

THE RIDDLE OF STEEL™

ROLEPLAYING WITH AN EDGE

QUICKSTART RULES
BY
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THE RIDDLE OF STEEL™

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CREDITS

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1. INTRODUCTION

A MOMENT OF STEEL

BALOR'S BREATH sent small puffs of steam up through the vents in the front of his helmet. His armor's joints creaked in protest as he marched down the snow-covered path. News of barbarian raiders had reached the clan, and he and his men had been sent to eliminate the problem – sent into a three-day march through unrelenting, bitter cold, the snow and frost more dangerous than any raiders they could imagine.

A soft sound echoed from the surrounding woods – nothing more than a whisper, but enough to break Balor's grim train of thought. He held up his hand to halt the war party. A dead silence filled the area, a silence Balor knew too well. He reached down and unclasped the warhammer from his belt.

At once, as if the forest itself had roused to fury, large dark figures crashed out of the underbrush and the surrounding woods, descending upon them. Balor had barely enough time to get his shield up as a massive axe sliced down, gleaming edge aimed to split his head. The axe lodged in the shield, and Balor swung his hammer around, striking his attacker in the shoulder. The attacker, his leather and furs reddening, stumbled backwards with a cry, his war-painted face twisted in pain. Another swing from the warhammer, and the bandit fell to the crimson-smearred snow, never to rise again.

Breathing heavily, Balor looked around to see the barbarians fleeing, most of their men left behind to the same fate. Some of his own clan had joined them, their bodies contorted among the trees in different poses of death. Steam rose from where their blood spilled into the snow, rising to vanish without trace into the bleak, merciless sky.

The small battle had begun quickly, and – like his kinsmen's lives – ended even quicker.

WHAT IS AN RPG?

An RPG, or “Role-Playing Game”, is basically “let's pretend” with rules. The players of the game create fictional personae whose abilities are defined and

rated by the rules, and who interact with a fictional world described by the game's referee, known in *The Riddle of Steel* as the *Seneschal* (SEN-uh-shall). The Seneschal creates and describes the situations, characters and opponents encountered by the other players' characters; the players, making up their own lines in character, describe their actions and reactions to those situations. Special 10-sided dice are used to determine the outcome of conflict. The best games take on aspects of storytelling, interactive theatre, creative writing and strategy gaming to create a unique, fun-filled experience with actual *people* – not just a TV screen or a computer program.

THE RIDDLE OF STEEL

The Riddle of Steel involves fantasy elements familiar to most gamers – magic, swordplay, intrigue, war and adventure. What sets the game apart is its approach to these traditional elements. Roleplaying games often seek to create an enforced balance in play, by rigorously defining how a character's power level and classification determine his or her abilities – in combat, magic, skills and in-game influence. This is meant to ensure no one character can dominate the game and shut out other players... but it also, all too often, puts players under a stringent set of arbitrary restrictions that stifle imagination and excitement.

Things are different here. Magic is deadly and powerful – even the weakest sorcerer is a lethal threat. Swordplay is fast, dynamic, and bloody – choose your battles wisely. Heroes don't get better by hacking up monsters and counting up gold – they get better by chasing their own passions and dreams, growing as *characters* rather than just gamepieces. And players don't get a free balance built into the rules for them – each player has to take responsibility for his own participation and enjoyment. The world of *The Riddle of Steel* is more real, more dangerous, and more exciting than what you'll find in most RPGs... at least, we'd like to think so.

ABOUT THE QUICKSTART RULES

These Quickstart Rules present a highly simplified version of *The Riddle of Steel* as presented in

the main corebook. These rules will let you get started learning the basic mechanics of *Riddle* right away. However, the primary corebook provides much more in the way of rules, resources and information, including:

- A more detailed character creation system, allowing you to play non-human races, select character gifts and flaws, expanded attribute range, a more complex skill set and wider range of social status and starting wealth.
- Extended combat rules, including more Proficiencies, more Maneuvers, more weapons and more complex and realistic damage tables.
- Advanced sorcery rules, with more complex spell definition, more options

for sorcerer characters and more sample spells listed.

- A full gazetteer of the world of Weyrth, examining over 40 nations in detail and presenting far more information on Weyrth's economy, history, religious background, cultures and geography.

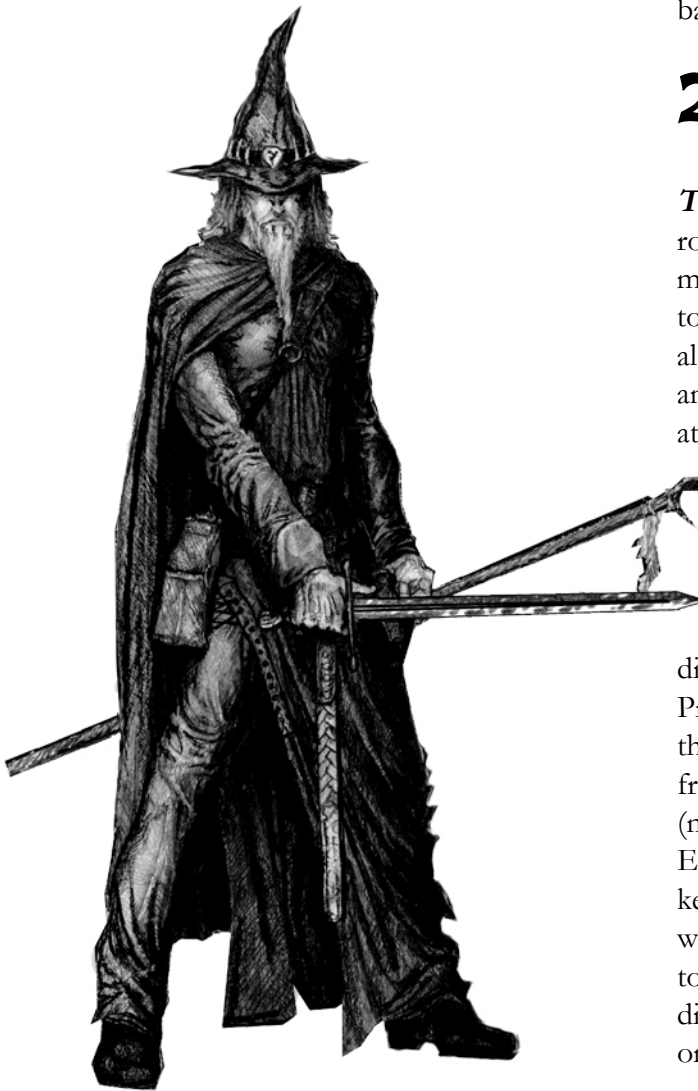
So why bother with these Quickstart Rules at all, then? First of all, because they're a good way to introduce new players to the game – to get them familiar with the “feel” of *The Riddle of Steel* before they lay out \$40 for the corebook. Secondly, because they're fast and simple, which makes them perfect for those “beer and pretzel” games you sometimes run on short notice. Finally, they're available for free download on *The Riddle of Steel's* web site, which can be a useful backup to your copy of the corebook.

2. GAME MECHANICS

The Riddle of Steel uses 10-sided dice for all its rolls; you can get these dice at any gaming store and most comic stores, and you should probably get 6 to 10 for each player (including the Seneschal). We also recommend each player get one die in red and another in white. Small bowls for holding your dice at the gaming table are a good idea as well. The dice rolls fall into five basic types.

ATTRIBUTE TESTS

Attribute Tests are made by rolling a number of dice equal to one of your Attributes (like Agility or Presence) against a *Target Number* (TN) based on the difficulty of the task at hand. TNs can range from 2 (foolproof) to 12 (very difficult) or higher (nearly impossible), and are set by the Seneschal. Each individual die which equals or beats the TN is kept as a *Success*; the others are ignored. Any dice which roll 10 may be rerolled, *adding* the new result to the rolled 10. This is called *Stacking*. Any given die can keep Stacking as long as you keep rolling 10s on that die.



Usually, only one success is needed to accomplish an action, though some actions may require more; likewise, the number of successes indicates the quality of the result, with one success equaling a marginal scrape-by while four or five indicates a flawless feat. You may also gain bonuses or penalties to your Attribute (and thus to the number of dice you can roll) if the Seneschal states a particular task is easier or harder, due to circumstances, than it would otherwise be.

VOCATION TESTS

Vocation Tests are a special kind of Attribute Test, made by rolling an appropriate Attribute against the *Vocational Rating* (VR) of that Vocation; the VR thus acts as a Target Number. Thus, *lower* VRs are better than higher ones, and the lower your VR the more accomplished you are in that Vocation.

PROFICIENCY TESTS

Proficiency Tests are made by rolling dice from one of your three *Pools* of dice: your *Combat Pool*, *Missile Pool* or (for sorcerers) *Sorcery Pool*. These dice are rolled against TNs set by your choice of weapon, maneuver, or magical invocation; more information can be found in Parts 3 and 4, below.

CONTESTED ROLLS

Contested Rolls, sometimes called just *Contests*, are made whenever two or more characters or forces are directly struggling against each other to win. Each competitor rolls their dice in an Attribute, Vocation or Proficiency Test against their own TNs, which may be identical for each or different depending on circumstances. The number of successes scored by each competitor are compared; the competitor with the most successes is the winner. The loser's successes are subtracted from his to determine his final *Margin of Success*. (Ties will indicate varying results depending on the situation; a tie in armwrestling will mean something different from a tie in bladeplay. When in doubt, the Seneschal will make the final call.)

EXTENDED ROLLS

Extended Rolls can be any of the four types listed above. These rolls are made for long-term, extended tasks like forging a sword, creating a spell or climbing a high cliff. An Extended Roll sets not just a TN, but a number of *Required Successes*, which must be accumulated over the course of several rolls. Each roll represents the passage of a set length of time – when forging a sword, each roll may represent a day's work, while the process of spell research may require a week for each roll. These rolls take as long as they take, unless a Fumble is rolled (in which case the player must start over from scratch) or unless time runs out due to other circumstances in the game.

FUMBLING

Sometimes Tests aren't just failed; they're completely botched. This is called *Fumbling*. Whenever you fail a roll (i.e. roll no successes at all) *and* roll two or more 1s on the dice, you have Fumbled – not only failed, but screwed up spectacularly badly. The Seneschal will determine the exact results, based on the situation.

GAMEPLAY MECHANICS IN ACTION

Geralt, a Cynrithmeiran bladeslinger (played by Jake), and his friend Vhord, a knight of Stabl (played by Nick), are travelling a road together through a misty twilight. Steve, the Seneschal, sets the scene for them:

S: The evening mist has thickened over the hills, and moisture is collecting on your bags and armor. The twilight is chill, and the wilderness noises are subdued and muffled. Your aching feet feel every step you make on this rutted path.

J: (*as Geralt*) Can we stop a moment? I don't want my bowstring getting wet.

N: (*in character as Vhord*) Certes, my friend. I would not see thee helpless.

J: Don't you *ever* relax?

N: But I *am* relaxed.

S: Jake, I'm gonna ask you to roll Geralt's Wits and tell me what you get.

6 The Riddle of Steel: Roleplaying with an Edge

Wits is a Mental Attribute, which includes senses and perception as well as intelligence. In this instance, Steve needs to know if Geralt hears the bandits lying in wait up the road; but he can't tell Jake the TN or what the Attribute Test is for, because then Jake will know what's waiting for them!

J: Okay, lessee... (Geralt's Wits is 5. Jake rolls 5 10-sided dice, getting:) 7, 4, 8, 9, 2. No fumbles, at least!

Steve had set the TN to hear the bandits as 8 – hard, but not impossible. Geralt scored two successes, which Steve explains as follows:

S: Geralt – as you're coiling your bowstring for storage in your pack, you hear an odd noise carried through the mist. It sounds like a scrape on gravel, combined with an oddly huffing breath...

J: You mean – like a horse's hoof on dirt? Did the breath sound like a horse too?

S: Bingo.

N: (out of character) Crap. Bandits.

J: Okay. I tell Vhord, "You wait here. I'm gonna sneak around and see what's what."

N: (back in character) I have little liking for cowering in the mist, Geralt.

J: (also in character) There's honour, Vhord, and then there's foolishness. Would you send men into battle without knowing your enemy as much as you could?

N: No, but neither would I allow lack of such knowledge to be an excuse for cowardice!

J: Okay, okay, just keep your voice down... (to Steve) Any chance the bandits heard us just then?

S: They might have; you heard them when they were being quieter than you were just now. But sound carries oddly with the wind and the mist.

J: Actually, that's perfect. (to Nick) Vhord, I want you to sing a Stahlrish song to distract them. Something loud and obscene, as many verses as you can. (to Steve) While he's doing that, I'm going to sneak around through the hills and try to come up on these bandits from behind.

S: Vhord?

N: (still in character, stiffly) If they are bandits, they do not deserve honour; if they are not, Geralt's... advance scouting... will merely avoid a misunderstanding (out of character) I don't lose a Conscience

point for that, do I?

Conscience is a Spiritual Attribute, which rises and falls as a character acts in keeping with or against his conscience. It is important because it not only grants bonus dice on certain rolls, it determines how Vhord can advance in experience. In this case, Steve is generous:

S: No, Stahlrish honour isn't *that* strict. Don't worry about it. Okay, I'm gonna need Vocation Rolls from both of you: Nick, roll Presence vs. your Courtier; Jake, roll Agility vs. your Woodsman.

N: Why am I rolling vs. Courtier?

S: To see how well you sing your song, of course!

Vhord has a Presence of 4 and a Courtier VR of 8; he rolls 4 dice and gets... 3, 6, 7 and 9. One success; the song is acceptably done but no more. Geralt has an Agility of 6 and a Woodsman VR of 8; he rolls a 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 0, then rerolls the 0 for another 7 – a total of 17. Three successes.

S: As Vhord's voice booms out with a Stahlrish tavern song about a barmaid and a rock dwarf, you slip into the hills and make a wide circling arc through the heather, trying to close in on where you heard the noise. Give me a second here...

The bandits don't have sentries, but there's a chance they may hear Geralt as he closes. Steve rolls the Wits of the rearmost bandit – a measly 3 – against his Woodsman VR of 9. He rolls 3, 6 and 8... no successes. He doesn't hear Geralt.

S: You get within a few yards of the bandits, for bandits they are; three men on either side of the trail hidden by a rise in the ground, armed with crossbows and shortswords, decked out in patchwork leather armour and scraps of chain. The horse you heard was one of about four, tied off to a tree off to your left.

J: Crossbows. Three-become-One, I hate crossbows. Can I get close enough to take out the rearmost without the others noticing?

S: That'll be a lot trickier, but you *might* be able to manage it...

J: No, wait! I've got a better idea. I'm going to sneak over to the horses, cut them free, then whack one of them on the butt and stampede them all

towards the bandits. That should put a crimp into their plan!

S: Not bad. Okay, roll Agility against your Woodsman VR again to get over there without causing the horses to give you away....

J: (*rolling*) Okey-dokey, here we go.... 3, 2, 6, 9, 7, 1. Well, one success is all you need, right?

S: In your case, yes, you're lucky. The horses snuffle nervously at you as you untie them, but don't react beyond that. Vhord is starting on the third repetition of his song, and you can see the bandits shifting in restless suspicion....

J: Time to roll the apple-cart. I draw my sword and start whacking the horses' butts with the flat.

S: You want to hit them all?

J: Yeah, why not?

S: Okay, your Combat Pool is 12, so that's three dice to each horse. Your longsword has a TN of 6; I'm bumping that to 7 because you're trying to hit only with the flat. You're not gonna miss, but the better you roll, the faster and more accurately the horses will make for the bandits....

This is a series of Proficiency Tests. Jake gets two successes on his first Test, one each on his second and third, and on his fourth he rolls... 1, 1, and 4 – a fumble!

J: Ah, crap! What happens?

S: The blade turns in your hand and cuts into the horse's hindquarters! With a shriek of pain and fury, the horse kicks out and back at you!

