing B2, Formation Fighting, Armor Training

Gear— Elven spear, Elven knives, Elven rope, Elven clothes, Elven sandals, Plated leather armor (with half-leggings).

IMS— Spear: I B3, M B6, B9. VA 2, Add 2, Fast, Longest. Knives: I B3, M B5, B7. VA 1, Add 1, Fast, Shortest.

Armor— Plated leather: 4D chest. 3D arms, head. 2D legs.

Relationship— Captain Eberhard (human pirate captain, minor rival)

Beliefs— The world is wide and I will see what it contains. Injustice must be fought where it dwells and breeds, lest it overtake us all. Never refuse the call to adventure. Who knows what you might miss!?

Instincts— Always carry the Elven rope. If I overhear someone speaking of faraway places, stop and listen. Always be on the lookout for the signs of Eberhard's misdeeds.

Traits— Grief B5, First Born, Born Under Silver Stars, Essence of the Earth, Fair and Statuesque, Keen Sight, Nimble (for Spear).

Lord Protector

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B8	B8	B6	B6	B6	B6	B9	B6	B12	G8	2	B10	B5	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B4	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B10	Tr: B11	Mo: B12

Age— 453 **Lifepaths**— Born Citadel, Servitor, Seafarer, Spearbearer, Sword Singer, Sea Captain, Captain and Lord Protector

Skills— Elven Script B4, Citadel-wise B4, Althing-wise B4, Pirate-wise B4, Pilot B4, Spear B3, Sword B6, Brawl B4, Knives B3, Command B6, Oratory B5, Tactics B6, Logistics B6, Administration B4, Observation B4, Armor Training, Shield Training, Formation Fighting, Weathersong B4, Rope Chant B3, Rhyme of the Mariner B5, Spearcraft B3, Song of the Sword B6, Ballad of Rage B4, Slip of the Currents B4, Supplication to the Winds B4, Monody of the March B4, Silent Fury B5, Strain of Farsight B6, Anthem of Courage B5, Lament of the Fallen B4

Gear— Clothes, shoes, travelling gear, Elven sword

Resources— An Elven ship (the Osprey), 2D reputation among the fleet as a legendary bad ass, 1D reputation among the Protectors as a legendary bad ass, a 1D reputation aboard the Osprey as being a fair and just bad ass, a 2D affiliation with the Elven fleet, 1D affiliation with the crew of the Osprey (as their remote, but loving captain). Relationships: Althing and his Sea Captain second in command aboard the Osprey.

Beliefs— The most sacred vow I have made is to protect our people—their safety must come first in all things, even before my allegiance to the Althing and the Council. The Althing needs my counsel; I have dedicated myself to him and as he has much to contend with, therefore I must always push my views above the petty egos of the others who have the ear of the Althing. The best defense is a vigorous and potent offense; wars are won through action and initiative, not reaction and indecision.

Instincts— When in battle, strike for the commanders first. After battle, always hunt down and slay stragglers. Always draw sword when threatened.

Traits— Grief B5, First Born, Born Under Silver Stars, Essence of the Earth, Fair and Statuesque, Keen Sight, Humility, Sword of the White Towers, Sworn to the Althing, Sworn to Protect, and Unbreakable.
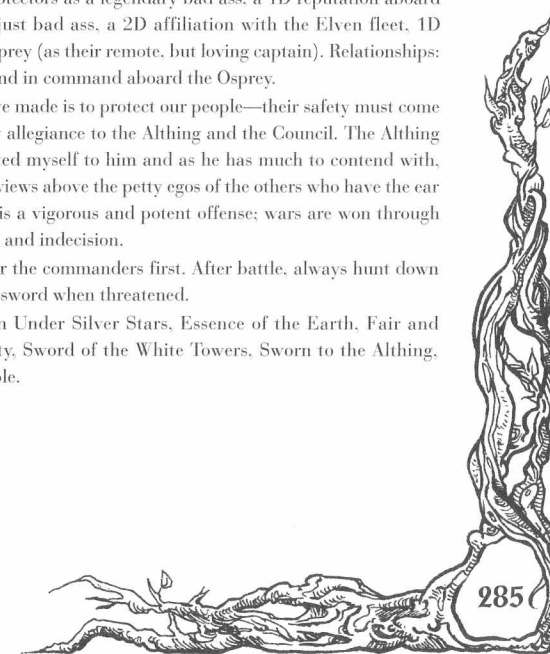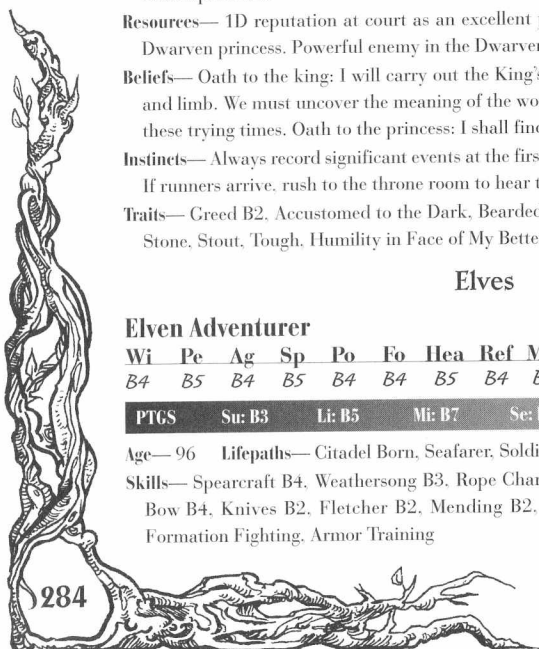
Wilder Matriarch

