

Trials of the Grail



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Introduction

“Sire, I came because I must, for this is to be the starting point for all who would join fellowship in the Quest of the Holy Grail, which will be undertaken presently.”

TRIALS OF THE GRAIL is a kind of entertainment called a role-playing game. In it you will play a role, just as you might in a dramatic production or as part of a psychology exercise. *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL (TOTG)* may be called a game because it shares some traits with a lot of other games: you “play” it with a group of your friends, there are rules to help you, and it can be a lot of fun. However, like most role-playing games, *TOTG* is much more than this as well.

TOTG can be thought of as a diversion—a form of entertainment, and like other forms of entertainment, like films or novels, it can explore deep themes common to all humanity. *TOTG* is therefore a kind of art, but with a difference: unlike more traditional mediums,

role-playing games are not passive but highly active; you cannot appreciate a role-playing session except to be a part of it. It cannot be simply viewed or read.

These games are also inherently social: they are like a movie, or a play, but one that you and your friends create together. You will not just be an actor but also a writer and a director.

What You Do

To be specific, *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL* is a role-playing game where the players take up roles inspired by Arthurian Romances, the classic tales of heroism, courage, and godliness; tales like *THE QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAIL*, *CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES*, *IDYLLS OF THE KING*, and *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*. The players will become *questors* who search for the one and only Holy Grail. The tropes and archetypes of Romantic literature will appear in full force here, and indeed you will become one of them yourself in your role as a gallant knight on a holy mission.

You will travel the English country-side battling dangerous foes and trying your wits against mysterious forces. All of it in the hope of attaining your final goal: the relic known as the Grail, which will heal not just your ailing king but the very land itself, which also lies sick and dying. Your loyalty to the king is unquestioned, your skill unmatched, but what



of your worthiness? The Grail is not merely an object but a force itself and it does not reveal itself to just anyone. Before you lies the greatest test of your life, which will bring you directly before the judgment of God. Are you ready?

TRIALS OF THE GRAIL is fundamentally a game about journeys and overcoming challenges, as are many role-playing games, and these challenges are—for the characters in the story—about physical prowess as well as intellect. In the end, the physical process of questing is secondary: foremost is personal growth and the attainment of potential. This growth is both in body and spirit, and is ultimately what will determine failure or success.

That is what *TOTG* means in terms of its characters but what of its players? As a player of *TOTG*, you will control a single character (unless you are the Game Master) but will be afforded far more power than in other games. You can choose not just what your character does next, but what he sees over the next ridge, what the next challenge will be, and even how that challenge unfolds.

By some standards *TOTG* is not a game for beginner role-players because it allows great flexibility and gives a lot of creative power to the players. But someone who is unfamiliar with the usual assumptions of role-playing games will probably have no trouble grasping *TOTG*'s concepts or in being creative. These rules are primarily aimed at moderately experienced role-players, but if by some chance this is your first, don't be intimidated: the basics of role-playing are very easy.

Overview

In this section we'll briefly overview the major rules of *TOTG* so that you can be familiar with them before reading about each in more detail. (Role-playing game texts shouldn't be like mystery novels: there's no

secret ending.) You may also want to review this section after reading chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 1: Preparation will instruct you on how to begin setting up a game of *TOTG* and on some of the basic ideas behind play. Chapter 2: Questors outlines how you will create a character to play: your character is your role in the game, and you will control your character's actions in the imagined world.

During play the questors will move around their world at the behest of their players and react to challenges created by the self-same players, and in particular the Game Master, who has no regular character to control. Whenever a questor is tested in some way, a *trial* is called for in order to determine the outcome of the situation. Trials are detailed in chapter 3. If a questor ever fails horribly he may become injured in which case he will have to prove himself spiritually worthy and then seek healing (chapter 4: Infirmities).

As questors wander the land, proving their skill in trials and searching for signs of the Grail, they will try to do good deeds to demonstrate their spiritual worth. When a questor does a good deed, and particularly if he sacrifices something to do it, he is rewarded with *virtue*, a numerical record of his action. Virtue is described in chapter 5, and is one of the game's most important elements. It can be used for a wide variety of purposes including the improvement of skills, the healing of injuries, and the gaining of *wisdom*.

While virtue is good for a questor in the short term, all the questors are ultimately in search of spiritual *wisdom*. Only with wisdom can a questor pass critical kinds of trials called *judgments* that test a knight's worthiness. Wisdom can be acquired through a variety of means but most commonly when a questor uncovers an important secret called a *mystery*. Wisdom and its uses are described in chapter 8.