J: Damn, damn, damn, and I don't even have any dice left in the Pool for a dodge... Anything I can do?

S: (*fiendish grin*) Nope.

Steve rolls for the horse's attack, but Geralt is lucky; Steve only gets 1 success. Added to the horse's STR of 8, this does a total of 9 wound levels of damage. This is reduced by 5, for Geralt's Brawn, and by another 1 for Geralt's tough leather vest, leaving Geralt with a final 3 levels of wound damage.

S: Take a level-three wound to your midsection. You reel backwards and collapse to the earth, coiled around a huge, numb agony in your guts, barely able to breathe. Fortunately, your plan seems to have worked; the bandits are off chasing the horses.

J: All of them?

S: Nope – not quite. One of them turns, comes charging back towards you, stands over you and levels his crossbow.

J: Oh, man....

N: (*clearing his throat*) Hello? Can I do anything now?

S: Absolutely. You heard the ruckus and the uproar a few seconds ago.

N: Then I go charging forward into the fray!

S: Your timing is perfect. As horses and bandits run hither and yon about you, you see the figure emerge out of the mist, lifting a crossbow to aim and fire....

N: I drew my sword when I charged; I simply swing it out to one side as I run, aiming for the neck.

S: Okay, combat time. Throw down your initiative die.... (*Nick throws down a red die, indicating that Vhord is attacking this round; Steve throws down a white die, meaning the bandit will try to defend.*) What's your Combat Pool?

N: 13 - I'm spending 7 on this cut to the neck.

S: You caught him by surprise. He tries to get his crossbow up to parry; he can only spend 5 dice.

N: Let's roll!

Vhord's longsword has a TN of 6; the TN to parry with a crossbow is pretty high, as it's not something the thing was built for - 8. Vhord rolls 7 dice vs. TN 6 as the bandit rolls 5 dice vs. TN 8; Vhord gets four successes, the bandit only one, giving Vhord a Margin of Success of 3 – a bit. Vhord's sword does his Brawn, 6, + 2 in damage, or 8; adding his three successes, that's a total of 11 versus the bandit's unarmoured Brawn of 5 – or 6 damage levels to the neck! On the Damage Table, this is an immediately fatal wound, with obvious results....

S: Your sword knocks the crossbow from the bandit's hand without slowing, continues on into his throat, and out the other side in an explosive gush of red as the bandit's head and body go separate ways.

N: Woo hoo! Never screw with a Stahlner, buddy! I spin around. Anybody else want a piece of me?

S: They're too busy chasing their horses, and any who might have been close enough have been thoroughly discouraged by the swift death of their col-

league.

N: Then I'd better get over and give Geralt a hand....

J: Great. Stahlnish medicine. I shoulda let the horse kill me....

And that's how it goes: simple, fast, brutal and comprehensive. The strategy comes in playing to your strengths and knowing when to attack and when to ambush; the fun comes in creating these other people, and vicariously enjoying their triumphs.

3. CHARACTER CREATION

ASSIGNING PRIORITIES

Quickstart characters in *The Riddle of Steel* are built around four areas of ability: *Social Class & Wealth, Attributes, Vocations* and *Proficiencies*. To create a character, each of these areas must be assigned a priority, from A to D; A is the strongest and D the weakest. Each priority gives a different amount of ability in each area, as shown on the chart at the bottom of this page.

So, for example, if you wanted to create a lower-class rogue who is a poor but clever thief and trickster, you might assign her priorities as follows:

A - Vocations: One at VR 6, a second at VR 7. (Entertainer and Thief are two possibilities.)

B - Attributes: 20 points to divide among her Attributes.

C - Social Class/Wealth: Peasant/Serf equivalent. Pretty poor.

D - Proficiencies: Only 3 dice. Not much of a fighter at all.

A young noble squire, on the other hand, would

have his priorities assigned as follows:

A - Social Class/Wealth: Nobility. Quite wealthy.

B - Proficiencies: 9 dice. A good bit of martial training.

C - Attributes: 18 points. A little better than average.

D - Vocations: 1 at VR 9, probably Courtier or Knight. Little non-martial schooling.

SOCIAL CLASS AND WEALTH

The four levels of Social Class and Wealth provide benefits as follows:

Nobility (Priority A): Adventuring nobles are assumed to be from among the lower ranks of the nobility, usually without a landed title. If they receive income, it is from their work as soldiers, courtiers or freelances. Noble characters begin with 100 Gold Pieces. Income depends on exact position, but generally bachelor knights or freelances receive 31-40 (30 + 1d10) Silver Pieces a month, while courtiers live on the patronage of their superiors or liege lords. Nobles have the right to bear all arms and armor, are almost always formally educated, can own land, and enforce the laws of the realm or their liege lord. They are addressed as "Sir" or "Lady".

Freeman (Priority B): The middle class – ranging from merchants to clerks, farmers, soldiers, clergy, artisans, tradesmen, blacksmiths et al. Most adventurers or wanderers come from this class. They are sometimes formally educated. They begin with 25 Gold Pieces; income (if established) is an additional 11-20 (10+1d10) Silver Pieces per month on average. They may bear arms and wear non-metallic armour, but may not own land without the consent of the local liege lord; they are not obliged to obey any noble to whom they

CHARACTER CREATION PRIORITY TABLE				
Priority	Social Class & Wealth	Attributes	Vocations	Proficiencies
A	Nobility	22 points	1 at VR 6, 1 at VR 7	12 dice
B	Freeman	20 points	1 at VR 7, 1 at VR 8	9 dice
C	Peasant / Serf	18 points	1 at VR 8, 1 at VR 9	6 dice
D	Prisoner / Slave	16 points	1 at VR 9	3 dice

have not sworn allegiance, but open irreverence and disrespect will earn swift retribution.

Peasants/Serfs (Priority C): Workers bound to a particular lord or area of land by an oath of fealty; in return for their service (which they may not voluntarily refuse) the lord agrees to protect them militarily. They seldom have any education or training, and cannot own metallic weapons or armor (which still gives them staves and bows). They begin play with 5 Gold Pieces, and typical income is 2d10 Silver Pieces twice a year when crops are sold. Adventurers from this social class have probably snuck away from their liege lord, a practice technically illegal but seldom prosecuted, to see the wide world of adventure if they can.

Prisoners/Slaves (Priority D): The bottom of the barrel, a condemned criminal or outright piece of property. Prisoners or slaves are assumed to have just escaped, or are about to escape as part of their first adventure; thus, they not only begin with no funds, income or possessions, but usually with the forces of the law pursuing them. Slavery is legal in many kingdoms in Weyrth, and escaped slaves or prisoners can expect little help or assistance – which only makes the adventure all the more challenging.

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes break down into four types, Temporal, Mental, Spiritual and Derived, as follows:

The *Temporal Attributes* cover your physical abilities, and range from 1 to 10; the average human possesses a rating of 4 in both Temporal Attributes.

Agility (AGL): Dexterity, speed, body control and balance.

Brawn (BRN): Physical power and muscle strength, toughness, fitness and endurance.

The *Mental Attributes* cover your mind, thought, strength of character and will. Like the Temporal Attributes, they range from 1 to 10 with a human

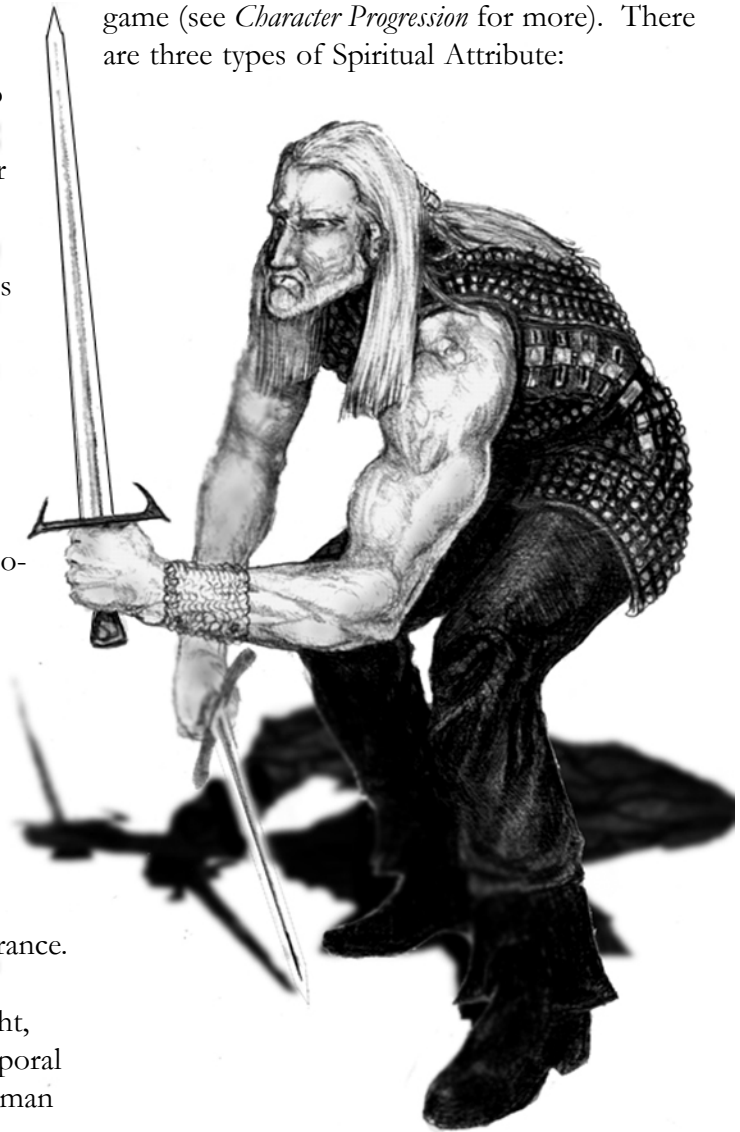
average of 4.

Wits (WTS): Mental sharpness, alertness, intelligence and awareness.

Presence (PRS): Strength of personality and force of will and determination.

The points you receive from your Priority are divided among these four Attributes, AGL, BRN, WTS and PRS. Priority A gives you 22 points to divide, Priority B 20, Priority C 18 and Priority D 16. No attribute may be lower than 2 or higher than 7 at this point.

The *Spiritual Attributes* cover the profound aspects of your personality and nature, the drives and feelings that make your character who he or she is. They can range from 0 to 5; there is no “average”, and scores can fluctuate highly throughout the game (see *Character Progression* for more). There are three types of Spiritual Attribute:



Conscience: The desire to do the right thing, regardless of personal cost.

Faith: The bond between you and your chosen patron deity or philosophy.

Passion: A great love, hate, or loyalty that drives you through life. The subject must be specified.

A player must divide *five* points among these Spiritual Attributes. He can assign a maximum of 5 to any one Spiritual Attribute, and can rate the others as 0 if desired. Passion may be taken twice, for different subjects each time.

The *Derived Attributes* are calculated from the Temporal and Mental Attributes. There are three of them, as follows:

Coordination (CRD): A combination of Agility and Wits, determining your ability to react and act quickly and accurately under stress. To determine Coordination, add Agility and Wits, divide by 2, and round down.

Resistance (RES): A measure of how hard you are to knock out or take down. To determine Resistance, add Brawn and Presence, divide by 2, and round down.

Move (MOV): Determines how much distance in yards you can cover on foot in 1-2 seconds. Move is equal to your Agility, plus $\frac{1}{2}$ your Brawn (rounded down).

Vocations

In the Quickstart Rules for *The Riddle of Steel*, all areas of character skill and training (outside weapon proficiencies or sorcery) are collapsed into one-word *Vocations*, each of which describes the capacities of that profession or area. Starting Vocations and their Vocational Ratings, VRs, are determined by the chart: Priority A grants one Vocation at VR 6 and one at VR 7; Priority B grants one Vocation at VR 7 and one at VR 8; Priority C grants one Vocation at VR 8 and one at VR 9; and Priority D grants only one Vocation at VR 9.

Some sample Vocations, and their areas of

strength, are listed as follows:

- *Woodsman/Ranger*: Hunting, tracking, survival, scrounging, herbalism, orienteering, stealth and wilderness camouflage, climbing and swimming.
- *Knight*: Horsemanship, first aid, hunting, heraldry, military strategy and tactics, tournament etiquette.
- *Soldier*: Leadership and intimidation, riding, military strategy and tactics, heraldry, first aid, battle, rank politics.
- *Tribesman/Clansman*: Hunting, first aid, clan/tribal etiquette and language, stealth, leadership and intimidation, sailing (for naval peoples) or survival (for land peoples).
- *Sailor*: Navigation, climbing and swimming, sailing, artillery use, boating, naval tactics, heraldry (flags), street wisdom and astronomy.
- *Peasant/Craftsman*: Trade of choice (farming, smithcraft, tailoring, masonry etc), first aid, folklore, animal handling and herding, survival, hunting and trapping.
- *Clergyman*: Theology, court and church etiquette, meditation, ritual, oratory, literacy, diplomacy and first aid. Priests can't automatically heal people in *The Riddle of Steel* but miracles have been known to occur with a sufficiently strong Faith....
- *Druid*: Naturalism, meditation, ritual magic, arcane theory and symbol drawing, herbalism, astronomy, and surgery.
- *Scholar*: Ancient languages, literacy, oratory, research, etiquette, and other areas of esoteric knowledge, including ritual magic.
- *Labourer*: Teamster work, street wisdom, scrounging, intimidation, gambling, a trade skill of choice (farming, masonry, carpentry, mining, shipbuilding, etc.)
- *Courtier*: Court etiquette, diplomacy and persuasion, ridicule, games and gambling, dancing, literacy, intrigue, legal knowledge and lying/bluffing.
- *Entertainer*: Dancing, intrigue, oratory, musicianship and singing, acting, acrobatics, juggling, and disguise.
- *Rogue*: Panhandling, trap detection, street

wisdom, scrounging, stealth, pickpocketing and lockpicking, climbing, breaking and entry, and gambling.

This is only the beginning of possible Vocations. Players can make up their own, coming up with names and listing eight to twelve areas of ability covered by each Vocation. Sorcerers should take either Druid, Scholar or Clergyman as one of their vocations.

Not all Vocations are equally applicable to all situations; part of the challenge to your players is to come up with clever justifications for how your training applies. In general, it is the Seneschal who will decide how applicable your Vocation is to the action of the moment. If the action is covered by one of the areas specified in your Vocation description, you roll against your VR. If the action can conceivably be related to the Vocation but is tangential at best, you roll against your VR +2. If the action has absolutely nothing to do with any Vocation you have, the Seneschal will handle it as an Attribute Test instead at a very high TN (minimum 9).

PROFICIENCIES

These dice are assigned to your proficiencies in various types of weapons. Priority A gives you 12 dice to assign, Priority B 9 dice, Priority C 6 dice and Priority D 3 dice. These dice can be assigned among various types of weapons as you prefer: if you had 9 dice to spend, you could spend 3 in Longsword, 3 in Dagger and 3 in Bow, 5 in Greatsword and 4 in Axe, or any other combination thereof. These Proficiencies are added to your Coordination Attribute to determine the number of dice in your *Combat Pool* (for melee weapon Proficiencies) or your *Missile Pool* (for missile weapons). A warrior with a Coordination of 5 and a Proficiency of 4 in Longsword, for example, will have a Combat Pool of 9 dice when fighting with his longsword.

Characters who wish to play sorcerers may also spend these dice to purchase ability in the *Realms*

of sorcerous power: Temporal, Mental, or Spiritual. Each Realm has three levels of power – Novice, Apprentice, and Master; each level of power, for each Realm, costs 2 Proficiency dice. So a character with 6 Proficiency dice could buy Proficiency 2 in Quarterstaff and Novice-level power in two of the Realms (2 dice each), or buy Quarterstaff 2 and Apprentice-level power in one Realm (4 dice).