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B8	B6	B5	B5	B5	B5	B8	B5	B11	B7	2	B2	B4	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Age— 360   **Lifepaths**— Wilder Born, Harvester, Huntswoman, Forester, Spouse, and Matriarch

Skills— Sing G4, Elven Script B3, Firebuilding B4, Bow B4, Knife B2, Stealthy B3, Forest-wise B3, Orc-wise B4, Observation B2, Round of the Harvest B4, Call of the Wild B2, Song of Arbors B5, Song of Soothing B3, Rhyme of Rules B4, Homesong B5, Lyric of Healing B4, Lament of Mourning B4

Gear— Elven clothes, Elven shoes, a run of mill bow, a quiver of hunting arrows

Resources— 1D reputation in the village as a fierce enemy of darkness, pastoral land. Relationships: husband, son

Beliefs— Protect the forest, and it will provide. It is vital that I teach my son the ways of the forest—it has become a fell place due to the influence of the Shadow. With my husband stricken by Orc poison, I must remain strong and disciplined; this is our home we will and we shall fight to protect it.

Instincts— When travelling, always use Song of Arbors to learn the lay of land. Always keep my bow handy and dry. Always use stealth in the fell areas of the deep.

Traits— Grief B4, First Born, Born Under Silver Stars, Essence of the Earth, Fair and Statuesque, Keen Sight, Stubborn

Men

Complicated Con Man

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B10	B5	6	B2	B2	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 29   **Lifepaths**— City Born, Pickpocket, Criminal, Barkeep, Con Man

Skills— Inconspicuous B4, Streetwise B4, Sleight of Hand B4, Intimidation B4, Knives B4, Persuasion B4, Falsehood B4, Disguise B2, Drink-wise B2, Drunk-wise B2

Resources—A small bar, a three lifepath thug bodyguard, a 1D affiliation with the local rookerie, a 1D local reputation (about town) as a "good guy"

Gear—Poor quality knives (concealed on person), street clothes, comfortable shoes

IMS— Poor quality knives: I B2, M B4, S B6. VA –, Add 1, Fast, Shortest.

Beliefs— If they are stupid enough to fall for my lies, they deserve what they get. Better to invest your earnings than fritter them away on whores and booze. Not that there's anything wrong with whores and booze, mind you.

Instincts— Always use Inconspicuous when on the street. Always enter the bar from the back. Always be on the look out for likely marks.

Traits—Plain-Faced, Cynical, Good Listener, Ear for Voices

Courtier

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B5	B4	B5	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B10	B4	5	B3	B3	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 24   **Lifepaths**— Noble Born, Page, Student, Courtier

Skills— Noble-wise B4, Court Gossip-wise B4, Inconspicuous B4, Persuasion B4, Etiquette B4, Oratory B3, Seduction B3, Sword B4, Riding B2, Brawling B2, Read B2, Write B2, Doctrine B2, Observation B2

Resources— A small house away from court (an embarrassment, really), a 3D affiliation with the noble court, a 1D infamous reputation among the upper nobility as a schemer

Gear— A dueling sword and poniard, sumptuous finery, pointy-toed shoes

Beliefs— I think you'll find me equally as good with my sword as I am with my tongue, varlot! My reputation is undeserved. Those that cross me now shall pay when I'm the power in court.

Instinct— When at court, observe for conversations to eavesdrop on. When eavesdropping, always use Inconspicuous.

Traits—Mark of Privilege, Rapier Wit, Schemer, Ambitious

Drunken Sailor

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B3	B4	B5	B5	B4	B4	B3	B4	B10	B4	7	B0	B1	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 24   **Lifepaths**— Son of a Gun, Boy, Carpenter's Mate, Sailor

Skills— Sailor-wise B2, Ship-wise B2, Mending B3, Gambling B2, Seamanship B4, Brawling B4, Knots B3, Rigging B4

Resources— a 1D reputation as idealist among the crew

Gear—A billy club, a shiv, uniform, deck shoes (or not), travelling gear, monkey

Beliefs— I have no will to resist temptation. The landlubber's life ain't for me.