Going back a little, chapter 6 describes rare and holy artifacts that a questor might



1. Preparation

Before play of *TOTG* can begin some basic preparations need to be made. This planning is done not by any one player but by the whole group.

The Game Master

First, one player needs to be designated Game Master (GM). As in many other games, the GM's job is to orchestrate play, control villains and other characters, and introduce challenges to the other players. "Challenges" can mean many different things. Within the game world, challenges are obstacles that the questors must overcome, but there are challenges for players too. A challenge can be a puzzle within the game world, but more often a "challenge" is an open-ended question that the GM poses through a situation: he will introduce some problem or idea that is thematically interesting. The players will respond to this question in their own way, and make the story *move* as they do so. In this way, the challenge is to their creativity, imagination, and a host of other skills. While there is generally no outright rivalry between the GM and the players—to see who can "win"—play can involve a varying amount of friendly competition and one-upmanship.

Since you're reading these rules, the player who acts as the GM may very well be you: you'll do additional planning, run the game and teach the rules to your friends at the same time: since most of *TOTG*'s rules are fairly simple, it's not necessary that everyone read this document in detail (although it doesn't hurt).

In the simplest of terms, *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL* is about questing for the Grail. But what exactly is the "Grail?" And who are these

"questors" going out to look for it? These are not rhetorical questions, but genuine ones that you and your group will need to answer—and just two among many. There is no single way to play *TOTG* within the basic guidelines it provides. That the main characters are knights who fit a particular Arthurian story is not nearly as important as the common themes raised in every game of *TOTG*, just as the various Romances all share common features even while their specifics differ. The main act of preparation is to decide exactly what kind of game it is you want to play.

Game Master Tip

Running a game of *TOTG*, as GM, is not necessarily an easy task but with a little dedication nearly anyone is capable of it. As is true with game-mastering in general, running a successful game of *TOTG* begins with good preparation and knowledge of the rules. However it also requires the ability to know when (and when not) to use those rules, to pick up on players' desires and ideas, to improvise, and to describe things vividly. This may sound daunting, but many people make fine GMs with only a little practice and experience with things like literature or acting can help. Of course, since *TOTG* is centered around classic Arthurian tales, knowledge of these is also a top skill to have.

Subsequent "Game Master Tip" boxes like this one will provide advice on running a game of *TOTG*: for keeping the game flowing, for using the rules, and for encouraging the other players. With the right techniques, you can help ensure that everyone enjoys the game.

Basics

Once a GM has been chosen the entire group should get together to establish the basic tenants of the upcoming game. At this stage you are trying to answer the question “what kind of game are we looking for?”

You can begin by considering how long of a game you want in real-world time. *TOTG* games can last from between a single multi-hour session to maybe a dozen sessions at most. Unlike many RPGs, which can be night-on endless, *TOTG* has a more-or-less fixed beginning, middle and end. By knowing what the time-scale is like before-hand, the GM can plan events accordingly.

Another basic question is what kind of tone your play-group wants for its game. *TOTG* can be many things: dark and moody, serious and moral, spiritual, perhaps even comic. Different tones will be appropriate depending on the personalities of the players and what they want to get out of the game: a brief and fun diversion, instruction in Romantic fables, consideration of ethical dilemmas, or something else still. All are valid approaches but by and large they are not mutually compatible. You should discuss tone and general expectations with your group and try to arrive at something that’s mutually acceptable. (Or, better yet, discuss some of these things with potential players and assemble a play-group out of people who want the same things.)

Defining the World

Beyond very broad and basic ideas of play, your group also needs to decide on the nature of the world they are going to play in. In other words: setting. *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL* is nominally set in an idealized yet still troubled Medieval England, with various elements of the supernatural and the mythic finding their way in. But this is just one possibility. In *TOTG*,



there are four basic tenants to all games. With a standard setting like the above they can be phrased in very familiar terms:

- The players’ characters (called questors) are knights or other warriors. They serve a powerful and noble lord on a quest for the Holy Grail. They are skilled young men with a high place in society, and pure hearts.
- Their king is sick or maimed—bedridden and confined to his castle—so he cannot accompany the questors. He needs the Grail in order to be healed.
- The land is plagued by mysterious and ill goings-on. Crops wither, plagues run rampant, and violence is everywhere. People sense an unseen malevolent force behind it all; a conspiracy of some sort. The king’s rejuvenation will bring the land back to a normal order because the king is tied inexorably to it: the king is the land.
- The Grail is an ancient holy relic: the cup that Jesus drank from at the last supper. It appears before the questors but then vanishes. They all swear an oath to find it but it will only reveal itself again to those who are worthy.