SPIRITUAL ATTRIBUTE USE

Spiritual Attributes are valuable in two ways: they represent additional dice that can be called upon for actions that further those Attributes, and they provide the means by which your character grows and evolves. Essentially, whenever you are performing an action that supports or is supported by your particular Conscience, Faith or Passion, you can *add dice equal to that Attribute* to your roll.

You can add dice equal to your Conscience to any roll for an action that involves “doing the right thing,” especially if there are easier or more tempting alternatives. Every time you act Conscientiously, you can increase your Conscience by 1, up to the maximum of 5. Going against your Conscience, by acting out of selfishness, greed or cowardice, can result in the loss of a Conscience point at the Seneschal’s discretion.

You can add dice equal to your Faith to any action roll that significantly furthers or defends the belief, faith or religion involved, or to any roll to defend or protect the truly faithful. Every time you act in keeping with your Faith, especially in the face of danger, you can increase your Faith by 1, up to the maximum of 5. Going against your Faith can cost you a Faith point at the Seneschal’s call.

You can add dice equal to your Passion to any action roll directly affecting the object of your passion – rescuing a dear love or true friend, attacking your deadliest enemy, defending the King you’re sworn to serve, etc. You gain a point in Passion every time you undertake a risk or make

a sacrifice for the object of your passion, up to the maximum of 5; you needn't be successful, you just have to really try. Ignoring such opportunities or neglecting the object of your Passion will cause a loss of 1 point, at the Seneschal's discretion.

CHARACTER PROGRESSION

Character development in *The Riddle of Steel* is directly related to how effectively you pursue your character's dreams, passions and beliefs. In order to progress, you must spend points from your Spiritual Attributes, effectively causing them to drop (but you can recover these points through gameplay for further development and roleplaying). Spiritual Attribute (SA) points can be spent as follows.

To increase a Temporal or Mental Attribute: Spend SA points equal to the Attribute's current rating to increase that Attribute by 1. Derived Attributes can't be directly improved; you have to improve the Temporal or Mental Attributes they're calculated from.

To increase a Weapon Proficiency: Spend SA points equal to the Proficiency's current level to raise it by 1. Acquiring a totally new Proficiency costs 1 SA point, but you must find a teacher with at least Proficiency 5 in the weapon to train you. Raising Proficiencies already possessed does not require training.

To increase a Sorcerous Realm: Spend SA points equal to *three times* your current level in the Realm (so to go from Level 1, Novice, to Level 2, Apprentice, costs 3 SA points; to go from Level 2 to Level 3, Master, costs 6 SA points). Level 1 in a Realm not already possessed costs 3 SA points. *Double* these costs for anyone trying to learn without benefit of a master, large library, or similar resource. *Characters must buy at least 1 level in 1 Realm at character creation in order to develop more sorcerous abilities later*—a character who did not buy any ability in at least one Realm at character creation has no sorcerous talent, and cannot develop it later in life.

To reduce a Vocational Rating: VRs don't directly change by spending SA points, but through practice and use. For every time you successfully use a Vocation under duress of any kind, you may place a check in one

of the little boxes beside your Vocation. When you have accumulated *five* checks, roll Wits against a TN of (15 - current VR); e.g. if your Vocational Rating is 8, you roll against a TN of 15 - 8, or 7. Success on this roll lowers the VR by 1. If you fail, your VR remains as it was, and you must erase three of your five checks. (Fumbling eliminates *all* checks and leaves your VR as it was.)

You can improve VRs through training "out-of-game", by spending 10 SA points to make a Wits roll as above. These SA points are spent even if the Wits test fails. You may also purchase a new Vocation, provided you can find a teacher, at a starting VR of 9 for 10 SA points.

To improve Social Class & Wealth: Find money. Marry rich, or well-connected. Blackmail a noble, or gain his favour. In short, you can't do it by spending SA points or rolling dice; you have to do it through the actual story of your character. Talk to your Seneschal if there are particular rewards you'd really like to achieve; a decent Seneschal will give you at least a few opportunities to acquire them (though he's under no obligation to make that acquisition easy for your character!).

4. COMBAT AND INJURY

Combat in *The Riddle of Steel*, even in this "rules-light" Quickstart version, is fast and deadly dangerous; victory requires not just high scores and big weapons, but tactical thinking and planning. There are no "hit points" or cosmetic damage; every wound has the potential to be your last, and every weapon can kill anyone. Make plans, team up, play dirty, and above all, *don't be stupid*.

Melee combat is fought using the *Combat Pool*, which is the total of your Coordination and your Proficiency in the weapon you're using: if you have a Coordination of 5 and a Longsword Proficiency of 6, for example, you will have a Combat Pool of 11 dice whenever you fight with your longsword. Once you've determined your Combat Pool (or CP, for short), set aside the dice



and get ready for the fight!

Rounds, Initiative and Exchanges

Melee combat is structured around the *Combat Round*, a period of time lasting about 1 or 2 seconds in which combatants engage in two *Exchanges of Blows* – Contest Rolls using some or all of their CP to roll contests of attack and defense. At the beginning of the fight, each combatant should take their red die and their white die into their hand. To signal the beginning of the combat, the Seneschal will call out “*Throw!*”

- To show you are *attacking*, throw down the *red* die.
- To show you are *defending*, throw down the *white* die.

If more than one combatant throws down a red die, they attack in order of their Coordination scores, from highest first to lowest last.

Taunting: If nobody throws down a red die, the combatants circle for a few moments, and can *Taunt* each other to try to provoke the other into attacking. Each player should make an Extended Roll of Presence, with TNs and Required Suc-

cesses equal to their target’s Presence; the first one to accumulate the necessary Successes has provoked the other into attacking, and the loser *must* throw down a red die at the next call.

Surprise: If a player does not throw down an initiative die when the Seneschal calls for it, or the Seneschal rules that the character would reasonably be caught by surprise (getting jumped on from a dark alley, getting stabbed by a trusted ally, etc.), the surprised or hesitating player must roll Coordination against a TN set by the Seneschal to indicate the degree of surprise – ranging from TN 7 if you didn’t throw down your die or are otherwise aware of your attacker but caught off-guard, all the way to TN 13 (requiring a Stacking success) if you were caught totally blindsided! Failure indicates that no action can be taken until next round, but if you get at least one success, you can defend (or attempt to Buy Initiative).

Buying Initiative: This dangerous tactic requires waiting for your opponent to strike, then attempting to beat him to the punch by moving faster than he can. You can buy initiative when you have both thrown down a red die, or if you throw

down a white die and then change your mind. Instead of simply waiting for your attack turn in order of Coordination, or defending as normal, tell the Seneschal you want to buy the initiative by spending CP dice equal to your opponent's Wits. You may then roll a Contest of Presence against your opponent's Wits, each against a TN equal to the other's Coordination; the one who gains more successes will strike first.

Once the actions of Initiative have been established, the first *Exchange* takes place: the attacker allocates a portion of his Combat Pool to an attack and rolls; the defender does likewise with his Combat Pool to defend. On the following Exchange, the winner of the previous Exchange attacks with the remainder of his Pool, and the loser defends. This signals the end of the Round, and Combat Pools refresh. The winner of the last Exchange retains the initiative next Round; the red and white dice are not thrown down again. This continues until both opponents choose to break off, or one defeats (usually by killing) the other...

ATTACKS, OFFENSIVE MANEUVERS AND TARGET ZONES

All attacks in *The Riddle of Steel* must use a deliberately targeted *Maneuver* – you can't just flail away randomly and hope to hit somebody! In the Quickstart rules, there are three different types of attacking Maneuvers, each of which must be aimed at a particular *Target Zone*. To attack, a player must state the Maneuver he is using, how many of his Combat Pool dice he is spending on the attack, and which Target Zone he is aiming for – for example, Jake might say, describing his bladeslinger Geralt's choice of attack, "I'm swinging, for 6 dice, to the head," or, "I'm thrusting for 4 dice to the chest."

Roll the dice you've stated you're spending. Your *Attacking Target Number*, or ATN, is set by the weapon and Maneuver you're using – see *Weapons and Armour*, later, for details. Make a note of how many Successes are scored on this attack; this will

determine your damage, if you hit. If you *fumble* your Attack roll, you immediately lose *half* the dice you just spent on your attack from your remaining Combat Pool – e.g., if your Combat Pool is 12 and you fumble a Swing for 6 dice, you lose 3 dice at the beginning of the next Exchange.

The three basic attacking Maneuvers are:

Thrust – Driving a weapon or blow home with a straight lunge or stab. Thrusts are very fast, but lose the extra damage of a swing's angular momentum; you gain an extra die to use in your attack roll, but must reduce the damage done on a successful hit by one level. You can spend an additional CP die before you roll to eliminate this damage reduction, if successful.

Swing – The elemental attack for most melee weapons: swinging them through an arc to add the weight of momentum and leverage to its impact. As with Thrusts, you can spend an additional CP die before rolling to boost the damage of a successful hit by 1 level.

Feint – A deceptive maneuver designed to "fake out" the defender. The attacker must first announce a Thrust or Swing to his initial Target Zone as above; after the defender declares his defense, the attacker can spend 1 CP die to call, "Feint!" and changes the Target Zone while adding extra dice to his attack, at an additional cost of 1 CP for every extra die added. The new Target Zone should be fairly near to the original – pulling off a huge change in direction, like feinting at the feet and then attacking the head, will cost 2 CP dice for every die added to the true attack.

Example: Geralt, with a CP of 13, is facing off against Stefan, an old enemy. He decides to go for a Feint, and declares a Swing for Stefan's left leg (Target Zone II) for 6 dice. Stefan declares a Block for 5 dice (he has a shield, and is feeling pretty safe). However, Geralt then spends 1 of his 7 remaining dice and calls "Feint! Now I'm swinging for Stefan's side!" He spends 3 dice and adds the last 3 dice to his Swing, which is now 9

dice to Target Zone III against Stefan's measly 5. Geralt has a much better chance of getting that blow home now....

Feints are a little harder to execute than Thrusts or Swings; you must have at least Proficiency Level 4 to use a Feint. In addition, Feints lose their impact when used more than once against the same opponent. Each repeated *identical* feint (same original Target Zone, same new Target Zone) against the same opponent, even if time has passed since your last duel, costs an extra CP die to execute.

The seven Target Zones are as follows:

Zone I	Lower Legs
Zone II	Upper Legs
Zone III	Belly/Sides
Zone IV	Chest/Shoulders
Zone V	Head/Neck
Zone VI	Groin/Hips
Zone VII	Arms

Remember the location of your hit; it will be vital in determining the effects of your blow later.

DEFENSES AND DEFENSIVE MANEUVERS

To fend off an attack, the defender has a choice of four basic defensive Maneuvers. He must state the Maneuver he is using and how many dice he is rolling for it ("I'm Blocking for 4 dice," or "I'm Parrying for 7 dice"), but unlike the attacker he need not state a Zone – he is automatically assumed to be defending in the Target Zone chosen by the attacker. The *Defending Target Number*, or DTN, is set by the maneuver and tool selected.

The defender's successes on this roll are compared to the attacker's. If the defender rolls more successes than the attacker, he has successfully beaten back or avoided the attack, and may attack on the next Exchange. If the attacker rolls more successes than the defender, he has hit and wounded the defender; subtract the defender's

successes from the attacker's to determine the attacker's final *Margin of Success*. (If attacker and defender tie, no damage is done, but the attacker retains initiative.)

The defensive Maneuvers are:

Block – Getting your shield (if you have one) in the way of the attacker's weapon. The DTN is set by the type of shield used; see *Weapons and Armour*. Shields also provide a certain level of passive protection, equalling anywhere from 4 to 10 points of protection to Target Zones III, IV, VII and possibly even V and VI, depending on size (see *Weapons and Armour* for more information). If you do not have a shield, you cannot Block.

Parry – Using your weapon to deflect the attacker's weapon away from or past you. The DTN is set by your choice of weapon – it's easier to parry with a rapier than a battleaxe!

Dodge – Getting the hell out of the way. This is the simplest defense in one way, and the hardest in another; it leaves your weapon open for use but may have a higher DTN, depending on what you're trying to do. There are three different types of Dodge, and you must state which you are using:

- Dodge and Break (DTN 4): Full evasion or retreat – you've broken off combat, and no attack is possible for either party in the next exchange. A new Initiative Throwdown must be held. You cannot Dodge and Break immediately after your own attack.
- Dodge and Stand (DTN 7): Partial evasion – if successful, you can steal initiative on the next exchange, becoming the attacker, by paying 2 CP dice. You can also steal initiative for *no* cost if your opponent fails completely (rolls no successes) or fumbles.
- Duck and Weave (DTN 9): Step inside the attacker's blow to gain an advantageous position. If you win, you steal initiative, and the attacker loses half the CP dice he spent on his attack from his Combat Pool, as if he had *fumbled* his Attack Roll.



Counter – Also known as the *riposte*, a Counter turns the attacker’s attack against him. To use a Counter, you must spend 2 CP dice immediately and then allocate dice as if Parrying, at the weapon’s standard DTN. If you succeed, you steal initiative and gain bonus dice on your attack equal to every die used in the *attacker’s* roll; if you fail, the attacker gets an extra success on his attack, increasing his Damage Level.

DETERMINING DAMAGE

On a successful hit, the attacker will have scored a *Margin of Success* over the defender. Damage is determined by adding this Margin of Success to the *Damage Rating* (or DR) of the weapon being used. Most melee weapons’ damage is determined by the wielder’s Brawn, ranging from Brawn -2 to Brawn +3. The defender subtracts his own Brawn, and the *Armor Value* (AV) of any armor worn that covers the struck location. The final result is the *Wound Level*,

ranging from 1 to 5, which is cross-referenced on the *Damage Table* to determine the exact results – level 1 wounds are only momentarily disabling, whereas level 5 wounds are usually fatal or close to it. Location makes a difference as well; a Level 3 wound to the head is worse than one to the shoulder.

There are no “hit points” in *The Riddle of Steel*. Damage is assessed through three factors: *Shock*, *Pain* and *Blood Loss*.

Shock indicates the dice that are lost from *all* your Dice Pools (Combat, Missile and Sorcery) immediately after receiving the blow. It lasts only for the round in which the blow is inflicted, unless the Shock penalty is greater than the receiver’s current total CP; in this case, the remainder of the penalty is applied at the beginning of the next round, unless the *Pain* penalty is greater. (For example, if you are hit for a blow which does 7 Shock, but you only have 5 CP left, you lose all your CP for the rest of this Round and 2 CP at the beginning of next Round.)

Pain indicates the dice that are *permanently* subtracted from your Dice Pools until the wound heals. People with high Presence can resist the effect of Pain somewhat. Pain is also important for determining healing times.

Blood Loss reflects the deterioration of health due to bleeding and internal damage, and is measured by rolling against a Blood Loss Target Number (abbreviated as BL). The first wound received sets this number; every wound received thereafter increases this TN, *as long as it comes from a different part of the body* – e.g. if you get hit twice in the arm, your BL does not increase, but if you are hit in the arm and then in the leg, it does. At the beginning of each Round, all wounded characters must roll Brawn vs. their current accumulated BL; whenever the roll is failed, one point of Brawn is lost. (This *does* reduce the damage you inflict and resist!) When Brawn reaches 0, the character enters a coma and dies.

Certain wounds can also inflict *Knockdown* or *Knockout*. Whenever a character receives a wound that inflicts enough Pain or Shock to reduce his CP to zero or less, he may be knocked down. Roll Resistance against a TN of twice the attack's Margin of Success; failure indicates you have been knocked prone, which reduces your Combat, Missile and Sorcery Pools to 1/3 normal. Certain blows, especially to the head, may call for a *Knockout* test; this is also a roll of Resistance against a TN set by each wound – failure indicates loss of consciousness for 1d10 seconds, usually with immediate collapse, and fumbling indicates 1d10 x 10 minutes of unconsciousness.