Instincts— When there's alcohol, drink to numb the pain. Never volunteer.

Traits—Sea Legs, Veneer of Obedience, Cursing, Bullseye-Accurate Spitting, Sailor's Oath, Optimist

Experienced Soldier

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B3	B4	B5	B4	B5	B5	B4	B4	B11	B6	9s/4p	B0	B1	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Age— 23   **Lifepaths**— Born Peasant, Farmer, Foot Soldier, Foot Soldier

Skills— Farming B3, Mending B4, Firebuilding B3, Soldiering B3, Sword B4, Axe B4, Brawling B4, Foraging B4, Shield Training

Gear— Footman's axe with beak, small sword, knife, plated leather armor and sallet, target shield, clothes, boots, traveling gear, a mangy dog

IMS— Axe: I B4, B9, B13. VA 1, Add 2, Slow, Long, two handed. Beak: I B4, M B7, S B10. VA 3, Add 2, Unwieldy. Small sword: I B4, M B7, B 10. VA –, Add 2, Fast, Short.

Armor— Plated leather: 3D arms and legs; 4D chest. Sallet: 4D head.

Beliefs— I'll tell you the truth, this war isn't going to end soon. Someone's got to fight the wars, might as well be me. I only kill when I must; don't cross me.

Instincts— Grab the axe at the first sign of trouble. Always keep the sword and shield slung on the back, at the ready. When looting or foraging, always save a little bit for tomorrow.

Traits— Hoarding, Thousand Yard Stare, Scarred, Realist

Father of a Peasant Family

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B4	B3	B3	B4	B4	B4	B3	B10	B3	6	B2	B2	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 38   **Lifepaths**— Born Peasant, Farmer, Miller, Head of Household

Skills— Farming B3, Mending B3, Firebuilding B3, Animal Husbandry B4, Miller B2, Brewer B2, Carpentry B2, Hunting B1, Haggling B4, Almanac B4
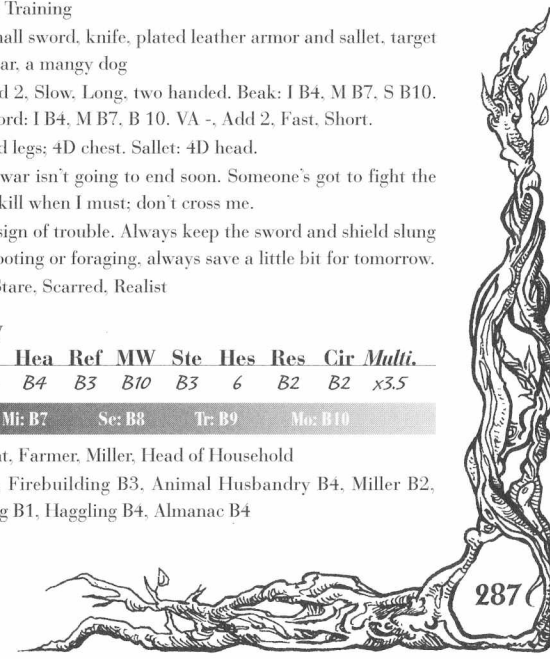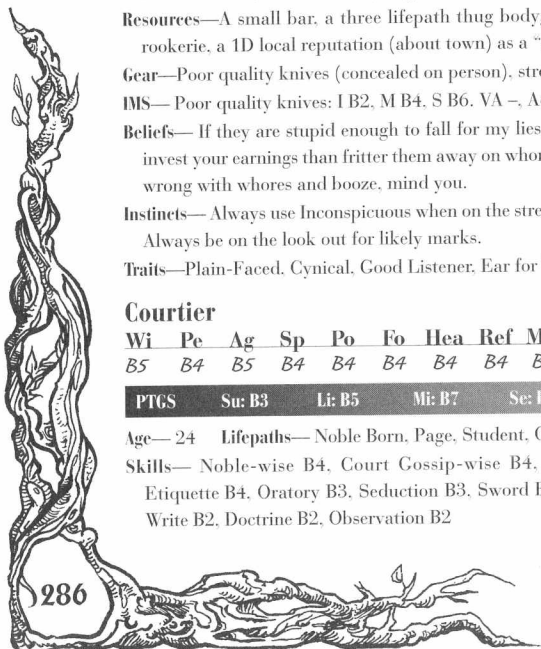
Resources—Rented land and house, a small herd of cattle

Gear—clothes on his back, shoes on his feet

Beliefs— Life is hard work. My family survives only by dint of my labor. Cows are the stupidest animal on earth.

Instincts— Always wake up before dawn to milk the cows. Always mend a broken fence.