None of the tenants need to be present in this exact form however and they can be modified to suit many different settings and to purposely change how the game is played.

Superficial changes to the presentation of the game's themes are especially easy to make. For instance, one simple change—and one which falls well within the scope of the original literature—is to make the Grail not a cup but a mysterious stone. This is easy because what's important is not the Grail's physical form but rather its status as a *spiritual* “grail”; as an object that will heal the king. More substantial changes can be made to the setting as long as the basic themes, or some variation of them, are present.

The Characters & the Quest

Your group should consider each tenant in turn to discuss how you want it to be applied to your game. Let's start with the first and second tenants together. Stripping away assumptions of setting and color, they can be rephrased more generally as:

- The characters form a group of associates who are collectively searching for some kind of important “grail” object. They are in some way spiritual people, and aim for great skill in what they do.
- An important figure in the questors' world is somehow maimed and must be healed with the grail.

These are the essential aspects of the first and second tenants. Anything additional to this will make the game richer and provide a necessary context for the characters' quest— and there are innumerable possibilities. Below are several takes on the first two tenants:

The questors are Abolition-era FBI agents searching for a big witness—code-

named Grail—who can take down one of the biggest mob bosses ever. This is more than a job. These men have sworn success to their bureau chief, who was shot three weeks ago and is close to death in the hospital.

The questors are a bunch of rural American kids undertaking a Huck-Finn style adventure to seek out a mythical traveling salesman who peddles an amazing wonder-drug. One of the kids' fathers has lain bedridden for months, unable to work, and they've decided to help him.

The questors are American GIs in France during World War II. Although the Allies are winning, their unit was ambushed and hit bad. Their commander was shot and lies dying. With enemy units all around them, a small group of soldiers sets out to find a secret grotto which local legend says was the dying place of a great saint, and which heals all who drink from its waters. Their mission: find the grotto, heal their commander and win the war.

The questors are very early humans, living by gathering and basic tool-making. Their leader has been struck down by a terrible blight because he accidentally entered a sacred place. Now the band's fittest must travel out, away from familiar territory, in search of the long-lost bones of their great ancestors. Only then can they cleanse their leader, heal his body, and bring prosperity back to their families.

The questors are stunt pilots in a traveling air show. Recently their great idol, the greatest pilot ever to fly through a barn, has gotten the willies: he's suddenly afraid to fly. Although he's old, the questors can't accept that he's washed

up yet. They set out to track down the pilot's long-lost love, in hopes that she can snap him out of it.

The Land & The Conspiracy

Now consider tenant three. It describes problems with the land, which are inherently linked with the illness of the king. It can be stated more generally:

- The land is plagued by ill goings-on and things are not as they should be. Power structures are breaking down and violence and disease are spreading. People sense an unseen malevolent force behind it all; a conspiracy of some sort. Healing the important figure will also correct this situation.

The vital nature of the questors' mission is key, and is essentially to ensure prosperity and their way of life. The problems associated with their "land" do not need to be highly specific and their source may be left undefined: *something* is causing trouble but it is unclear what. It could be natural forces, coincidence, divine retribution, dark powers, or some ancient conspiracy working against the questors. Of course, you and your group may know what's causing the trouble even when your questors don't. The situation should be ominous regardless of the details.

Following on the last examples, consider how we might address the third tenant:

The FBI agents' land is America itself, and specifically the fight against organized crime: the fight goes badly without their chiefs hard-headed presence. The forces against them are not just mob bosses but also—as becomes increasingly clear—everything around them: their cars seem to break down more often, ordinary citizens act

strangely and give them trouble. Everyone seems to be linked with the mob—or is it just their imaginations?

The rural kids' land is the country-side around their home town. For no explicable reason the father's illness has been accompanied by terrible storms, crop failures, fires, and other accidents. They don't know what's going on—maybe some strange voodoo curse from the weird folks in the swamps—but they have to save their friend's dad.

The GIs are entrenched in the midst of a horrible fight with death and mayhem on all sides. Ambushed in a small valley, they're trapped, and with scores of injured. Cut off from the outside, they'll all be dead before help arrives. While the unit tries to hold out, things go from bad to worse. Officers make horrible miscalculations, ammunition goes bad and some of the men have started getting sick. While a crazy idea, the grotto is the last hope for any of them.