EXAMPLE THE DARK MELEE COMBAT IN ACTION

Our hero Geralt, played by Jake, has been called out on a duel by his old enemy, Stefan. Geralt has a Brawn of 5, a Coordination of 6 and his Combat Pool is 15; he's carrying a longsword and wearing no armor. Stefan has a Brawn of 5, a Coordination of 4, and his Combat Pool is 13; he's wearing a full suit of chainmail, a pot helmet and carrying a beater shield, all of which reduce his CP to 9. They are fighting on foot.

Seneschal (as Stefan): Declare attack or defense.

Both Jake and the Seneschal grab their red and white dice, then throw down. Both throw white.

S: The two of you circle for a moment, sizing each other up. Throw again.

Again, both Jake and the Seneschal throw white dice. Geralt and Stefan continue circling. They throw again, and again, both of them throwing white in each instance.

S: Stefan, tired of circling, begins to taunt you, insulting your family and your skill.

J: I'll return the favor. I say, "It's your brother whose head this inbred, unskilled bladeslinger tore from its shoulders. Perhaps you'd like to join him in hell?"

S: Roll Presence.

They have engaged in Taunting. Geralt has a Presence of 5; Stefan has only 4. Stefan must get 5 successes of 5 or more; Geralt need only get 4 successes of 4 or more. On the first roll Stefan gets 2 successes, Geralt 3.

S: Throw down again.

Again, both throw white dice.

J: He wants me to attack first, but this just might work. I say, "Your brother never even put up a fight. I felt bad after I killed him – it was like slaying a handmaiden!"

S: Roll Presence again....

Geralt gets 3 successes, Stefan only 1. Geralt has easily surpassed his minimum requirement of 4 successes.

S: Looks like that did it. Throw down for initiative.

This time Stefan throws a red die; he lost the Taunting contest and snapped first. Geralt throws down white, waiting to see what strategy Stefan uses (and hoping to turn a Counter against him).

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S: Here we go: Round 1, exchange 1. Stefan comes in quickly, swinging for your head, zone V, for four dice.

J: About time – I'm gonna Duck & Weave, so I can get past that shield! I'm spending 9 dice.

They both roll: Stefan gets 2, 5, 8, 9 – only 2 successes against the ATN of his weapon, which is 6. Geralt rolls 2, 3, 3, 4, 7, 7, 9, 9, 0: three successes against the Duck and Weave DTN of 9. Three against two only wins by one – but that one is plenty. Stefan's sword whickers harmlessly by, opening a large hole in Stefan's defense.

S: You evaded his blow and can attack; he's lost 3 CP for your Duck and Weave.

J: Man, that was close! Okay, I'm spending my last six dice Swinging for his left side, zone III.

S: He's going to Dodge and Stand, spending his last two dice.

Geralt rolls 2, 2, 5, 7, 8, 0... four successes against his weapon's ATN 5 (it's a very fine sword). Stefan rolls 6 and 8 – one success against the DTN 7 of his Dodge & Stand. Geralt wins with a margin of 3, plus his sword's damage rating of 8 (BRN +3, for a greatsword) for a damage total of 11 to Stefan's side. Stefan subtracts his own BRN 5 and his AV 4 (for the chainmail protecting that location), total 9, from Geralt's damage: 11 minus 9 is 2, for a level-two wound to the side. On the Damage Table, this reads: "Bleeding, torn and shredded muscle: BL 5, Sh 3, Pn 6-PRS." On the next Exchange Stefan will have only 6 dice to work with (his CP of 9 minus 3 Shock), and every Exchange after that he will have only 7 dice (CP 9 minus 2 Pain, which is 6 minus his PRS 4).

S: You duck under his sword and land a solid blow to his side – it would have killed him if he hadn't been armored. But you've left him reeling, and you can follow up with another attack.

Round 2: pools refresh.

J: I'll swing up from below at zone VI. 10 dice – I wanna gut this puppy.

S: He's blocking with his shield for 4 dice.

Geralt rolls 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 7, 7, and 7 (bad luck!) – only three successes on his ATN 5. Stefan rolls 2, 3, 7, 9 – two successes against his shield's DTN of 5. Geralt

hits with a margin of 1; his weapon damage brings it up to 9. Stefan's BRN and AV bring that back down to 0, inflicting a level 0 wound – a scratch.

S: You land a hit on the inside of his leg, but it fails to break through the chain. However, you still have initiative, and can attack again.

J: You know it! I'm spending my last 5 dice to hit him in the side, zone III.

S: He's blocking with his last 2.

Geralt rolls 1, 2, 2, 4, 8 – one success on ATN 5. Stefan rolls 7 and 9 – two successes! He blocks Geralt's attack, stealing initiative. Round 2 ends.

As Round 3 begins, the Seneschal rolls Stefan's BRN 5 against his BL 5; he gets 2 successes, so Stefan's fine for now. However, Stefan still only has 7 dice to work with, for the Pain of his wound in the side.

S: Round 3: pools refresh. Stefan has initiative and thrusts for your side, zone III. He's spending five dice, which gives him six for a Thrust.

J: No problem. I parry sideways, 8 dice.

Stefan rolls 4, 5, 7, 7, 8, 9... four successes for his weapon's ATN 6. Geralt parries, rolling 1, 2, 4, 4, 5, 9, 0, 0... three successes against his sword's DTN 6. Stefan hits with a margin of 1, adding this to his sword's damage of BRN (5 levels) for a final total of 6... but this is reduced by 1 to 5, because Stefan was Thrusting. Against Geralt's BRN 5, this drops to a level-0 wound.

S: His sword skitters along your ribs, slicing skin but doing no real damage. He follows up with another attack, a Swing to your head for his last two dice.

J: Time to finish this. I'm gonna spend two dice to Counter, then use the last 5 to trap him.

Geralt spends 2 CP dice, then rolls the remaining 5 against his DTN 6 as Stefan rolls. Stefan gets 7 and 9, two success... Geralt gets 2, 3, 7, 7 and 8 – three successes! This successful Counter gives Geralt the initiative on the next Exchange, and gives him two bonus dice for Stefan's two successes.

S: You trap his sword and knock the blade aside, bringing your own sword into perfect setup. Round 4 begins, pools refresh.

He rolls for Stefan's Blood Loss, but again Stefan succeeds.

S: You won the counter, and can launch your attack with 2 bonus dice.

J: I'm swinging for the head. 10 dice, plus the bonus 2, for 12.

S: He's going to try to Dodge and Break, for all 7 dice – he knows he's going down if he doesn't get out of here; you can see it in his eyes...

Geralt rolls his 12 dice: 1, 1, 3, 5, 6, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9, 9, 0 – nine successes on his ATN 5! Stefan rolls 7 dice against the DTN 4 of a Dodge and Break, and gets... 1, 1, 2, 3, 3, 8 and 0 – two successes. Geralt's blow does his weapon damage, 8, plus his 7 Margin of Success – 15! Even after subtracting Stefan's BRN 5 and pot helm's AV 5 (on his head), that's a level-five wound. On the Damage Table, this reads: "Instant death. Very messy." And that ends the fight.

S: Blood spatters you at your opponent drops like a bag of sand. Now his retainers start advancing on you....

J: Okay, time to get out of here.

As shown by this example, the right Maneuver at the right time is more useful than a big sword, lots of armor or a high CP. Jake only needed one successful hit to give him an advantage that won the fight, and he got that hit by saving his dice for a Maneuver that would get him past Stefan's defenses. This is what is meant by thinking tactically and planning your fight.

MISSILE COMBAT

Missile combat functions a little differently from melee, although it also draws on a Dice Pool: your *Missile Pool*, which is the sum of your Coordina-

tion and your Proficiency in the missile weapon you're using.

The Missile Pool begins at 0 and refreshes to its maximum size (Coordination + Missile Proficiency, as above) at a rate equal to your Wits per round, beginning once the missile weapon is ready and in position to fire. Thus, a character with Wits 6 and Missile Pool 12 would gain the full benefit of all 12 dice after 2 seconds of aiming (though you cannot gain more dice than are normally in your Pool). Once a shot is fired, the Missile Pool drops to 0 and begins to refresh again at the same rate.

Most weapons require a little preparation time before they are ready to fire, especially between shots. Haste, hesitation or circumstances can shorten or lengthen this time. You can reduce your prep time by spending MP from your Pool; each weapon has its own MP cost for hurried preparation.

Range is also a key factor in successful missile fire. In *The Riddle of Steel*, each ranged weapon has a Range Increment which increases TN at every interval of this distance: thus, if a weapon has an RI of "+1 per 10 yards," the base TN increases by 1 for every 10 yards to the target – so all shots at 0 to 9 yards are made at the weapon's base TN, all shots at 10 to 19 yards are at +1 TN, all shots at 20 to 29 yards are at +2 TN, and so on.

A typical missile weapon is described thus:

Standard Short Bow

- Prep Time:* 2 or 4 rounds (0 rounds to pull arrow from ground, 2 to pull from quiver; 2 rounds to nock and draw)
- Refresh Begins:* When arrow is drawn
- Hasty Prep:* Spend 2 MP to reduce Prep Time by 1 round
- ATN:* 6
- DR:* 5
- Range:* +1 ATN per 10 yards

Circumstances will modify prep time according to

common sense. A player who carries an arrow nocked to his bow will obviously have a shorter prep time for that shot, while a crossbow in a backpack will require much more prep time than usual.

Target movement can affect your chances to hit as well. Any target that is moving constantly at a steady rate subtracts 2 MP from your Pool's total; a target moving erratically and unpredictably subtracts 3 MP. A target that is aware of incoming fire can Dodge and Break as well.

EXAMPLE ^{THE DARK} MISSILE COMBAT IN ACTION

April's character Lira, a Dardanian freedom fighter with WTS 6 and a Missile Pool (Short Bow) of 12, has come to Otamarluk to assassinate the Sul'taan. She has worked her way up to a rooftop across from the palace entrance, and is evaluating the range.

April (as Lira): So how far am I gonna be shooting?

Seneschal: Looks like about 25 yards, give or take.

A: Not less than 20?

S: Nope.

A: Okay. I'll stick three arrows in the ground and wait.

S: An hour passes, then another. Finally, you hear a commotion from below, and peer over the roof's edge to see the Sul'taan exiting the palace, surrounded by guards.

A: I grab an arrow from the ground and nock it.

S: 2 rounds total.

A: How fast is he moving?

S: Not very... he's walking at a steady pace with his guards, but they're moving in a straight line. The guards are looking around – it doesn't seem to have occurred to any of them to look up yet, but sooner or later...

A: I'm not rushing this shot. I'm taking the full two rounds to aim.

S: Your Pool loses 2 dice for the Sul'taan's movement, and your ATN's two higher for the range – 8.

A: 10 dice, at ATN 8. I can live with that. I fire

for his chest.

Lira rolls 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 8, 8... two successes. A hit. Her damage level is 7: 5 for the bow, plus 2 for her successes. The poor unarmored Sul'taan's BRN is 4; he subtracts this from 7 to yield a level-three wound to the chest. On the Damage Table, this reads: "Heavy injury, tearing major blood vessels: BL 6, Shock 6, Pain 8-PRS".

S: The Sul'taan reels back, spouting blood everywhere. Doesn't look like he's quite in danger of dying, though... and now the guards are fanning out, shouting frantic orders to one another as they cast around to find the archer who laid their liege lord low.

A: I want this guy dead. I'm going for another shot; gonna spend 2 MP for hasty prep time.

S: 1 round to nock and draw, 1 round as you refresh to 6... and with shouts and cries, the guards below converge on the building you're standing on.

A: Crap. I'm out of time. I'll fire with what I've got. At least he's not moving any more...

S: You've only refreshed up to 6. Lose 2 MP for the hasty prep time, roll 4 dice against ATN 8.

Lira rolls: 4, 4, 6, 7... a miss! She must now choose between firing her last arrow, or making her escape before the palace guards catch up to her...

THE DAMAGE TABLE

This is it – the table that determines whether your character lives or dies. To find the effects of a wound, cross-reference the level of damage inflicted with the Target Zone. The last row, Generic Damage, is used for all-over, non-specific damage such as fire, sorcery, lightning, poison, disease and other injurious things.

If you are fighting a non-human opponent, rough analogues should be used to the appropriate Target Zones, bearing in mind the progression of Wound Levels: Level 1 is glancing and light, Level 2 a little more serious, Level 3 is a significant hindrance, Level 4 is incapacitating, and Level 5 represents crippling, maiming or mortal injuries.

Particularly large creatures may even require 2 Damage Levels per Wound Level, or more – and not all creatures will bleed or feel pain like humans, which can cause even more interesting battles....

The Damage Tables in the full corebook of *The Riddle of Steel* offer much more complicated and detailed breakdowns of injury types, differentiating damage by cutting, bludgeoning or piercing and including a hit location roll for exact location within a Target Zone. These Damage Tables are available for download at www.theriddleofsteel.net.

WEAPONS AND ARMORS

The following weapons (next page) represent the arms most commonly used on Weyrth and similar fantasy worlds. For each weapon, the commonly used grip (1- or 2-handed) is given, the ATN for swinging and thrusting and the DTN for parrying, and the damage done on a successful hit (usually listed as BRN plus a modifier, e.g. a broadsword which does BRN +1 would do 6 levels of damage,

plus successes, when wielded by someone with Brawn 5).

Some armors, on the chart on the next page, can cause effective reductions in the Combat Pool of anyone who wears the armor into a fight. See the table at the bottom of this page.

HEALING

Wounds can be treated immediately by anybody whose Vocation includes some ability at first aid. A successful Wits roll against a medically-skilled Vocational Rating reduces Blood Loss by 3 for every success – but failing this roll increases BL by 1, and fumbling it *doubles* BL. Make sure you're being treated by someone competent. Brawn points lost to Blood Loss are regained at the rate of 1 a day, once the character's bleeding is stopped.