Traits— Blank Stare, Superstitious, Hoarder

Regal Baron

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B5	B4	B4	B4	B5	B4	B5	B4	B10	B5	6	B6	B3	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 40   Lifepaths— Noble Born, Page, Squire, Knight, Lord, Baron

Skills— Etiquette B4, Falconry B4, Conspicuous B3, Hunting B4, Dance B2, Sing B2, Estate Management B2, Riding B4, Brawling B4, Sword B4, Polearm B4, Lance B4, Knives B2, Crossbow B2, Mace B2, Intimidation B3, Read B2, Write B2, Armor Training, Shield Training, Mounted Combat Training

Resources— A small castle and attendant estate, a steward to manage the damn thing, a 2D affiliation with the nobility (as a baron)

Gear—Superior quality sword, glaive, dirk, and mace; plated mail armor; a beautiful courser; a sturdy jennet; a wardrobe full of clothes; a hope chest full of silk-lined ermine mantles; a keen-eyed falcon

IMS— Sword: I B4, M B8, S B12, VA 1, Add 2, Slow, Long. Dirk: I B3, M B6, S B9, VA –, Add 1, Fast, Shortest. Glaive (chop): I B5, M B9, S B13, VA 2, Add 2, Slow, Longer.

Armor— Plated mail: 5D for head, arms and legs; 6D for chest

Beliefs— Rulership is my natural and ordained task. My steward can manage the estate, I've got hunting to do. I shall be addressed by my rank; 'tis my right! Transgressors of the law and estates must be punished.

Instincts— Always observe proper etiquette among those with the Mark of Privilege. When insulted, defend my honor with challenge to combat. In combat, lead with the glaive.

Traits— Mark of Privilege, Your Lordship, Sworn Homage, Noblesse Oblige, Regal Bearing, Callous, Sharp Dresser

Rogue Wizard

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B6	B3	B3	B3	B5	B4	B4	B10	B6	6	B4	B3	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 37   Lifepaths— Village Born, Barber, Neophyte Sorcerer, Sorcerer, Rogue Wizard

Skills— Bloodletting B4, Read B4, Apothecary B3, Graveyard-wise B4, Astrology B3, Research B3, Ugly Truth B4, Symbology B3, Write B3, Anatomy B4, Inconspicuous B3, Sorcery B5, Enchanting B4, Cult-wise B3, Apocalypse-wise B4, Alchemy B4

Gear— Clothes, shoes, enchanting tool kit

Resources— A remote cave, a 2D reputation with the Cult of the Red Hand. Relationship: The Prophet of Bones and Dust (the rival leader of an apocalyptical, heretical cult)

Spells— Falcon Skin, Magesense, Phantasmagoria

Beliefs— The Church be damned, I must have more cadavers for my experiments! The End Times approach and those who choose the winning side early shall be rewarded. The Prophet fears my power. Once he no longer needs my knowledge, he will eliminate me if he can.
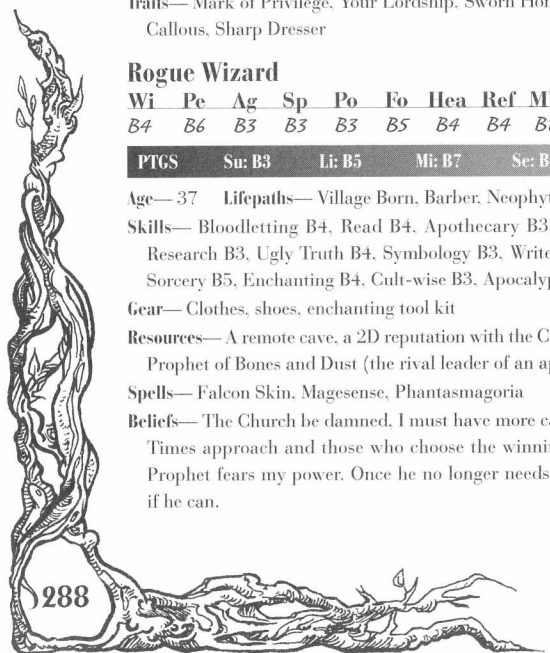
Instincts— If the Prophet seems to be learning too much about the Ritual, make up new requirements. Always Enchant Patiently and Carefully. If I see a funeral, note the location of the grave plot.

Traits— Agreeable, Extremely Respectful of One's Betters, Spooky, Gifted, Aura of Fear, Low Speech (Birds)

Orcs

Edge Grinder

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B4	B5	B4	B4	B5	B4	B4	B10	B5	6s/4p	B1	B2	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 35   Lifepaths— Born Chattel, Scavenger, Forge Slave, Forger, Edge Grinder

Skills— Foraging B3, Inconspicuous B2, Back Breaking Labor B2, Blacksmith B4, Intimidation B2, Mending B3, Weaponsmith B5, Armorer B4

Gear— Weaponsmithing Tools, Hides, Rags, Hobnailed Boots

Resources— 1D affiliation with the clan (the Named sometimes even takes his advice), 1D reputation (sometimes the Orcs remember that *I* create their weapons).