The early humans' conspiracy is one of malevolent spirits, attracted to the band for unknown reasons—undoubtedly some spiritual misstep. The animals they hunt are becoming scarce and the plants seem to be drying up. Something has to be done.

The stunt pilots' land is the air show. The crowds just don't come any more, and without them the place is lifeless and empty. Their managers have taken to drink, and get angry. There's no money, and talk of the show going under. Without the show, where would any of them go?

The Grail

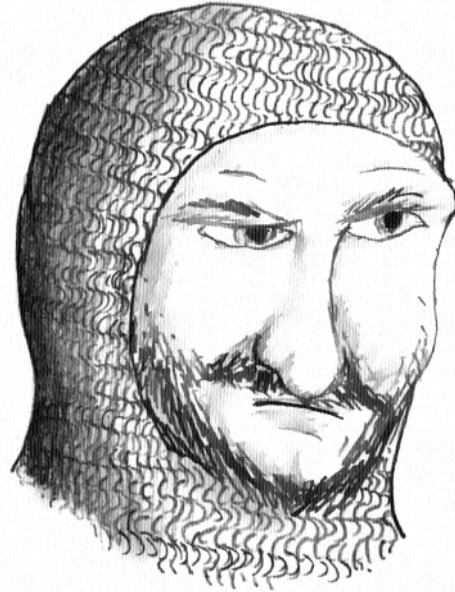
Finally we have the fourth tenant which can be framed broadly as follows:

- The grail is an object of great power and spiritual significance. No one knows exactly where it is, so it must be sought. The questors have all sworn to find it but only the truly worthy will succeed.

While the superficial nature of the Grail is not of vital importance, its spiritual nature is. “Spirituality” in this case need not be strict religious spirituality but it must be some unordinary appeal to great and lofty ideas. Similarly, worthiness and virtuousness do not have to imply universally superior morality: it could be a selective kind of morality, focusing on honor, treatment of social inferiors, family ties, debts to the established church, and so forth. Since mystery enshrouds the Grail, a lot about it can be left up in the air, with the rest being defined during play. But you can’t play without at least some grasp of what it means to be *good* within the context of the quest.

Following are the conclusions to the running examples:

The Grail for the FBI agents is a mysterious and supposedly devastating witness. It is in no way clear who this witness is: it could be a man, a woman, a child, a convict, or a preacher. To the questors, he signifies justice and order. But who knows what kinds of demands he might impose on them to secure his help? Can they convince him to risk himself on the stand? Certainly their own dedication to the cause must be absolute.



The kids’ Grail is also a person: the snake-oil salesman whose product actually works. He too is totally mysterious, known only from stories—perhaps he doesn’t even exist. For the kids he is an idealized figure representing the ingenuity and goodwill of America—for surely he will help them out of the goodness of his heart...won’t he?

The GIs’ Grail is the grotto of the French Medieval saint. Their quest is therefore decidedly religious in nature. How can they reconcile their place as soldiers—and all the killing they’ve done—with appeals to a peaceable saint for help? Can they justify the healing of just one man, their commander, in the midst of so much bloodshed? Can they believe in a saint’s grotto when most of them aren’t Catholic?

The hunter-gatherers' Grail is an ancient funeral cairn, with bones of their ancestors within. Worthiness will mean appeasement of the ancestors and acting in the proper way to escape harassment by other spirits: it is a test of knowledge; of close adherence to the proper codes of conduct.

The stunt pilots' Grail is again a human being, this time with a more definite form: a woman who once loved their pilot hero. What came between them, the questors don't know. Therefore, part of the Grail is the knowledge of that situation—for through that lies the means for convincing this woman where she really belongs. Are the stunt pilots savvy enough to understand such matters of romance? Do they really want to discover the details of their hero's past life?

Your group can be as conservative or adventurous as it likes with its use of the four tenants. While some changes may be superficial and easy (like a different form that the Grail takes) the role of the questors and the ways they interact with the world can require re-interpreting other rules of the game. For instance, while *TOTG's* themes are a perfect fit for many kinds of modern settings, swords and remote hermitages generally are not. A more traditional approach, with knights in shining armor, will be assumed through most of the rules, but with asides discussing alternate approaches. The most important thing in deciding how to run *TOTG* is discussion with your entire group, so that each person's ideas are considered and everyone is content with the final decisions.