When the bleeding is stopped, the body's natural healing can begin. In game terms, each Wound “drops” a level – Level 3 becomes Level 2, which in turn becomes Level 1 and then vanishes – after a certain amount of time has passed; a roll of

TARGET ZONE	Level 1 Wound	Level 2 Wound	Level 3 Wound	Level 4 Wound	Level 5 Wound
I: Lower Legs	Bruise and stumble BL 0, Sh 1, Pn 4-PRS	Heavier impact some bleeding and pain BL 2, Sh 3, Pn 5-PRS	Significant damage, broken bones BL 4, Sh 5, Pn 6-PRS	Heavy damage, shattered bones BL 5, Sh 7, Pn 7-PRS Roll Knockdown	Foot shin or knee ruined, torn or smashed. BL 6, Sh 9, Pn 9-PRS Roll Knockdown at 3
II: Upper Legs	Glancing blow BL 1, Sh 2, Pn 5-PRS	Heavier damage, but still essentially intact BL 3, Sh 4, Pn 6-PRS	Major blood vessel hit muscle torn BL 8, Sh 7, Pn 8-PRS	Heavy bleeding, broken bones, gasped tendons BL 10, Sh 9, Pn 10-PRS Roll Knockdown	Joints shattered, bones pulverized, very heavy bleeding BL 12, Sh 10, Pn 12-PRS Roll Knockdown at 3
III: Belly/Sides	Glancing blow BL 1, Sh 1, Pn 3-PRS	Stronger impact, knocking the wind out of you BL 4, Sh 2, Pn 5-PRS	Bleeding, torn and shredded muscle BL 5, Sh 3, Pn 6-PRS	Critical injury, much blood, internal damage BL 12, Sh 15, Pn 15-PRS Roll Knockdown	Shattered ribs, partial to full evisceration. BL 15, Sh All, Pn All Roll Knockdown at 3
IV: Chest/Shoulders	Light impact stopped by bone BL 0, Sh 2, Pn 4-PRS	Sagging impact cracking ribs or collarbone BL 4, Sh 4, Pn 6-PRS	Heavy injury, tearing major blood vessels BL 6, Sh 6, Pn 8-PRS Roll Knockdown	Broken ribs, heavy internal injuries and bleeding BL 15, Sh 12, Pn 12-PRS Roll Knockdown -3	Pierced heart crushed ribcage, severed lungs/arteries. Death within seconds
V: Head/Neck	Momentary stagger BL 0, Sh 2, Pn 5-PRS	Solid impact causing dizziness and pain BL 4, Sh 6, Pn 6-PRS Roll Knockout +1	Brain rattled in skull, hairline cracks BL 7, Sh 10, Pn 8-PRS Roll Knockout -2	Skull damage, internal bleeding, concussion BL 13, Sh 15, Pn 10-PRS Roll Knockout -4	Real, real messy – decapitation or shattered skull. Instant Death
VI: Groin/Hips	Glancing blow, but painful BL 1, Sh 2, Pn 5-PRS Internal, roll Knockdown: on failure, Increase Shock & Pain by 5	Heavier blow, shock and greater pain, broken bone BL 5, Sh 4, Pn 5-PRS	Damage to external organs, bleeding, chipped bone BL 5, Sh 8, Pn 10-PRS	Hibious maiming, heavy bleeding, cracked bone BL 12, Sh 13, Pn 12-PRS Roll Knockdown -3	Messie in internal damage, shattered pelvis. BL 15, Sh All, Pn 13-PRS Roll Knockout at 3
VII: Arms	Grazed, some blood. May do pain if hand held object. BL 0, Sh 1, Pn 4-PRS Roll Knockdown +1 to hold onto weapon	"Funn ybone" or other joint hit; bleeding and pain BL 2, Sh 3-PRS, Pn 5-PRS Roll Knockdown -2 to hold onto weapon	Broken bones, bleeding difficult to use BL 5, Sh 8, Pn 7-PRS Roll Knockdown -4 to hold onto weapon	Compound fracture, heavy bleeding BL 8, Sh 11, Pn 8-PRS Automatically drop anything held	Arm crippled, possibly severed or destroyed. BL 10, Sh 15, Pn 10-PRS Automatically drop anything held
Generic Damage	BL 0, Sh 2, Pn 5-PRS	BL 0, Sh 5, Pn 8-PRS	BL 0, Sh 8, Pn 12-PRS	BL 0, Sh 11, Pn 16-PRS Roll Knockout	BL 0, Sh All, Pn 20-PRS Roll Knockout at 3

Weapon	Grip	ATN		DTN	Damage	Description
		Swing	Thrust			
Dagger	1H	8	6	7	BRN -2	12" - 18", straight-bladed
Shortsword	1H	7	5	7	BRN	21" - 30"
Broadsword	1H	6	7	6	BRN +1	33" - 45", blunt-ended (higher Thrusting ATN)
Rapier	1H	6	5	5/8	BRN	36" - 48". Rapiers parry weapons heavier than themselves at DTN 8, but equal or lighter weapons at DTN 5. They also do not lose a damage level on Thrusting attacks.
Scimitar/Sabre	1H	6	7	6	BRN +1	36" - 42". Single edged, curved blade.
Longsword	1H	7	8	7	BRN +1	36" - 48". Can be used one-handed with shield, but functions optimally with two-hand grip.
Bastard Sword	2H	6	7	6	BRN +2	48" - 60". Can be used one- or two-handed.
	1H	7	7	7	BRN +2	
Greatsword	2H	6	6	6	BRN +3	60" - 72".
	1H	7	7	7	BRN +4	
Bludgeon	2H	6	7	7	BRN	24" - 48".
Hand Axe	1H	6	8	10	BRN +1	24"
Mace	1H	6	8	10	BRN +1	24-30"
Warhammer	1H	6	6	8	BRN +2	24-30"
Battleaxe	2H	5	7	7	BRN +3	Assumes spiked haft and double blade. 36" - 48"
Polearm	2H	7	5	8	BRN +3	Includes pikes, halberds, glaives, et al. 6' - 9'.
Spear	1H	6	5	7	BRN +1	5'-6'. May be thrown at -3 MP.
	2H	7	5	6	BRN +1	
Lance	2H	7	N/A	N/A	BRN +3	12' - 15'. Usually used from horseback, adding more damage based on mount's speed.
Quarterstaff	2H	6	6	5	BRN	5' - 6'. Often the only weapon permitted in towns....
Bite	0H	7	N/A	N/A	BRN -3	Large predators' canines. "Swing" means basic biting attack.
Claws/Talons	1H	5	6	N/A	BRN -3	Typical predator claws. Longer talons do BRN -2.
Punch/ Strike	1H	5	5	6	BRN -1	Unarmed hands can parry other unarmed hands or blunt weapons only.
Kick	0H	6	7	8	BRN	Reduce damage by 1 if feet are bare.

Missile Weapons

Short Bow

Prep Time: 2 or 4 rounds (0 rounds to pull arrow from ground, 2 to pull from quiver; 2 rounds to nock and draw).

Refresh Begins: When arrow is drawn

Hasty Prep: Spend 2 MP to reduce prep time by one round.
ATN: 6

DR: 5

Range: +1 ATN per 25 yards

Crossbow

Prep Time: 4 to 6 rounds (0 rounds to pull bolt from ground, 2 to pull from quiver, 4 to cock and lock)

Refresh Begins: When bolt is loaded and aimed

Hasty Prep: Spend 2 MP to reduce Prep Time by 1 round

ATN: 5

DR: 6

Range: +1 ATN per 10 yards

Long Bow

Prep Time: 2 to 4 rounds, as per Short Bow

Refresh Begins: When arrow is drawn

Hasty Prep: Spend 2 MP to reduce Prep Time by 1 round
ATN: 7

DR: 8 (Minimum BRN 5 to pull)

Range: +1 ATN per 10 yards

Thrown Dagger

Prep Time: 1 to 3 rounds (1 round to pull knife, 2 to flip blade down and cock back)

Refresh Begins: With cocking back to throw

Hasty Prep: Spend 2 MP to reduce Prep Time by 1 round

ATN: 7

DR: Brawn -1

Range: +1 ATN per 3 yards

Armor Type	Armor Value (AV)	Zones Protected	CP Modifiers	Other Modifiers
Sleeveless Leather Jack	2	III, IV, VI		
Leather Jack w/Sleeves	2	III, IV, VI, VII		
Chain shirt	4	III, IV, VI, VII		
Full chain suit	4	II, III, IV, VI and VII	-2	-1 Move
Piecemeal mail	3-5	Potentially all	-1	
Breastplate (front & back)	6	III, IV and VI	-1	
Helmet	5	V	-1	-1 to perception rolls
Small shield	6	III, IV and VI	-1	-1 to Move
Large shield	8	III, IV, VI, VII	-3	-3 to Move

Brawn against a set difficulty, or a successful Vocation roll for a Vocation featuring surgery or first aid, may reduce this time. This process is shown on the chart below:

Level of Wound	Heals Naturally in	Healing TN for Brawn
1	7 days	4
2	15 days	6
3	30 days	8
4	60 days	10
5	90 days	12

These times are accumulative; it takes 30 days for a Level 3 wound to heal to a Level 2 and then another 15 for that Level 2 to heal to a Level 1. Pain penalties decrease to the value appropriate for that Target Zone with each reduction in Wound Level.

Every day, the player may make a roll against the TN of his Wound (see above); every success reduces the time for the wound to heal “down” a level. Once a week, a medically-skilled PC or NPC may roll Wits vs. his Vocational Rating; any successes rolled here may also be subtracted from this time. For example, on the day after receiving a Level 3 wound, Geralt rolls his Brawn vs. TN 8, while his friend Snowden the Druid rolls Wits vs. his Druid vocation (which includes medical skill) with VR 7. Geralt rolls 3 successes, while Snowden rolls 4 – this reduces the healing time for his Level 3 wound by 7 days, from 30 to 23. Geralt can continue to make Brawn rolls, as long as he’s resting, but Snowden won’t be able to treat him again for another week.

5. SORCERY

In *The Riddle of Steel*, magic is a rare, dangerous, and incredibly powerful force. Even relatively weak sorcerers still have the capacity to wreak incredible havoc upon their foes – and upon your adventure, if you’re not careful. However, this danger is matched by sorcery’s danger *to its own user*; wasteful and thoughtless use of magic will inevitably cost the sorcerer his youth. Every spell cast has the potential to age the caster prematurely, and to knock him unconscious from the strain at a critical moment. Sorcerers must be wise, patient and cunning with their magic to retain their vitality and lives – but the payoff is unparalleled.

Note: *It should be noted that there is no “divine magic” in Weyrth. There are several religions, any and all of which may be real, but the players should not know which are the True Faith or Faiths; any character with Faith believes his own to be the Truth. The occasional miracle may occur in response to the prayers of the devoutly faithful, at the Seneschal’s discretion (a player should really have to work for these interventions, and should never be able to complacently expect them), but this does not prove the reality of the religion to unbelievers any more than it does in our own world. Faith is a mystery. The Truth of the Gods is far too complex to reduce to simple healing spells.*

THE SORCERY ATTRIBUTES

Sorcerers have their own Derived Attributes, calculated from their Temporal and Mental Attributes. These Attributes are as follows:

Power (POW) is equal to your PRS plus ½

your BRN. This represents the raw energy you can channel through your spirit and body, and controls the damage your magic can do at various levels.

Art (ART) is equal to your WTS plus $\frac{1}{2}$ your PRS. This represents your aptitude for fine control of the magic you channel, including your ability to cast spells correctly and to stave off any aging it may induce.

THE SORCERY POOL

Just as bladeslingers have a Combat Pool and archers have a Missile Pool, sorcerers have a Sorcery Pool (abbreviated SP). Your Sorcery Pool is equal to your Power plus your Art, and represents the number of dice used when casting spells or resisting hostile magic or aging. They are used in the same way as Combat Pool dice or Missile Pool dice; a TN (known as the *Casting Target Number*, or CTN) is calculated for the spell based on the spell's power and scope, and the player must roll dice from the Sorcery Pool in an attempt to match or beat the CTN – both to successfully cast the spell, and to resist the aging each spell imposes on its caster!

Your Sorcery Pool is equal to the base score of Power + Art for *Cantrips*, and is *doubled* when casting *Rituals*. For more on the differences between these forms of magic, see below.

THE THREE REALMS

All spells are classified in three *Realms* of power, indicating their focus and what they can do. Each Realm, as noted under character creation, is further divided into three levels of power: Novice, Apprentice and Master.

The Temporal Realm: Temporal magic is used to tangibly affect matter, both living and nonliving. They change, move, combine or divide the target. Used over large areas or at long range, these spells are useful for both offense and de-

fense.

A *Novice-Level* Temporal Spell can:

- Shape matter into simple geometric forms, bind two different elements together or separate them, or duplicate an object you're looking at.
- Move objects up to 10 yards per combat round (about 20 mph), with directional changes limited to one plane (i.e. left-right or up-down, but not both); you can also animate objects with a shambling, clumsy grace (equivalent to AGL 1). Already moving-targets can be slowed to half their current speed. Maximum vertical lift is 10 yards.
- Double an object's size or shrink it to half size, cause it to age a month, or split an object into two identical smaller copies of itself.

An *Apprentice-Level* Temporal Spell can:

- Shape matter into complex shapes and inanimate structures, fuse or separate up to ten different elements (this allows one to affect plants and most normal objects), or duplicate an object from memory by shaping raw elements.
- Move objects at up to 50 yards per second (approximately 100 mph), with full directional control and mobility; animated objects possess the coordination and speed of a normal human (AGL 4). Maximum lift is 100 yards above ground; already-moving objects can be slowed to $1/10^{\text{th}}$ their current speed.
- Expand an object to ten times normal size, or shrink it to $1/10^{\text{th}}$ normal size, cause it to age up to a year, or induce cellular division (effectively stimulating normal growth or healing).

A *Master-Level* Temporal Spell can:

- Replicate and create living flesh out of

raw matter, binding up to a hundred elements or separating them (at this level one can instantaneously disintegrate a target), and create objects from the imagination (as long as the raw matter is present).

- Accelerate objects to unimaginable speeds instantaneously, or paralyze them in mid-step. Maximum lift is 1 mile. Animated objects possess superb control and grace (equivalent AGL 8).
- Expand an object to 100 x normal size, or shrink it to 1/100th of its size, cause it to age up to a decade, or split objects along molecular lines.

The Mental Realm: These magics manipulate thought, perception and information. A sorcerer uses the Mental Realm to create illusions, control other wills and magically reveal knowledge. It should be noted that since the Mental Realm affects insubstantial forces exclusively, any spell that uses only the Mental Realm can have a Volume variable (see below) of zero.



A *Novice-Level* Mental Spell can:

- Create a blurred, shadowy, insubstantial illusion that cannot move, but can block sight or distract a target at a key moment.
- Place a short thought or image into the target's mind, coerce him into performing a reasonably simple action (as long as it does not threaten the target's life or offend his conscience), or eliminate or change his memory of an occurrence within the last day.
- Scan the surface thoughts of a target, clairvoyantly perceive events up to a mile away (at a magnification of up to 10x if desired), or see a day into the

future or the past.

An *Apprentice-Level* Mental Spell can:

- Create clear but simple illusions that can be seen and dimly heard, and can be animated as long as the caster concentrates on them (although close examination will usually reveal the deception).
- Transmit an experience or an emotion (rage, pain, nausea, love, drunkenness, sleepiness, psychosomatic illness) into the subject's mind, completely control the subject (although the subject can and most likely will resist), and delete or rewrite all memories associated with

a particular person, place or event.

- Sense the needs and emotions of a target (in addition to current thoughts), view events up to 100 miles away (with optional magnification of 100x if needed), or see up to a year into the past or future.

A *Master-Level* Mental Spell can:

- Create an independent, utterly realistic animated illusion that is indistinguishable from reality without the use of magic or extreme circumstances (attempting to walk through a wall to prove it illusory, or diving into an illusory pit of flame to show one is not burned).
- Implant a spiritual entity (spirit, elemental, demon or other) or a dormant spell into a target.
- Control a target completely to any action, including self-destruction, with no ability to resist; the target will have no memory of the time under control.
- Completely wipe the target's entire mind or reprogram their personality, memory or identity completely (including changing Spiritual Attributes).
- Probe into the subject's deepest memories, including those buried by trauma or covered up by other Mental magics; view an event anywhere in the world (provided the sorcerer has some link to the event); or divine events up to fifty years in the past or future.

The Spiritual Realm: This Realm manipulates forces from beyond this world, including elementals, spirits, ghosts, demons and the raw forces of magic itself. Most entities, before consenting to service, require a price over and above the physical effort required to summon them: this may include services, Spiritual Attribute points, sacrifices of rare and precious things or beings, and so on. The Seneschal will set the price for each spirit, depending on its power, motivation and nature – a lesser elemental may be happy

if you unblock its river, but a Greater Demon is likely to demand a blood sacrifice....

A *Novice-Level* Spiritual Spell can:

- Summon or banish a minor spirit, lesser elemental or lesser demon and bind it to service.
- Dispel (or renew; see *Calculating Target Numbers*) any ongoing spell of Novice level.
- Imprison (i.e. trap in a physical object) a minor spirit, lesser elemental or demon, to be called forth later at command.
- Refresh your Sorcery Pool with dice equal to half your Power.

An *Apprentice-Level* Spiritual Spell can:

- Summon or banish a noted spirit, greater elemental or demon lord and bind it to service.
- Dispel or renew any ongoing spell of Apprentice or Novice level.
- Imprison a noted spirit, greater elemental or demon lord.
- Refresh your Sorcery Pool with dice equal to your Power.

A *Master-Level* Spiritual Spell can:

- Summon or banish a True Spirit, Elemental Tyrant or Demon Prince – the most powerful entities of the desired type, effectively – and bind them to service.
- Dispel or renew any ongoing spell.
- Imprison a True Spirit, Elemental Tyrant, Demon Lord.
- Refresh your Sorcery Pool with dice equal to twice your Power.