Beliefs— They need me. Never let them forget it. Give a rival a dull edge and he won't live long. Get the Named on your side; the rest will fall into line.

Instincts— When handed a weapon, test the edge. Offer to sharpen the Named's axe before every battle. Never use a poor quality weapon myself—give them to my enemies.

Traits— Hatred B4, Cannibal, Cold Black Blood, Fanged and Clawed, Loathsome and Twisted, Lynx-Eyed, Vile Language, Tasting the Lash, Scavenger, Pain Life, Singed, Suspicious

Hatred Bearer

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B2	B3	B4	B4	B5	B4	B3	B3	B10	B7	8s/7p	B0	B1	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 23   Lifepaths— Born Chattel, Goblin, Legioner, Legioner, Hatred Bearer

Skills— Foraging B2, Brawling B4, Conspicuous B1, Black Legion-wise B1, Intimidation B2, Spear B3, Shield Training

IMS— Spear I B3, M B6, S B9

Armor— Poor Quality Plated Leather: 3D arms, legs and head; 4D chest. Shield: 3D.

Gear— Poor Quality Plated Leather, Poor Quality Spear, Black Iron Shield, Travelling Gear, Hobnailed Boots, Clan Banner

Beliefs— I bear the clan's hate into battle. I killed for this honor and will have to be killed before I let it from my grip. None can withstand my wrath.

Instincts— Always keep a hand on the banner. Strike anyone who touches the banner.

Traits— Hatred B5, Cannibal, Cold Black Blood, Fanged and Clawed, Loathsome and Twisted, Lynx-Eyed, Vile Language, Tasting the Lash, Paranoid, Booming Voice, Psychotic
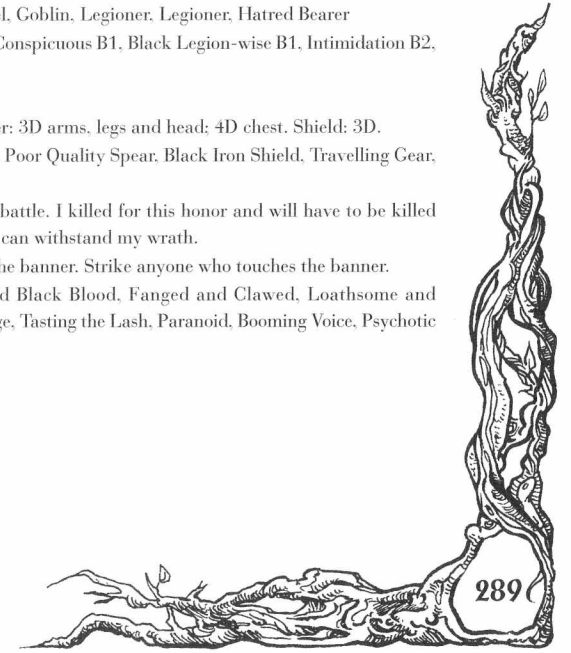
Gate Forger

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B3	B3	B4	B9	B5	6s/4p	B1	B2	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 34 **Lifepaths—** Born Great, Servant of the Gate, Siege Master, Gate Forger

Skills— Mason B3, Excavation B2, Siege Engineer B4, Artillerist B4, Mending B3, Soothing Platitudes B2, Bastions of Hatred Architect B4

Gear— Sledgehammer, plated leather armor, travelling gear, hobnailed boots, siege engineer tools

Resources— 1D reputation among the clan as the Orc to see when something needs to fall.

Beliefs— If it was built, it can be broken. I'm not mad: My plan alone can level the White Tower. Make the Named think it was his idea, but make sure the rest know who did what they could not.

Instincts— If there's a bridge, note its location. When on the move, always note sources of lumber. Always give praise to the God of Darkness and Hate before firing the siege engines.