Game Master Tip

The initial definition of the game and the questors is often a relatively easy stage for new players to grasp since it flows easily from the idea of writing a story. However, it is still possible for a group to draw a blank when attempting to formulate the basics of the imagined world. Generally the best thing a GM can do is provide a series of prompts that get the players to think about specific subjects. If the topic of the group's maimed king has been brought up, the GM might ask "So...who was this leader of yours before he was maimed? Is he an actual king? What's his personality? What kinds of great deeds has he accomplished? What do people think of him?" This may be enough to jog further discussion.

Planting the seed of an idea may sometimes be necessary: draw on what the players have stated so far and on the basic

themes that go into any game of *TOTG*. If the Grail itself is being discussed but no one seems to know what to say about it, suggest that perhaps it is not a physical grail at all, but rather a prayer said to God by one of the ancient figures in Christianity. Gauge the players' response, and if it's negative shift to a new idea. If they like it, allow them to take it up and elaborate on it, prompting them with questions when necessary.

While it is easy for a GM to take a heavy-handed role in designing the world and the quest, this is not his job. Only once the basics of it have been decided on should he allow his own mind to go to work, filling in further details and creating back-plots based on what his players are interested in. (Though of course his own interests aren't without merit either!)

2. Questors

“You, I know, will be equal to this challenge, for this is the purpose for which God sent you to us: to consummate what others have had to renounce, and to bring to conclusion all those things that no other was ever able to resolve.”

The most important element in any game of *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL* is its characters: those who undertake the quest and whose mettle will be tested. Each player (except the GM) will control one character, who is a *questor*. The GM will control all the other characters in the game who appear as villains, allies, and ordinary folk—these are referred to simply as characters.

Each questor is “owned” by the single player who controls it. A questor cannot be

changed or modified except with the permission of this player. This permission may be tacit or general in nature, but it is important to note that no player should attempt to dictate the actions of anyone else’s questor.

Questors exist in two ways. First, a questor is a concept in the player’s mind in terms of who he is as a character: what does he look like? What is his personality? His history? Some of this concept is recorded, but ultimately a lot of it remains ethereal. Even so, it must be communicated to the other players as well as possible so that they can imagine the questor themselves. Questors also exist concretely as terms and figures defined by the rules of the game. Both of these definitions are essential and operate in tandem.



Creating Questors

The creation of questors in *TOTG* is always a group activity. It should be done with all the players and the GM gathered around a table, discussing every questor as it’s made. This is because the questors are not independent lone-wolves, but fellow-knights who will comprise a closely knit band with a common goal. How each one fits into the group will have a significant impact on the story.

By this point in your preparations your group will already have decided what kind of basic questor everyone will be playing: usually

Game Master Tip

The definition of questors is often the easiest part of game set-up for players, and simple prompts like the ones already mentioned usually work to get over stumbling blocks. A few aspects of characters can take significant thought however, notably strengths, weaknesses, and mysteries. Ideally, a group will sit down and begin the character creation process at one point in time and then some days later return to it so that everyone has had plenty of time to consider his character.

knights of some sort. Now each player (but not the GM) must begin to formulate some more specific ideas about the questor he himself would like to play. Although all the questors will usually be of the same basic kind, each one will also have unique qualities that are entirely his own. When designing a questor you can begin by asking yourself some basic questions:

- What is my knight's status? Does he have great holdings or is he of more simple means?
- What are his general interactions with others? Is he haughty? Jovial? Stern?
- What other quests has he gone on in the past?
- What motivates him?
- What virtues does he hold most dear?
- What flaws does he have? How has he sinned in the past?
- How else is he set apart from his fellow knights?

In answering these questions you will begin to get a sense of your knight as a person rather than just one warrior of good among many.

You should discuss your questor with your entire group as you think about these questions to help you develop the concept.

Two Types of Questor

In *TOTG* not all questors have equal prominence in the story: one is designated the *lead questor* and around him is a loyal group of supporting allies. The lead questor is like the lead character in a novel or play: There is a focus on his actions and he will guide the group in its adventures. As in the source literature, the lead questor is not just another knight but is set apart from his comrades by particular characteristics.

The Lead Questor

The most obvious features of the lead questor are his youth, his inexperience, and his amazing natural talents. His past is often mysterious, and he may have met his fellow questors only recently. Being young, he is often innocent and somewhat naïve, but also pure of heart and the most virtuous among all his companions. However, more important than anything else is the lead's great skill: he is simply a natural at whatever he does (i.e. being a knight) and despite his inexperience he is better than anyone else around him, perhaps better than anyone anywhere. He has vigor, strength, and courage in abundance. If anyone can succeed in the quest to find the Grail, he can.