Some things that magic can *not* do, in *The Riddle of Steel*, include:

- Spells cannot create matter from nothing (although it can be summoned from elsewhere).
- Spells cannot endow matter with true life, or restore life to the dead (though

- they can mutate already-living flesh with shocking ease).
- Time and aging – especially Attribute loss from aging (see below) – cannot be reversed, although the outer face and body can be cosmetically sculpted to *appear* younger.
 - Souls, spirits, demons, elementals and other such entities cannot be truly destroyed (although they may be banished, imprisoned or controlled).
 - Fire cannot be conjured from thin air to burn without flammable fuel (but Master-level Temporal magic can move molecules fast enough to ignite or melt matter).

Spell Types: Cantrips and Rituals

A *Cantrip* is a hasty working designed to produce a simple effect relatively quickly, lacking the benefits of a ritual space, time and undisturbed work to invoke the magic's fullest power. Cantrips tend to deplete your supply of magic force quickly; you use only the basic Sorcery Pool, Power + Art, for casting and resisting aging. Cantrips can use only one Realm at a time. The casting time for Cantrips is equal, in seconds, to the CTN of the spell – so a Cantrip with CTN 4 takes 4 seconds to cast, a Cantrip of CTN 7 takes 7 seconds to cast, and so on.

A *Ritual* is a long, careful, slow accumulation of power designed to produce complex and long-lasting effects in relative safety. They are only feasible in safe, secluded locations, however, and thus the first thing any sorcerer will do is seek to establish a sanctum for the working of Ritual spells. The Sorcery Pool is *doubled* when casting Rituals, and the casting time is equal *in hours* to the CTN of the spell – a CTN 8 Ritual will take 8 hours to cast, and so on. Rituals can include combined effects from all three Realms in their

effect.

For convenience, this is summed up in the chart below:

CASTING TARGET NUMBERS CTNS

The number that a Sorcery Pool die roll must match or beat for the spell to work is the *Casting Target Number*, or CTN for short. The CTN also determines how many months a spell can potentially age the character, and is the Target Number for the aging resistance roll as well. The higher the CTN, the more powerful and difficult the spell and the more likely it is to age you or knock you out. Wise sorcerers will seek ways to reduce the CTN in order to offset these risks.

The CTN is the sum of five factors determining the power of the spell, all ranging from 0 to 3:

- Its *Target* (the nature of its subject);
- Its *Range* (how far away the subject is);
- Its *Volume* (how much mass or area the spell must affect);
- Its *Duration* (how long the magic must last); and
- Its *Level* – Novice spells are Level 1, Apprentice spells are Level 2, Master spells are Level 3. Ritual spells which include more than one Realm add 1 to this score for every Realm incorporated after the highest; thus, an Apprentice Mental Spell which also used a Novice-Level Temporal effect would be equivalent to Level 3 (2 + 1), and a Master Temporal Spell which also included Mental and Spiritual effects would be equivalent to Level 5 (3 + 1 + 1).

The value of each factor is chosen by the player to meet the sorcerer's needs. The meaning of each value, for each factor, is shown in the chart

SPELL USAGE REFERENCE CHART			
Spell Type	Sorcery Pool	Casting Time	Realms Usable
Cantrip	Power + Art	(CTN) seconds	1 only
Ritual	(Power + Art) x 2	(CTN) hours	Up to 3

CTN FACTORS AND VALUES	
Variable	Value
Target (T) Multiple targets can be specified, provided Volume is high enough; however, multiple targets must be either "everybody within the Volume factor" or only specified targets up to your WTS score, if you wish to be selective.	0: Incorporeal, including ghosts or spells. (Spells affecting the caster only may also use Target 0.) 1: Inanimate objects, including constructs and unthinking undead like skeletons or zombies. 2: Plant life, including magically animated growth. 3: Animals, including humans, magical beasts and sentient undead like mummies or vampires.
Range (R) To use Unlimited range, the caster must either use a Mental Realm spell to see the subject clairvoyantly, or possess a vital link (an image or portion) to the subject.	0: Self; the spell affects the caster only. 1: Touch: the caster must touch the subject with one hand. 2: Line of sight; the caster must be able to personally see the target. 3: Unlimited; the caster can affect the target anywhere, subject to restrictions (see at left).
Volume (V)	0: Incorporeal, including thoughts, memories, and spells. 1: Up to 3 gallons/20 pounds of weight, or a 1-yard-wide area. 2: Up to 30 gallons/400 pounds of weight, or 10 yards in size or diameter. 3: Up to 300 gallons/2000 pounds of weight, or 100 yards in size or diameter.
Duration (D) Every success in casting increases the basic Duration interval specified – three casting successes on a spell with a Duration of 2 creates a spell that lasts for 3 days.	0: Instantaneous or Sustained (see below). 1: One hour per Casting Success. 2: One day per Casting Success. 3: One week per Casting Success.

above.

Sometimes the Seneschal can provide some leeway in determining spell factors. For example, a Temporal Spell designed to undo the bolt on a door without touching it would be composed as follows:

- Target: 1 (the bolt itself)
- Range: 2 (the caster can touch the door, but not the bolt itself; the Seneschal deems that since the bolt is a very simple mechanism and the caster knows its location, the range is equivalent to line of sight, even though the caster can't actually see the bolt).
- Volume: 1 (the bolt itself weighs less than 20 pounds)
- Duration: 0 (the spell will last only the moment it takes to undo the lock)
- Level: 1 (a simple, slow movement of a small amount of matter)

These numbers total 5, for a final CTN of 5. This is the number against which the sorcerer must roll his Sorcery Pool dice to successfully cast the spell and resist aging.

SPELLCASTING AND AGING

Whenever a sorcerer casts a spell, he must decide how many dice from his Sorcery Pool he will use to cast the spell, and how many will be rolled to resist aging. One should always keep a large number of dice in reserve to resist aging; reckless use of magic will transform the sorcerer into a prune in remarkably little time.

The dice allotted to *casting* are rolled first. The sorcerer must match or beat the CTN with at least one of his casting dice; additional successes can increase duration, make the spell more powerful, damaging or harder to resist, and so on, but only one is needed to achieve the basic effect.

The player must then roll the dice allotted to resisting aging, against the CTN. Normally, a spell ages the caster by 1 month for every point in the CTN; every success rolled on the age-resistance roll reduces this aging by 1 month. Thus, a spell with CTN 6 can potentially cost the caster six months of his life; but every die that rolls 6 or more on his Age Resistance roll reduces that time

by 1 month. Hence, he needs six successes or more (and thus a minimum of six dice allotted here) to avoid aging completely.

If the sorcerer ages at all as a result of casting, the player must make a Knockout Roll of Resistance against a TN of 5 + the number of months aged; failure means the sorcerer is unconscious for 1d10 minutes, or until revived by a friend's successful roll of WTS against a medical/first-aid Vocation.

Example: Von Salm, a sorcerer, was mistakenly arrested during a tavern brawl and locked in the town jail. He chose not to use his magic to defeat the guards and escape because he was in Stabl, where magic is outlawed, and did not much feel like incurring even more official wrath. Thus, he waits patiently until nightfall for the lone guard to doze off, then goes to work on the lock.

He uses the Lockpicking spell above as a Cantrip, thus gaining only his basic Sorcery Pool of 13 to work with – but with a CTN of 5, that is plenty. He allocates 4 dice to casting the spell and 9 to resisting aging, gaining 1 success on the Casting Roll and 5 successes exactly on the Anti-Aging roll – no loss of youth this time! The bolt clicks open and Von Salm slips out.

If Von Salm had rolled only 3 successes on the Anti-Aging roll, he would have aged 2 months from the strain of the magic (CTN 5 - 3 successes = 2 months aging). This would have required him to roll his Resistance, 6, against a TN of 7 (5 plus 2 months aged). Rolling, he scores 3 successes – enough to stay conscious, although he staggers a moment as his hair and beard suddenly grow by eight weeks' worth of time!

Incantation and Gestures: Trained magicians can reduce the CTN of their Cantrips by using mystic incantations and precise gestures to shape their work. A successful roll of the Art Attribute against the VR of a mystically-trained Vocation (Ritualist or Druid) will reduce the CTN by -1; this can be done a maximum of twice for any individual Cantrip, once for Incantations and once for Gestures. This increases the chances of success, but also imposes stricter requirements: a caster must be able to speak clearly and audibly to use Incantations, and must have both hands and arms free to use Gestures.

Formalization: The same precise control used by Incantations and Gestures can be repeated and memorized until it has taken a precise, formal shape: this process is called *Formalization*. Cantrips which have been Formalized receive the -2 modifier to CTN permanently, without need for further rolls. The process of Formalizing a spell is an Extended Vocational Roll of Art against the VR of one's Ritualist or Druid Vocation; each roll takes a week, and the sorcerer must accumulate as many successes as the CTN of the spell. Once the necessary successes are achieved, a single successful Test of WTS against a literate or scholarly VR (Academic or Clergyman) is necessary to transcribe the spell.

Formalizing spells requires committed time, money, and resources for the necessary experimentation; sorcerers on the road or without the time to devote to their studies will find Formalizing their spells very difficult.

Example: Foreseeing further brushes with the law, Von Salm decides to spend a few weeks in his hidden cottage and Formalize his Lockpicking spell. He must roll his Art of 6 against his Ritualist VR of 7 and accumulate 5 successes; on his first roll, he gains 2 successes, on his second, 2 more, and on his third 3 – three weeks of research time. He then rolls his WTS of 6 against his Academic VR of 8... 1 success! "Gandar Von Salm's Cantrip of Convenient Egress in Defiance of Locks" is now written down and ready for use, at a much-reduced CTN of 3 – the Stablnish watch is going to find it very hard to keep Von Salm locked up in future....

Ritual Spells cannot benefit from Incantation, Gestures or Formalization: it is assumed that these spells already incorporate these techniques in order to provide the increased Sorcery Pool. However, there are also techniques that can be used to increase the efficacy of Ritual Spells, as below:

Meditation: To obtain a bonus for Meditation, the caster must spend half the normal casting time in quiet meditation immediately prior to

beginning the spell: for example, for a Ritual with a CTN of 10, the caster must spend 5 hours in meditation, rolling PRS vs. their Ritualist or Druid VR. A success lowers the CTN by 1; 5 successes or more lowers it by 3.

Symbol Drawing: Effective use of runes and glyphs during the Ritual makes its effects harder to resist. The TN for resisting a spell is usually equal to the spell's CTN; for every success on a roll of WTS vs. their Ritualist or Druid VR, the resistance TN of the spell is increased by 1.

Cooperation: Any number of sorcerers can cooperate in casting a spell; one sorcerer should be chosen as the primary caster, whose Sorcery Pool is the base amount for the spell. A second sorcerer can add his or her Art to the collective Pool; the third, and every sorcerer after that, adds only 1 die. All dice are given to the primary caster, who decides how to divide them between casting and aging; any and all aging incurred is applied to the primary caster.

Distractions, Interruptions and Wounds: Ideal circumstances for spell-casting are rare in the adventuring life. Sorcerers will often have to work magic under less than perfect conditions. To shut out the distractions of a loud and noisy environment (essentially, anything louder than quiet conversation or natural outdoor noise in clear weather), the sorcerer must roll his PRS vs. his Ritualist or Druid VR; failure increases the CTN of his spell by 1, and fumbling this roll increases it by 3. If the sorcerer is actually interrupted in mid-casting, a Cantrip is ruined and must be started over; a Ritual can be successfully "paused" with a roll of PRS vs. the spell's CTN – a failure increases the spell's CTN by 2 when resumed, and a fumble ruins the Ritual.

If wounded in the midst of spell-casting, the appropriate Shock and Pain modifiers must be applied to the Sorcery Pool, in the same way they are applied to a fighter's Combat Pool in battle.

REFRESHING THE SORCERY POOL

Once used, either for spell-casting or aging resistance, the Sorcery Pool dice are expended, returning naturally at the rate of one die per hour (or two per hour of meditation). In an emergency, however, the sorcerer can use Spiritual spells to refresh his Sorcery Pool:

MANA I This spell adds half the caster's Power to the Sorcery Pool. If these extra Cantrip dice are not used after the sorcerer's Power in rounds, the magic dissipates and is lost. **CTN 1** (Casting Time 1 Second) *This spell causes a minimum of 1 month aging, regardless of success on aging rolls.*
T0, R0, V0, D0, L1

MANA II This spell adds the caster's Power to the Sorcery Pool. If these extra dice are not used after the sorcerer's Power in rounds, the magic dissipates and is lost. **CTN 2** (Casting Time 2 Seconds) *This spell causes a minimum of 2 months aging, regardless of success on aging rolls.*
T0, R0, V0, D0, L2

MANA III This spell adds twice the caster's Power to the Sorcery Pool. If these extra Cantrip dice are not used after the sorcerer's Power in rounds, the magic dissipates and is lost. **CTN 3** (Casting Time 3 Second) *This spell causes a minimum of 3 months aging, regardless of success on aging rolls.*
T0, R0, V0, D0, L3

At least one die must be left in your Sorcery Pool to use these spells. The Sorcery Pool can never exceed the appropriate maximum value through the use of these spells, or by normal hourly refreshing.

Sustained Spells: Spells with a Duration of 0 can nonetheless be maintained for as long as necessary, provided the sorcerer commits his energy to sustaining the spell. In game terms, this means that the sorcerer must consciously direct his sorcerous energies to keeping the spell going; the caster must “invest” SP dice equal to the CTN of the spell, and these dice do not refresh until the spell is dropped. A sorcerer must have at least 1 die left in his SP to maintain spells; if his SP drops to zero for any reason, all Sustained spells break and vanish.

RESISTING MAGIC

There are three ways to resist hostile magic; two can be used by anybody and the third is only open to sorcerers. They are as follows:

- *Dodging* : Getting the heck out of the way. Any magic that takes a primarily physical or projectile form can be evaded with sufficient physical

speed; the defender must roll a dodge using his Combat Pool dice, as per the combat rules, with every success taking away one of the sorcerer’s casting successes.

- *Resistance*: Any spell that affects a living target directly and internally can be Resisted using the Resistance Attribute. The TN of the resisting roll is equal to the CTN of the spell; each success of the defender reduces the attacker’s successes by 1.
- *Countermagic*: Available only to sorcerers; a sorcerer may ward off incoming hostile magic by a direct contest of Sorcery Pool vs. Sorcery Pool. This is not a spell as such, so no aging resistance roll is required; the sorcerer must simply roll his SP against the CTN of the incoming spell, with every success neutralizing one of the attacker’s successes.

A LIST OF SAMPLE SPELLS

These spells do not take Formalization or other CTN modifiers into account.

Temporal Cantrips

DESTRUCTION

Cantrip

CTN 6 (Casting Time 6 seconds)

T1, R1, V1, D0, L3

Disintegrates any small object touched. Only items in the possession of an enchanted creature may resist, using the bearer’s Art plus any SP dice it wishes to allocate to resist.

LOCKPICKING

Cantrip

CTN 5 (Casting Time 5 seconds)

T1, R2, V1, D0, L1

The sorcerer can telekinetically pick locks or bolts. Knowledge of locking mechanisms increases the precision of the spell; roll WTS vs. Thief VR to lower CTN by 1.

FLIGHT

Cantrip

CTN 5 (Casting Time 5 seconds)

T0, R0, V2, D1, L2

The sorcerer becomes capable of sustained flight. He may change direction up to 90 degrees in one movement, and can reach speeds of over 200 MPH (though this is dangerous without protection from debris). High-speed turns may inflict G-force dizziness; roll Resistance vs. TN 8 to remain alert, with failure inflicting a +2 penalty to *all* TNs while turning.

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CROP'S BLESSING

Cantrip

CTN 8 (Casting Time 8 seconds)
T2, R2, V3, D0, L1

The target of the spell ages as though a month had passed – a particularly vital ability for fields and crops. Druids regularly use this spell to ensure the success of the spring plantings, and sometimes even to permit two harvests in a growing season if food is particularly scarce.