Traits— Hatred B5, Cannibal, Cold Black Blood, Fanged and Clawed, Loathsome and Twisted, Lynx-Eyed, Vile Language, Rare Talent, Humble Before My Master, The Bigger they Come..., Brutish Efficiency, Born To Rule Them All, Enemy of the Sun, Fervent Believer (in the God of Hate)

He Who Rules with Whip, Blade and Spell

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
G4	G4	B6	B5	B6	B7	B7	B5	B12	B7	4s/3p	B2	G2	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B5	Li: B8	Mi: B9	Se: B10	Tr: B11	Mo: B12

Age— 83 **Lifepaths—** Born Great, The Rites, Follower, Black Destroyer, Named, Whipmaster, Troll Lord, Slave to Dark, Drinker of the Dark, Bloodletter, Master of Blood, Blood Summoner

Skills— Torture G5, Sword B4, Armor Training, Bat-wise G2, Bow B4, Riding B3, Mounted Combat Training, Command G4, Brutal Intimidation G7, Troll-wise G2, Servant-wise G2, Void Embrace Training, Doctrine of the Night's Blood G4, Rituals of the Blood G6, Knives B4, Rituals-wise G4, Animal Husbandry G3, Elf-wise G2, Poison-wise G3, Sprinting Training

IMS— Ritual Sword: I: B5, M: B9, S: B13. VA 1, Add 2, Slow, Long. Ceremonial Knives: I B4, M B7, S B10. VA –, Add 1, Fast, Shortest.

Gear— Black Robes, Leather Apron, Ceremonial Knives, Tools of the Trade, Poisoner's Toolkit, Ceremonial Sword, Poison, Hobnailed Boots, Whip, Chainmail armor

Resources— 2D affiliation with his clan. He's the boss! Minor relationship with an Elven Ranger who saved his life (Forbidden, Hateful). Relationship: Emukt, Greater Imp servant and bodyguard

Rituals— Black Wings, Gathering of Stones, Call Forth His Might

Beliefs— I rule! No one else. Fear will keep the chieftains in line, and I was born to rule with terror. I can never let them know the Elf saved me; they will devour me.

Instincts— Always keep Emukt sated, lest he look to me to satisfy his hungers. If they rebel, break them and make them mine. Always start a battle (Range and Cover) with Black Wings.

Traits— Blasphemous Hatred G7, Cannibal, Cold Black Blood, Fanged and Clawed, Loathsome and Twisted, Lynx-Eyed, Vile Language, Stark Madness, Arrogant, Troll-Speak, Where's Whip There's Way, Savage Consequences, Intense Hatred, Low Cunning, Born To Rule Them All, Enemy of the Sun, Life is Death, Silent Hatred, Commanding Aura and Missing Hand
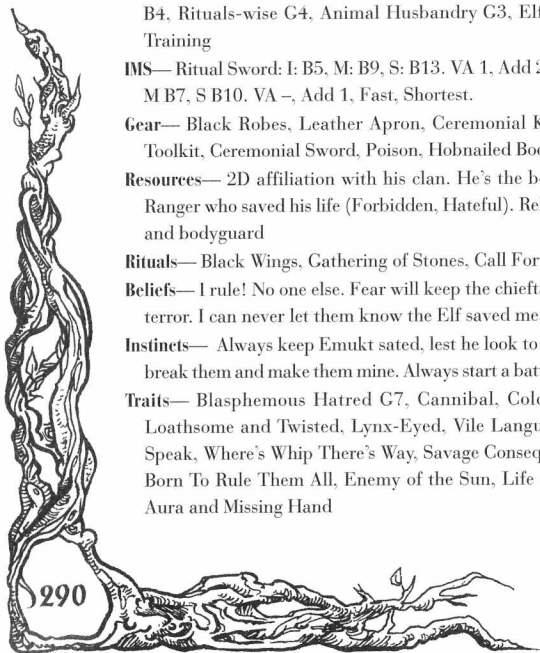
Roden

Roden Murderer

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B4(5)	B4	B6	B4	B3	B3	B5	B9	B6	7p/6s	B1	B2	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B2	Li: B4	Mi: B6	Se: B7	Tr: B8	Mo: B9

Age— 28 **Lifepaths—** Born Below, Lead to Society, Initiate, Shadow, Murderer, Murderer

Skills— Stealthy B5, Observation B4, Climbing B4, Knives B4, Intimidation B3, Garrotte B5, Crossbow B4, Throwing B4

Gear— Clothes, Roden Throwing Blades, Garrote, Knife

IMS— Roden Throwing Knives: I B3, M B5, S B7. VA 1. DoF as Bow. +1D Balance die. Knives: I B3, M B5, S B7. VA –, Add 1, Fast, Shortest.

Beliefs— A silent kill is the best kill. Obey the Visionary. Nothing stands between me and my target.

Instincts— If I am spotted while stealthing, then I throw a knife at the head of he who spotted me. Never speak unless spoken to. When I hear a sharp noise, I always stop and look.