Why does the lead questor not simply leave on his own and retrieve the Grail by himself? Although he seems destined to succeed, his inexperience and naiveté hold him back. What's more, he has not yet achieved his true potential. This is his greatest flaw, and because of it he needs loyal companions. These

men will prevent him from making the worst of mistakes and will slowly groom him into a great champion: one who can achieve the Grail. While all of them would like to succeed in the quest themselves, in the end they know (or will learn) that only he is capable of it.

Wisdom and morality are ultimately the means of obtaining the Holy Grail, much more than simple physical prowess. Because of this, *TOTG* focuses on spiritual growth and particularly the growth of the lead questor. Because he begins the game as a blank slate, he has the farthest to develop but also has an especially pure heart. The lead questor's personal journey towards spirituality is what will ultimately decide the fate of the expedition.

Whoever is going to play the lead questor should be prepared for a role that deals with issues of morality and personal growth, while the other players may concern themselves a little more with the earthly matters of questing. Of course the lead questor is also the leader of the group, when one is required, so his player must be comfortable being at the center of attention. Not everyone will necessarily enjoy playing the lead questor, and it is often the most challenging role.

Ways to Play

Even if you're running a game which isn't set in the traditional pseudo-Medieval England, lead questors still have the same basic characteristics, but you may have to reinterpret their role a little. The lead should always be the same basic kind of person the other questors are. He should be amazingly talented, and yet new to the scene—whatever that scene is—and perhaps a little alien. For instance, if all the questors are grizzled motorcycle gangers, the lead can be a seventeen year-old motorcycle master, who hasn't taken on the whole gang appearance: clean-shaven and with an infectious grin, he sets himself apart from the others, but he's not so different that they can't accept him.

Supporting Questors

Supporting questors have a different set of qualities from the lead questor in order to fulfill their own mission in the quest. They are older and more seasoned knights with many other quests behind them. Their abilities lie not in innate talent—although they are far from



talentless—but in their experience and knowledge. The lead questor’s performance is potentially great yet very unpredictable. In contrast, supporting questors are able to accomplish what they set out to do very reliably: they know their own limits, can evaluate situations, and have trained their minds and bodies to behave in a regular way.

The strength of the supporting questor does not lie in stunning, super-human performance, but in reliable performance that will ensure the group’s survival. While the lead questor may succeed brilliantly and slay an enemy with one charge of his horse, he may also fail miserably and need to be rescued. This is particularly important in the early stages of the adventure when the lead questor is very fresh.

The major disadvantage to playing supporting questors is that they begin as more fully developed characters so there is less room for them to grow. In the early parts of the game, the supporting questors will have to step up to most of the challenges the group faces and will take the lion’s share of the glory. However, as the quest continues and the lead questor develops, he will begin to overshadow them in terms of raw performance. The supporting questors will still continue to impact the story, but their players should be prepared for this transition.

Choosing Roles

In the midst of questor creation, one player needs to be nominated to control the lead. In some ways this is the most desirable position since the story will focus on the decisions of that player and he will often be the center of attention. On the other hand, there is more pressure on this player to perform well and to lead the group in play. The lead questor is also the most vulnerable, particularly early in the game. While he will often be played as brash, his player will have to be careful in what he has his questor do.

Even though supporting questors are individually less important than the lead, their players still exert a lot of control over the game: the lead questor’s player influences the game through the lead questor himself, but supporting players have other ways of influencing the story. Thus, there is a trade-off when choosing the type of questor you want to play. Each offers its own unique experience and neither is universally more preferable.

Questor Traits

Now we begin to delve into the second half of the questor definition: that dealing with explicit and concrete rules. There are several ways to approach the creation of this half of a questor. You may already have very definite ideas about the most important aspects of your questor, in which case the following process will merely be one of translating your idea onto paper. Often though, you may have just a vague sense of who your questor is and how he fits into the group. In this case, defining the questor in a step-by-step way may help you to make decisions about him by providing a series of questions to be answered.

In terms of the rules, questors are defined as a package of numerical values and brief descriptions called *traits*. Traits quantify particular aspects of the character, from his abilities to his background. Each trait is described below in its own section. It may be logical to proceed down the list linearly but you should also feel free to skip around as seems appropriate.