CLOSE WOUND

Cantrip

CTN 6 (Casting Time 6 seconds)
T3, R1, V1, D0, L1

This spell closes a single level 1 or 2 wound, totally eliminating all shock, pain and blood loss. However, the healing process causes agonizing pain; a subject must either be strongly restrained, unconscious, or must roll PRS vs. TN 8 to hold still. Increasing the Level to 2 allows Level 3 or 4 wounds to be sealed; level 3 is necessary to heal Level 5 wounds.

Mental Cantrips

PAIN

Cantrip

CTN 7 (Casting Time 7 seconds)
T3, R2, V0, D0, L2

The target is wracked with pain, as if struck with a weapon with a DR equal to the caster's Power (plus casting successes; use the Generic Damage row). The target may reduce pain by rolling PRS vs. TN 7; each success lowers the level of "damage" by 1.

ILLUSORY MASK

Cantrip

CTN 8 (Casting Time 8 seconds)
T3, R0, V2, D0, L3

The caster appears as whatever he imagines for the duration of the spell, subject to the limits of Volume (e.g. he could appear to be a Fey or another person, but not a dragon). The illusion can be penetrated with a successful roll of WTS vs. CTN, requiring successes equal to or more than the caster's.

ENCHANTED SLEEP

Cantrip

CTN 10 (Casting Time 10 secs)
T3, R2, V2, D1, L2

The subject falls into a deep sleep which lasts for 1 hour per casting success. The subject cannot be woken until the spell duration expires or until the spell is Vanquished, and will sleep even through mortal injury.

Spiritual Cantrips

MANA I

Cantrip

CTN 1 (Casting Time 1 Second)
T0, R0, V0, D0, L1

This spell adds half the caster's Power to the Sorcery Pool. If these extra dice are not used after the sorcerer's Power in rounds, the magic dissipates and is lost. *This spell causes a minimum of 1 month aging, regardless of success on aging rolls.*

MANA II

Cantrip

CTN 2 (Casting Time 2 Seconds)
T0, R0, V0, D0, L2

This spell adds the caster's Power to the Sorcery Pool. If these extra dice are not used after the sorcerer's Power in rounds, the magic dissipates and is lost. *This spell causes a minimum of 2 months aging, regardless of success on aging rolls.*

MANA III

Cantrip

CTN 3 (Casting Time 3 Second)
T0, R0, V0, D0, L3

This spell adds twice the caster's Power to the Sorcery Pool. If these extra dice are not used after the sorcerer's Power in rounds, the magic dissipates and is lost. *This spell causes a minimum of 3 months aging, regardless of success on aging rolls.*

VANQUISH I

Cantrip

CTN 2-3 (Casting Time 2-3 Secs.)
T0, R1-2, V0, D0, L1

This spell ends and dissipates the magic of a Novice-level spell. The exact CTN and cost of the spell varies with the range to the target spell. If the target spell is being actively sustained by a sorcerer, that sorcerer may roll a Contest of his Sorcery Pool to resist the Vanquish.

VANQUISH II-III

Cantrip

CTN 4-8
T0, R1-2, V0, D0, L2-3

As above, for Apprentice-level and Master-level spells respectively.

Rituals

TRANSFORMATION

Ritual

CTN 13 (Casting Time 13 hours)
T3, R1, V2, D3, L4
(Temporal 3 + Mental)

The target becomes whatever the sorcerer imagines for the duration of the spell; successful Vocation Rolls may be required to ensure the new form is properly assembled. The Mental component is to keep the transformation process from being agonizingly painful. This spell may be resisted by a roll of BRN against TN 12.

REGENERATION

Ritual

CTN 10 (Casting Time 10 hours)
T3, R1, V2, D0, L4
(Temporal 3 + Mental)

Regrows a severed limb, layer by slow layer. Mental power is required to keep the process pain-free. Requires a successful WTS vs. Surgeon VR, or any similar medical Vocation. As the tissue required to forge the new limb is taken from the subject's body, the subject loses 1 BRN point at the completion of this spell.

6. A PART OF THE WORLD OF WEYRTH

Weyrth is the official campaign world for *The Riddle of Steel*. It is a planet roughly the same size as Earth, with 364 days to a year and a similarly wide range of climates and peoples. Six moons – each a different size and hue – orbit Weyrth in an elongated cluster. Their luminescence casts a multicolored filter over the night sky when most of them are full, and leaves a pale darkness when they wane to new. The ancients recorded in the oldest scraps of lore still known that three suns once circled the heavens – but only one now shines over Weyrth's lands.

The known world consists of only one continent, called simply Weyrth, as most believe the world ends at its borders. This great continent is divided into three subcontinents: Mainlund to the north and west, Tegaarn to the east, and Maraiah to the south. A map of Mainlund and the full continent of Weyrth can be downloaded from www.theriddleofsteel.net.

MAINLUND AND ITS KINGDOMS

The subcontinent of Mainlund stretches from the Xanarian Peninsula to the icy northern shores of Savaxen and Stahl. Its western border is the Sea of Raiders and the surrounding ocean; its eastern border extends to Zaporozhya and Sarmatov, as seen on the map. The climate is roughly similar to that of Europe: generally temperate, colder in the north and with Mediterranean temperates to the south along the shore of the Imperial Sea. Much of Mainlund is covered in mountains and forests, but still retains a high population of both urban centers and rural estates.

Most of Mainlund was once under the control of the Old Empire of Xanarium, and all its realms show the influence of that cultural and religious heritage today. Founded nearly fifteen centuries ago, when Xanar Shardfinder defeated the Dark Betrayer, the primal corruptor of Mankind, and his nine sorcerous champions in the battle that created the Sea of Fallen Gods, the Xanarian Empire rapidly expanded throughout Mainlund, bringing with it the Imperial Church of the Three-Gods-Become-One. The religious power of Xanar's Word was to outlast the Empire's political sway. Most beginning campaigns take place in Mainlund.

Three of the kingdoms from which adventurers most commonly spring are discussed in detail below: Angharad, Cyrinthmeir and Stahl.

ANGHARAD ANNG-HAHR-AND

Geography: The tall green peaks of the westernmost Irontooth Mountains rise up from thick, enchanted forests and groves. Frequent short rains summon up toadstool rings and sudden fogs. Wee hamlets surround tall, many-spired castles and quaint fairgrounds. Everything about Angharad shouts, “Fey here!” and “Faeries there!”, and the Cymry, Angharad’s aboriginal inhabitants, wouldn’t have it any other way.

Religion: The inhabitants of the Angharad peninsula worship spirits – wood spirits, tree spirits, the sun, the moon, the winds, and above all the Fey and the Siehe, whom they see as the living embodiment of nature. Druids and shamans officiate in the realm’s rituals and rites, traveling from village to town leaving blessings and curses, and trying to appease the often-temperamental denizens of the Otherworld. For the average Cymry, it’s all very matter of fact. They live in a land where superstition and fairy story are simple everyday truth.

Politics/Military: The highlanders raid the lowlanders, the lowlanders raid neighbouring Stahl and Farrenshire, and the Picts of the nearby island of Picti raid them all. Angharad’s warriors prefer the greatsword, which they call the *cledydh-mawr*, spears and javelins. Armor is rare, though the better fighters have small helms, round shields and hardened leather jacks.

Law & Order: Imported feudal practices and old-world Cymric traditions dominate Angharad. Any clan chief with armor, a horse, a sword and fifty armed men willing to follow him can be a King, and dozens of such Kings each rule their own little land around the next hill or peak. Lesser lords rule lesser areas, in a vassal/protector relationship. Other areas, particularly in the south,

have successfully retained all the old traditions and have no ruler greater than a clan chief – save the Druids, whose voices are respected everywhere.

Economy: Wool trade is vital to the provinces and petty kingdoms that actually engage in useful production. Farming and woodcraft is common in the lowlands. Coinage is rare – most folk trade through the barter system – but gold and other precious metals are valued and used whenever possible.

Inhabitants/Culture: The Cymry are typically dark-haired, fair-complected, and short, with blue, green or grey eyes. They favor plaids and other woolens in dress. Festivals are common, as they love revelry and music. They are generally mistrusted (undeservedly) by more “civilized” folk; however, their way of dress and many festivals have grown quite fashionable in Cyrinthmeir and several other parts of the West.

Places of Note: Mythic castles and floating cities are all over Angharad. Though no cities exist comparable to the great metropolises of the south, there are thousands of holy sties, dragon’s lairs (abandoned – mostly), barrow tombs, enchanted isles, and very real border castles to both north and south in an effort to contain the Cymry within the mountains. The Ironteeth are said to house whole armies of Gols (see *Sample Opponents*), and the thick woods in southern Angharad are overrun with sprites and wood-faeries. Careless travelers may well be captured by the gaze of a dryad, the song of a satyr, or the arrow of a watchful Fey lord...

Player Bonuses: Cymry are short, slight, quick, feisty and passionate; they receive a +1 bonus to AGL and PRS but a -1 penalty to BRN, and gain +1 to one of their Passions.

CYRINTHMEIR KHR-ENTH-MEER

Geography: Cyrinthmeir is one of Weyrth’s largest realms, extending from the Imperial Sea to the Irontooth Mountains and bordering on

Ouestenreich, Gelure, Stahl, Magyarföld, Zaporozhya, the White Sea and other smaller lands. To the south, temperatures are moderate and coastal; to the north, winters are harsh and cold, the other seasons more temperate. The capital, New Cyrinthmeir City, is located at the foot of Cyrin's Walk, a low mountain range. The land is rich, full of forests, lakes, mountains and ore, wide plains and farmland.

Religion: Over 70% of Cyrinthmeirans acknowledge the Imperial Church of the Three-Gods-Become-One, the popular religion of most Mainlund nobility. In the far north, many heathen faiths are also practiced, including the Savaxen pantheon, Stahlisch atheism, Thayrism, and others; but in the south the Imperial Church is a tradition lasting over a thousand years, proud in its orthodoxy (though not to the point of Inquisition).

Politics/Military: Cyrinthmeir has been tightly allied with the old Xanarian Empire since its fall. Though technically a free state, the Imperial Church holds great power in Cyrinthmeir, and is a key factor in most political decisions. Cyrinthmeir is formally ruled by the Gathering of Lords, a council comprising wealthy lords and landowners from throughout the realm; the King or Queen is the most powerful of these lords, holding the largest army and the most resources. As such, the Royal Army is still only of moderate size; the rest of Cyrinthmeir's forces are controlled by various members of the Gathering of Lords, which leads to much internal conflict as neighboring lords war for resources and political strength. The King allows this infighting because it keeps the lords too weak to challenge him; should any one duke or lord grow strong enough to threaten the monarch, a civil war invariably erupts. This has



kept Cyrinthmeir from pursuing any aggressive expansion.

Border raids and political tensions have led to a long-standing feud with Gelure. Cyrinthmeirans tolerate Stahlners poorly, but have good relations with Ouestenreich. Cyrinthmeiran cavalry are among the best light horse in the world; the longsword and spear are the most popular personal military weapons.

Law & Order: Cyrinthmeir's law is classically feudal. Each lord or landowner administers law and justice in his own fief. Appealed disputes go to the lord's own lord, and on up to the King (rarely). Typical punishments for crimes against commoners include fines, branding, and prison time; crimes against gentry or lords are punished by execution or, less commonly, greater prison time. Freeman have more rights in Cyrinthmeir than in almost any other realm, and are protected from execution by law except for truly heinous crimes. The Church also runs its own courts and inquisitions, which are rarely challenged by any pious (or sensible) lord or magistrate.

Economy: Cyrinthmeir profits from expansive sea-trade in the south, amber trade to the east, lumber, farming and livestock (especially sheep, cattle and horses) in the central territories, and game and mining to the north. Major exports include coal and iron in the north, and gold and silver from Cyrin's Walk. A great deal of trade also passes throughout the kingdom; Cyrinthmeir has some of the best roads in the known world.

Inhabitants/Culture: Most Cyrinthmeirans are light-skinned, with all hues of hair and eyes. They are a stout people, hardened by war and weather but blessed with rich land. Generally, they are easy-going, adaptable and outspoken. They are proud of their long-standing bonds to Empire and Church, and consider themselves the wealth of the Old Empire. Their official language is Cyrinthmeiran, a descendant of Old Xanaric, but Stahlnish and Gelurois are popular second languages near the appropriate borders.

Cyrinthmeir is fully divided along class lines derived from Imperial and feudal traditions. Slaves, imported from islands in the Imperial Sea, are common in the south, as are native serfs in the rest of the country. Most of the Freemen dwell in the cities, and flaunt their rights there as often as possible. The rural areas are ruled with an iron fist by various Lords and clergy, ranging from bannerets and knights to barons, dukes and other lords.

Traditional dress is highly varied, and is based on climate. In the south, linens and short robes are popular for men, light flowing dresses for women; in the north, Stahlnish fashion is popular, as are various wools, velvets, and other heavy textiles. Treated and dyed leather is especially popular throughout the country, for those who can afford it (typically only the wealthier Freemen and the nobility). Hair is usually worn long by both men and women, and men frequently wear beards – trimmed neatly in the south, grown fully in the north.

Places of Note: Barameir, home of the old Imperial Library, is a powerful cityport. New Cyrinthmeir City is the national capital, and it is

also the center of the world's whitesmithing (gold and silver) guilds. Cyrin's Walk, the nearby mountain range, is heavy with the gold and silver sought by the guilds.

Player Bonuses: Cyrinthmeirans are tough and hardy, frequently well-educated, but typically nonaggressive (+1 to BRN and WTS, but -1 to PRS). Almost all Cyrinthmeirans are devout believers in the Church; a Trinity-worshipper may gain +1 to his Faith if desired.

STAHL

Geography: Stahl is a hard, mountainous land. The Irontooth Mountains form the southern and western borders, while the Frost-Giant's Wake – including some of Weyrth's tallest peaks – make up the northern border on the edge of the Icy Sea. East lie Sarmatov, Rzeczpospolita, and Magyarföld; to the south, Cyrinthmeir and Ouestenreich; to the west, Savaxen. Wide plains and cool evergreen forests fill the valleys between these mountain ranges.

Religion: Once loyal to the Imperial Church, the nobility of Stahl broke from both Church and Empire a century and a half ago, declaring atheism to be the state faith when the Church attempted to influence the Stahlnish populace against their rulers. The official stance of the High King and all sanctioned rulers beneath him is that all gods, higher powers, superstitions, fey creatures, and sorcery are delusions and falsehoods. Some of the common folk have adopted this philosophy, but the majority of Stahlners follow their traditional beliefs – the north shares the Savaxen pantheon, the south remains loyal to the Church, and the west follows the ways of Angharad's Druids. Nobles and lords formally discourage any organized religious practice in their territories, which simply causes most villages and settlements to practice their traditions locally and quietly.

Politics/Military: Stahl is ruled by a number of kings, princes and pennaths. Nominally, all these

rulers owe allegiance to the High King; in practice, there is no real unity. Warring is common among the various factions, clans and families – in fact, the lands of Angharad, Savaxen and Magyarföld were once ruled by Stahl, and have since broken away to independence. The High Kings have long since ceased trying to reclaim these lands, as they are too far from the capital city of Eisenberg. Relations with Cyrinthmeir are moderate, and with Gelure and Zhibara they are better; relations with Sarmatov, on the other hand, are very poor as a result of much mutual raiding, and only the relationship with the Xanarian Empire is worse.

The Stahlnish army is large and varied. In addition to hordes of still-thoroughly-barbaric tribesmen, Stahl boasts highly trained heavy cavalry, good generals and armored infantry. Stahlnish steel and metallurgy is among the best in the world, and Stahlnish armor and barding simply *is* the best. Axes, two-handed weapons and swords are popular weapons of choice.