Traits— Aecer's Likeness, Coat of Fur, Communal, Enlarged Incisors, Quick-Blooded, Tail, Large Ears, Pack Rat, Skittish, Tunnel Vision, Cautious, Cold-Hearted, Single-Minded, Murderous, Fleet of Foot, Broken, Secretive

Roden Kidnapper

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B5	B4(5)	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B10	B6	5p/4s	B1	B2	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Age— 29 **History—** Born Below, The Gauntlet, Sneak Thief, Burglar, Kidnapper

Skills— Brawling B4, Stealthy B4, Observation B4, Inconspicuous B2, Throwing B5, Lockpick B3, Knives B4, Climbing B4, Poisons B3

Gear— Clothes, Roden Throwing Blades, Poison Kit, Lockpick Kit, Traveling Gear

IMS— Roden Throwing Knives: I B3, M B5, S B7. VA 1. DoF as Bow. +1D Balance die. Knives: I B3, M B5, S B7. VA –, Add 1, Fast, Shortest.

Beliefs— Nothing gets done in the light. To be seen is to fail. Only do it for the money.

Instincts— Always keep my throwing blades poisoned. If a guard is coming, then I hide.

Traits— Aecer's Likeness, Coat of Fur, Communal, Enlarged Incisors, Quick-Blooded, Tail, Large Ears, Pack Rat, Skittish, Tunnel Vision, Skulking, Abused, Cool-Headed, Soft Step, Quiet, Confident, Callous, Coat of Darkness

Spider

Hunter-Seeker

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B4	B4(6)	B6	B6	B5	B5	B5	B5	B11	B7	6	B0	B2	*x4*

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Skills— Climbing B3(5), Cave-wise B2, Stealthy B4, Hunting B2, Burrowing B3, Snares B3, Spider-wise B2, Tracking B4, Brawling B5, Intimidation B3, Interrogation B3

IMS— Fangs: I B3, M B6, S B9. VA –, Add 2, Slow, Shortest, must be on the Inside.

Armor— Plated leather equivalent: 4D cephalothorax, 3D abdomen and legs.

Beliefs— I serve the Queen-Mother. I am sworn to carry out my duty; those who resist shall be punished.

Instincts— When quarry is spotted, Stealth into striking distance. Burrow when waiting. Drop a drag line.

Traits— Middling Stature, Alien, Arachnid Body, Eight-Eyed, Eight-Legged, Exoskeleton, Fangs, Keen Sense of Balance, Low Speech, Silk Spinner, Spider Sense, Virulent Venom, Wall-Crawler, Vile Language, Chitinous, Dark Sense, Strand-Runner, Orb-Walker, Single-Minded
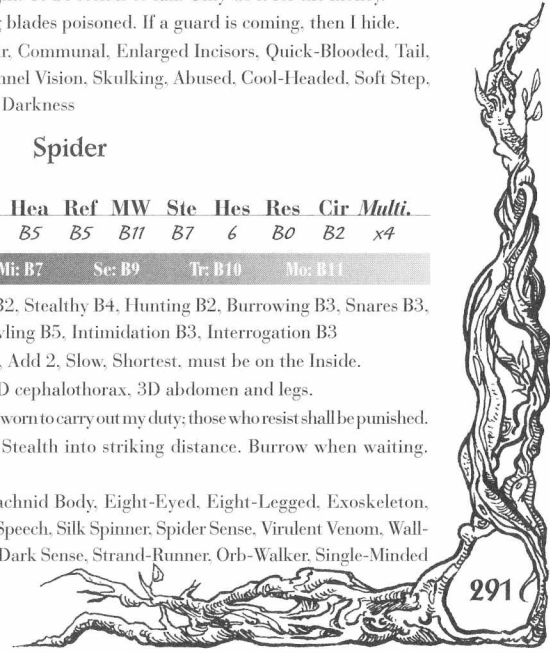
Troll

Brute

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B2	B2	B4	B5	B8	B7	B4	B3	B14	B8	8	B0	B1	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B5	Li: B8	Mi: B11	Se: B12	Tr: B13	Mo: B14

Skills— Brawling B4, Forest-wise B1, Stealthy B2, Man-wise B1, Village-wise B1, Intimidation B2

IMS— Bare-Fisted: I B4, M B8, S B12, VA 1, Add 2, Fast, Short. Hook Hand: I B5, M B10, S B15, VA 2, Add 2, Slow, Long. Head butt: I B5, M B10, S B15, VA 1, Slow. Bite: I B5, M B9, S B13, VA 1, Add 2, Slow, Shortest.

Armor— Full body covered with leather armor equivalent

Beliefs—There is nothing to this life but brutality. I shall crush my enemies and lord over their bodies.

Instincts— Always keep horns sharp. After a fight, ensure my opponent is dead.

Traits— Clawed, Fanged, Night Blooded, Night Eyed, Massive Stature, Stone's Age, Tough, Troll Skin, Voracious Carnivore, Horns, Hook Hand and Brute.