Aptitudes

All questors have four *aptitudes*. Aptitudes describe how able a questor is at performing certain broad kinds of actions. Each aptitude has two components to it: *talent* and *skill*. Talent is a questor’s natural ability in the given

aptitude; what he was born with. It describes potential but says nothing of how such potential is being utilized. Talented people may do miraculous things but their performance is highly variable. Skill, on the other hand, describes exactly the opposite things: it is the result of experience and practice, tempering natural ability. Questors with great skill tend to perform reliably. There are four aptitudes:

Manner

Describes a questor's charisma, affability, bearing, etiquette and overall force of character. Manner affects how a questor interacts with other people, especially people of his own station or higher.

Survival

The toughness, will-power, and presence of mind to sustain hardship and to function away from civilization.

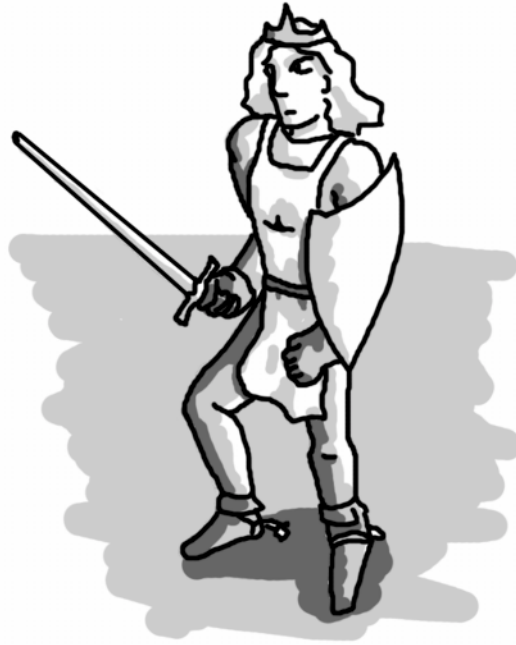
Warfare

The questor's ability to fight and conduct warfare, as well as various related tasks like tactics, riding, command, and the management of an armed force.

Wits

The questor's logic, creativity and learning. Witful characters can solve riddles, fashion a disguise, write poetry, or devise a way to rebuild a damaged bridge.

Every questor has both talent and skill for every aptitude. Each is a numerical rating describing how skillful or talented the questor is, respectively, and the higher the value, the more able he is. All eight skills and talents need to be assigned a value. To do so consider the strengths and weaknesses of your questor, the



kind of life he's led, and whether or not he's the lead:

- Lead questors get 20 points to spread between all their aptitudes. The total of their skills cannot exceed 8 however.
- Supporting questors get 26 points to use, but cannot put more than 12 into their talents.

All questors must have talent scores of at least 1, although a skill of zero is acceptable.

Note that each of the aptitudes ties together a wide range of general qualities and specific abilities that are functionally related. Each aptitude can be used by a questor in a variety of actions.

Manner is going to be used in most social situations and especially those situations where the way something is said is just as important as what's said. Manner does not just relate to conversation or to proper etiquette though. It can be used to assess another person in terms of their personality, feelings, or interests. The knightly ideal of high manners suggests only a few uses for manner, but it can let a questor lie, seduce, and con as well.

Survival includes many related abilities that fall roughly into two categories: general will and tenacity, and the skill and gumption to rough it. In either case, Survival allows a questor to keep going: to keep on living, keep on acting, keep on being a knight. To know whether an action involves the survival aptitude, ask yourself whether it depends on the character being “a survivor” in the general sense. A survivor can live long weeks in the woods, travel hard, sustain torture, swim through rapids, and withstand insults from his favorite lady. Survival tends to catch a bit more than half of all physical activities, with the rest going to warfare.

Warfare also includes a wide variety of traits. On one hand it covers physical actions that are overtly aggressive and that rely primarily on speed and coordination. It also covers a whole slew of skills relating to a knight’s duties in war and combat including social, physical, and mental ones. If an action is ever a significant aspect of war, then the warfare aptitude should probably be used.

Wits is primarily used when a questor wants to be creative or to solve some kind of puzzle. Of course, one can be creative in warfare, in conversation, and when building shelters—all actions covered by other aptitudes. But wits should nonetheless be used

whenever real creativity is required, or when a questor is confronted by an entirely novel situation. For instance, a knight besieging a castle normally uses warfare, but if the castle is magical and made of fire, wits would probably be required to circumvent its very unique defenses. Similarly, exercising a bit of charm or reciting a flattering poem takes manner, while making up a whole new poem on the spot is a matter of wits. Use wits whenever a knight must break out of the knightly mold and do something new and different.