Law & Order: Feudal law is strictly, harshly enforced, and punishments are severe; however, Stahlnish lords have a reputation for fairness that is, surprisingly, well-deserved, and lords can be punished as well as commoners if the situation merits it. Missionary work is illegal in most provinces; punishment ranges from simple deportation to immediate execution, depending on the local lord's temperament and the missionary's zeal.

Economy: Thanks to its size, Stahl is largely self-sufficient. They provide much of Weyrth's iron and steel, as well as breeding the Stahlnish Shire Horse – one of the largest and most expensive war-horse breeds in the world. Fur, wool, and wild game also make up a large part of the economy.

Inhabitants/Culture: Stahlners are tall, with light hair and eyes. Red hair is common in the north and west; in the southern corners, near the Magyar and Angharad borders, darker hair and eyes appear from interbreeding. Furs, wool, and leather are common apparel of all classes, though exact fashion and workmanship vary between

regions and classes. They are a harsh people, unforgiving and untrusting, given to violence and drink; the lack of religion among the Freemen and nobility has also caused much moral decline, especially in the cities.

Places of Note: Eisenberg, the capital, is perhaps the most heavily fortified city in the world, surrounded by geological defenses as well as man-made. The mountain ranges hold great mineral wealth and great danger, from both the bandits Stahl will admit to and the fey-creatures they cannot...

Player Bonuses: Stahlners are tough as nails (+1 BRN), surprisingly quick for their height (+1 AGL), and pride themselves on their honour and their willingness to do the right thing (+1 Conscience). However, their open mistrust makes it difficult for them to get along with others (-1 PRS). Their violent culture gives them added familiarity with weapons (1 bonus Proficiency die), and all Stahlners – not just gentry or men – are allowed to own and bear weapons and light armor.

TALES FROM FAR-OFF LANDS

These three kingdoms – Angharad, Cyrinthmeir and Stahl – provide a solid base of information for starting adventurers. More information on the realms of Weyrth can be found in the quick descriptions of other nations below, representing what new adventurers would typically know of these other lands; this information, of course, grows sketchier and more fanciful the more distant the land...

The Other Realms of Mainlund: In *Gelure*, the self-proclaimed Emperor Uglub has taken power, turning the state into a military power under martial law and his own absolute tyranny. He is gathering sorcerers and witches to his side; Uglub himself claims to be not only a sorcerer, but the Dark Betrayer reborn. Already *Gelure* has occupied much of *Farrenshire*, a tiny kingdom of chivalry, knighthood and honour. Among the isles of *Savaxen*, the blond barbarian worshippers of

Wodan One-Eye and his fellow gods continue to raid all their neighbours equally impartially. Meanwhile, in *Ouestenreich*, the Crown Prince maintains a small army amid great religious diversity, struggling to retain neutral between the powers of Gelure and Stahl, as the trading folk of southern *Helena* negotiate to keep commerce flowing. And in the east, the horse-nomad Kozaks of *Zaporozhyia* and the fiercely independent people of *Sarmatov* are braced to resist Stahl when it begins its own push for empire, while fighting off threats from the stranger lands beyond....

Rumours from Tegaarn: In the east, great realms adhere to the faith of the *Seven Voms of the Prophet*, a descendent of the Xanarian faith – among them the looming empire of *Otamarluk* and the Tatar Horde of *Krym-Khanan*. Beyond them, even further east, there are rumoured to be hellish domains of fire and ice, and stranger cultures of small, yellow-skinned folk who know mysterious martial arts and commit suicide at their lords' command. The Sul'taan of *Otamarluk* is poised to sweep down upon the West – but does he have deadlier foes he has dared to ignore?

Rumours from Maraiiah: Odd beliefs proliferate here like blowflies; people look different and are different, boasting darker skin from swarthy to jet black. The realm of *Tez'Hamun* believes itself ruled by animal-headed gods on earth, while those of distant *Yone* advocate an Eternal Dream that awaits us after death. Other realms practice their own brand of monotheism, and one realm is supposedly policed by assassins – who can be

warriors of *Otamarluk* are advancing into the former Imperial province of *Tavernum*, destabilizing the economy, while a guerilla war goes on in far *Dardanet* to determine the country's future. Travelers to *Maraiah* had best be competent and prepared to look after themselves....

TYPICAL MARKET PRICES

For simplicity's sake, all coins in the Quickstart Rules are referred to simply as Gold Pieces, Silver Pieces, Copper Pieces, and *farthings* (a fourth of a copper piece). Conversion is as follows:

- 1 Gold Piece = 20 Silver Pieces
- 1 Silver Piece = 12 Copper Pieces
- 1 Copper Piece = 4 Quarter-Bits (aka *Bits*)

Some prices for typical commodities might be listed as follows. Commodities will be cheaper the closer they are to their place of manufacture or harvest. Where ranges are given, they represent the spectrum of quality, from cheapest to most expensive. On the following list, “g” indicates prices in gold, “s” in silver, “c” in copper and “b” in quarter-bits.

Other prices can be estimated from the samples above, or set by the Seneschal as required. In general, a Quarter-bit has about the same purchase price as a modern American dollar; thus a copper piece equals approximately \$4.00, a Silver Piece equals nearly \$50 and a single Gold Piece equals nearly \$1,000!

Clothing	Price	Weapons & Armor	Price	Food & Lodging	Price
Peasant garb	2-3c	Dagger	1 - 6s	Tavern meal	2-4c
Freeman's garb	8c-1g	Broadsword/longsword	15s-2g	Week's rations	1-2s
Clergyman's garb	10c-25g	Bastard sword	3g	Ale or spirits	2-3c
Soldier's uniform	10c-3s	Greatsword	2g10s	Inn lodging / day	3c-6s
Cloak	6c	Shortbow	7s (1b/shot)	Inn lodging / week	20c-2g
Boots	2s6c	Leather Jack	6-10c	Stable mount / day	18c
Robe	10c	Chainmail	2-5g	Stabling / week	10s
Jewelry	1-30g	Breastplate	7g		
		Full plate suit	15g		

legally and openly retained by anyone! The

7. SENESCHAL STRATEGIES

TIPS FOR RUNNING *THE RIDDLE OF STEEL*

Running any RPG is a big responsibility. Running one with the intensity and potential danger (to your *characters*, that is; this is still just a game!) can be even more testing in some ways. The players only have to worry about one character each; you have to handle all the other characters, ranging from throwaway one-line encounters to the principal antagonists of the campaign, keep track of terrain, combat, timing and a hundred other details, and try not to get the players ticked off at you in the bargain! But it can be handled, and here are a few useful tidbits on how to go about it for *The Riddle of Steel* in particular.

- *Make sure you have everything you need* . This includes enough copies of the rules to go around (if your group will make do with one, one is enough; if not, tell the players to get their own), paper, pencils, character sheets, lots of 10-sided dice, drinks, snacks, and a good space to play in – preferably a well-lit one with a table, not too many really comfy chairs, and no bigscreen TV.
- *Run a practice session first*. With *The Riddle of Steel* in particular, even veteran gamers may be startled at how deadly combat is, or how much sorcery costs. A few practice fights and test rolls will go a long way towards getting people familiar with the system, as well as warning them that many usual gamer tactics won't work here.
- *Tailor your adventure to the players' characters*. Most of all, know what the PCs' Spiritual Attributes are and what the PCs want – that's how they'll succeed in the crunch, and that's how they'll get better and stronger. If all the PCs have a high Conscience or Faith, but you've prepared a game of skulduggery, thieving and intrigue, you're all due for an unpleasant session or two. If there's a sorcerer or two in the party, write adventures around sorcerous interests. If all the characters

are highly proficient at combat, throw lots of fights their way. And so on.

- *Be fair with the players, but cheat if you have to for the characters*. This means that while you should always be fair to the players – apply the rules to everyone equally, don't favour or slam one player over others, be merciful and just in intra-player relations – you can always fudge the rolls on behalf of the characters, or against them if necessary. If a bad die roll ruins the entirety of a game session, don't hesitate to lie about the results if you can.
- *Be understanding and generous, but be firm* . As the Seneschal you'll have to arbitrate rules disputes, sometimes by making up solutions on the spot. That's fine; that's your job. Sometimes players will disagree with your judgement calls – that's fine; that's *their* job. Sometimes they'll even have a point, so a minute or two to listen to them costs nothing. But don't let the players railroad you – you're doing a lot more work than they are, and you know more about the adventure than they do. It's your job to make the calls and stick by them, and if a player *really* can't stand your decision he always has the option of leaving the game.

DESIGNERS NOTES

The Riddle of Steel was first conceived after Jake Norwood discovered it was possible to throw yourself over a hundred-foot-cliff, get up, and run away with seven arrows sticking out of you – as long as you were a high-level fighter in a certain well-known fantasy game. In disgust with the cartoonishness of this kind of gaming, and after learning more about the real historical martial skills of Medieval and Renaissance Europe, Jake set to work to put together an RPG that played the way *he* wanted – that incorporated the gritty truth of real fighting, the wrenching passions of great literary characters, the mysterious, deadly and powerful sorcery of pulp fantasy, and genuinely character-driven gaming.

To this end, Jake designed the game around the following core principles:

□ Tactical combat with realistic damage results that required player skill, rather than high character statistics, to win. The Damage Table of these Quickstart Rules is immensely simplified; there are nearly 30 Damage Tables in the full game, reflecting the vast variety of damage types, injuries and locations possible in battle – but the lethality of that damage ensures the tables never need to be checked too often! It is recommended that combat be run in short bursts with each fighting character – several rounds or even a whole bout – rather than by “going around the table in order of initiative” as is often done with other games. *Riddle’s* combat system is fast enough that this will not slow the game down.

□ Character progression and improvement driven by roleplaying and pursuing character motivation, rather than arbitrary awards or points won through killing monsters and accumulating gold. The Seneschal is encouraged to constantly provide players with opportunities to bring their Spiritual Attributes into play; this not only helps the players improve their SAs, giving them more dice to use in the crunch, but allows them to progress at their own rate and to spend points as they choose.

□ Sorcery that restored the classic literary vision of mystic might as something scary, mysterious, flexible and powerful, rather than a list of rigidly defined spells limited by level or spell points. Sorcerers are rare and uncommon, and mortally dangerous to their opponents – yet they too can die if caught by surprise, and can burn away their own youth and life if careless. In addition, Jake included the following features that are *not* required:

□ Combat maneuvers that provide added realism and tactical options. The full corebook includes many more of these besides the basics presented here. However, it’s perfectly possible to run the game with simple “hit or miss” generic Attack and Defense rolls.

□ Philosophical complexity. *The Riddle of Steel* asks the question, “What is so important that I will risk my life in battle (or my health in

sorcerous exertion), even at the cost of other’s lives, to obtain it?” There is much depth to be found in the issues this question poses... but if you’re not comfortable with that and just want to hack-’n’-slash your way around Weyrth, you can do that too.

□ A complete campaign world suited to the game. Weyrth isn’t like a lot of fantasy worlds, where magic is just around every corner and nobody ever dies – or if they do, they don’t stay dead for long. Weyrth was designed to merge the grit of real medieval/Renaissance history with the wonder and strangeness of fantasy – to invite recognition while provoking curiosity. But if you prefer a different take on Weyrth, by tinkering with it – or even want to swap Weyrth out for another fictional universe – that’s entirely up to you.

The Quickstart Rules were written in recognition of the valuable niche such a product could fill – a useful learning tool for the system, a way to introduce new players to the game and a “rules-light” version that can be run with less preparation and complexity than the full game. I have tried my best to preserve the atmosphere, feel, and tone of *The Riddle of Steel*, while at the same time keeping rules to the absolute minimum of complexity. If you like these rules, it’s still very much worth acquiring the core rulebook.

The Quickstart Rules were also a big demonstration of two principles I’ve always believed: 1) The best way to shut up a complainer is to do something right; and 2) It never hurts to go straight to the man in charge and ask him if you can work together. After watching Jake get raked over the coals by an RPG.net poster for not having made these rules available yet – the poster, of course, completely ignored Jake’s reasonable explanations about lack of time, preference for the full system and a previous writer who’d bailed without warning on his commitment – I contacted Jake totally out of the blue and asked if I could be of assistance. Jake, being the immensely open-minded and professionally gracious individual he is, was more than willing to work with me, and the result is in your hands now. Enjoy.

A SELECTION OF ENCOUNTERS

These represent quick stats for use in quick encounters; personality and goals vary with the Seneschal's requirements.

Guard	AGL 4 WTS 4	Vocation: Soldier 8	Typical Weapon: Broadsword
	BRN 4 PRS 4		Typical Armor: Leather jack
	CRD 4 RES 4	Combat Pool 7-10	
	MOV 6	Missile Pool 6-9	

Most guards and watchmen are more interested in getting paid than risking their lives. They travel in small groups and almost never get into a fight they're not sure about winning.

Knight or Man-at-Arms shield	AGL 5 WTS 5	Vocations: Courtier 7	Typical Weapon: Longsword
	BRN 6 PRS 4	Knight 8	Typical Armor: Chainmail and shield
	CRD 5 RES 5	Combat Pool 10-16	
	MOV 8	Missile Pool 0	

Knights can afford armor and seldom fight without it. Men-at-arms may be less well protected. Knights prefer sword-and-shield fighting, and are aggressive in combat, relying on their armour for protection.

Rogue	AGL 6 WTS 6	Vocations: Thief 8	Typical Weapon: Shortsword
	BRN 4 PRS 5	Entertainer 9	Typical Armor: Leather jack
	CRD 6 RES 4	Combat Pool 9-14	
	MOV 8	Missile Pool 8-12	

Rogues will mostly avoid open confrontation; they prefer to steal and run, and favor ambushes and backstabs over toe-to-toe melee. Rogues will seek to escape whenever possible, even against a lesser foe.

Sorcerer/ Druid	AGL 3 WTS 6	Vocations: Scholar 7	Typical Weapon: Quarterstaff
	BRN 4 PRS 6	Druid/Ritualist 8	Typical Armor: None
	CRD 4 RES 5	Combat Pool 6-9	
	MOV 5	Sorcery Pool 12-16 (Lvl 3 in 1 Realm, Level 2 in others)	

These Gifted men and women are extremely dangerous if they get the drop on you. They are patient, and will flee physical danger in order to wreak magical vengeance years later. Often they are supported by armed servants. The best way to deal with a sorcerer is either with an arrow from cover or not at all.

Fey Elf	AGL 6 WTS 6	Vocations: Ranger 6	Typical Weapon: S.Bow longsword
	BRN 4 PRS 6	Academic 7	Typical Armor: Leather jack
	CRD 6 RES 5	Combat Pool 12-16	
	MOV 8	Sorcery Pool 12-14 (Lvl 3 in 2 Realms, Level 2 in 1)	

The Fey are immortal (unless slain or drained by their own magic), powerful, rare, unchanging, and superior to all other life (just ask them). They avoid contact with men at all costs, and are beautiful, deadly, and brutal in battle.

Gol (Trollspawn)	AGL 5 WTS 3	Vocations: Ranger 7	Typical Weapon: Club or mace
	BRN 7 PRS 4	Warrior 8	Typical Armor: Leather jack, shield
	CRD 4 RES 5	Combat Pool: 8-12	
	MOV 8	Missile Pool: 6-10	

Savage, mountain-dwelling humanoids who value brutality over efficiency. Some Gols become Captains, leaders with a cunning intelligence; all have lived as warriors their whole life.

Wurm (Dragon)	AGL 6 WTS 8	Vocations: Courtier 6	Typical Weapon: claws, teeth, breath
	BRN 20 PRS 10	Entertainer 7	Typical Armor: Dragonhide (DR 10)
	CRD 7 RES 15	Combat Pool 8-16	
	MOV 16 (32 fly!)	Sorcery Pool (optional) 29	

Ancient relics of the days before men, dragons are reptilian, winged, hideously intelligent and powerful. Teamwork is necessary to defeat them. There are very few left in Weyrth today; most believe them a legend.