Walking, Talking, Ass-Kicking Lizard

Hosžrem

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B5	B5	B5	B4	B5	B6	B6	B4	B11	B7	5	B1	B2	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B4	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Skills— Sword B5, Bow B4, Brawling B5, Climbing B4, Stealth B4, Doctrine of Fire B3

Gear— Bone sword, hunting bow, leather cloak, water canteen, bone symbol of the Wheel of Fire

IMS— Savage Bite: I B4, M B7, S B10. VA 1, Add 2, Slow, Shortest. Bone Sword: I B4, M B8, S B12. VA –, Add 2, Slow, Long

Beliefs— I am a servant of the Wheel. We are the chosen people, destined to consume this unholy place—until its bones are clean and bleached white in the sun. Five is the holy number.

Instincts— Always pray over the dead before eating them. When confronted, go aggressive! Mark the Wheel on the south face of trees I pass.

Traits— Anthropomorphic Lizard, Cold Blooded, Iron Scales (-1 pip to incoming damage), Prehensile Tail (+1D Brawling), Savage Bite, Resilient, Devout

Wolf

Black Destroyer

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Multi.*
B3	B5(7)	B4	B6	B5	B5	B4	B5	B11	B7	7s/4p	B0	B1	x7

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B7	Mi: B8	Se: B9	Tr: B10	Mo: B11

Skills— Howling B2, Pack Etiquette B3, Stealthy B6, Tracking B4(6), Intimidation B3(7), Begging B2, Savage Attack B5, Rider Training, Mounted Combat Training

IMS— Crushing Jaws: I: B4 M: B8 S: B12. VA 2, Add 2, Fast, Shortest.

Beliefs— I am loyal to my master.

Instincts— Always wait for master to mount up. Always lead with a Charge/Tackle.

Traits— Crushing Jaws, Lupine Intellect, Great Lupine Form, Deep Fur, Wolf's Eyes, Woodland Ear, Wolf's Snout, Long Limbed, plus Vile Language, Demented, Submissive, Tasting the Lash, Deranged, Howl of Doom, Fearless, Cold-Blooded, Brutal, Dominant, Great Cunning, Intense Hatred, and Wolverine

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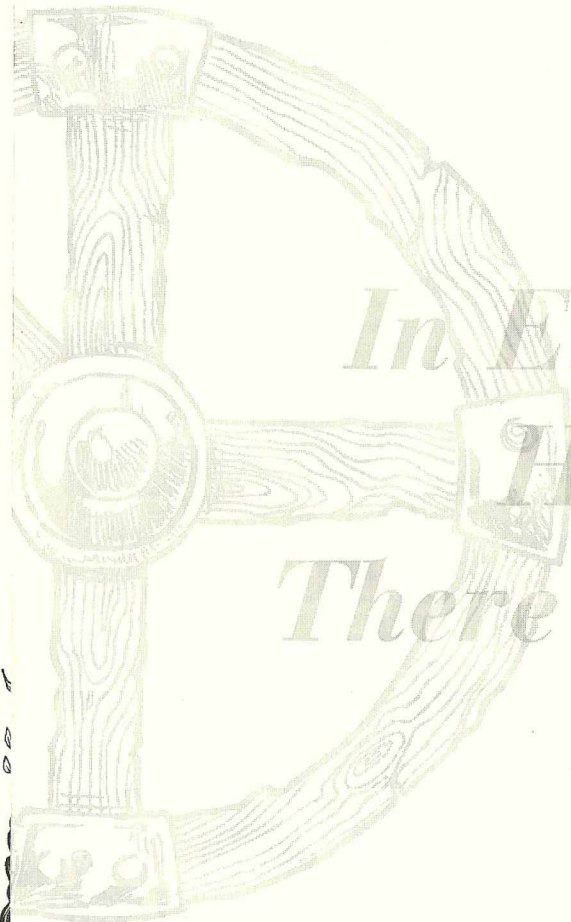
In Every
Heart,
There is a
Fire

the Burning Wheel

Revised Edition

The Burning Wheel is an award-winning fantasy roleplaying game in which players take on the roles of vibrant, dynamic characters whose very beliefs propel the story forward.

Starting with a simple d6 die pool mechanic, this game intuitively builds on its core concepts, evoking a pitch and tenor in play uncommon in roleplaying games. This book details solid, dramatic systems for task resolution, advancement, trials of belief, tests of nerve, searing social conflict, dangerous sorcery, miraculous faith, and brutal, gut-wrenching martial combat. Behind the dice, player decisions drive the game's systems. Their choices tangibly affect every outcome—from glorious victory to ignominious defeat.

The mechanics are presented in an easy-to-read writing style, with plenty of insight and advice from the designer. If you're not careful, Burning Wheel will change the way you play roleplaying games.

Ken Hite named it the Best New RPG in 2003. Reviewers on Gaming Report.com, RPG.net, Silven.com and Realms.org.uk have hailed it as "excellent," "impressive," "innovative," and, most importantly, "fun."

Try it, be tested and judge for yourself.