We will follow Rob as he creates a questor to better illustrate the process. Rob is playing the lead character, who he has named Sir Arain. Like most lead characters Arain is brave and fit but not well experienced. Rob wants him to be good at fighting above all else but generally well rounded. He distributes his 20 points as follows:

Manner: talent 4, skill 1

Survival: talent 3, skill 1

Warfare: talent 6, skill 2

Wits: talent 3, skill 0

Ways to Play

In a non-medieval setting, you'll probably have to modify at least some of the aptitudes to fit. Each one can be renamed and re-defined to your purposes, but the change should mostly be superficial, with each aptitude still representing similar ways of approaching problems, relative to who the questors are.

The "warfare" aptitude (or whatever you rename it to) should be whatever primary skill the questors have. Often it will be aggressive or at least physical, but it doesn't have to be. "Survival" should always encompass a variety of subsidiary skills that relate to resisting change from the environment—perhaps a threat to life or limb. "Manner" might deal less with royal bearing and the like, yet should always deal with interpersonal skills. "Wits," perhaps renamed, can usually remain unchanged, and should always have to do with problem-solving.

Here's an example of alternative aptitudes for a different setting:

While talents are more the lead's forte, in general, Rob doesn't want Arain to start off the game unable to fend for himself, so puts a few points into his skills.

A player does not have to spend all of his aptitude points—although he will usually want to use most of them especially if he is controlling the lead questor. Two things can happen to unused points: if the questor is the lead, unused points are turned into another numerical rating, *virtue*. Virtue is not literally a measurement of how virtuous the questor is, but of his recent good deeds. Virtue can be used for various purposes and is explained fully in chapter 5. If, on the other hand, the questor is a supporting character, unused aptitude points become *narrative points*. Narrative Points (NPs) are used to influence the story

In a game where the questors are flying aces on a British aircraft carrier during World War II, we might have the following aptitudes:

Style (Manner): how cool you are. Allows charming ladies, explaining yourself to Command, and talking your way into places.

Vigor (Survival): will and liveliness; the ability to stand G-forces, tolerate an officer's berating dress-down, and making your way as a civvie.

Flying (Warfare): what kind of flying ace can't fly? How good you are at navigating, shooting up bogies, pulling stunts, and landing again safely.

Wherewithal (Wits): thinking on your feet. If your plane gets shot down on some God-forsaken beach, will you be able to fix the thing?

directly, allowing the player to become a part-time narrator. They are described in chapter 7.

Strengths

The next thing to consider is a questor's *strengths* and *weaknesses*. A strength describes a situation in which the questor tends to do well. This benefit is not based on a particular action the questor does and says nothing about why he does well. Strengths are more specific than aptitudes but also cross aptitude boundaries, since more than one kind of action—and more than one kind of aptitude—can be performed within the same situation, with each one getting the bonus. For example, the strength "boats" means that a questor is able to do well in all scenes relating to boats: in walking about on them, fighting

from them, building or repairing them, and so on.

Strengths can create exceptions to what are otherwise a questor's shortcomings: a normally shy and socially inept knight could nonetheless have a strength that applies to all feasts, which are highly social events.

Strengths should not be so broad that they end up applying to ubiquitous situations (like "woods"). If the definition is too vague, narrow it with modifying words like "wild woods." Be sure to describe a situation and not an action or kind of behavior.

You might give some thought to the justification behind your questor's strengths. These need not be related to anything as obvious as great personal skill. In fact they might have nothing to do with the questor's own performance at all: strengths refer to positive outcomes, not what the questor does to get them. Thus strengths can stem from natural good luck, the favor of God, or the way other people perceive him. Even if the strength does stem from the questor's own skill, think about how he got it: from years of solitary training, service somewhere, his heritage, or maybe some critical formative event in his youth.

- Lead questors have only one strength, since they are more able overall and tend to have fewer individual quirks.
- Supporting questors get two strengths because they often have more colorful pasts and may be more skilled in specific areas rather than generally accomplished.

Below are some examples of appropriate strengths and how they might be used in a game:

Awkward Diplomacy: the questor has a knack for dealing with unpleasant situations involving powerful people. This might allow him to clear up

misunderstandings between two nobles, calm embittered rivals during a great feast, or fight his way out of failed negotiations.

Mysterious Maidens: to this questor, magical maidens who appear out of the woods are not so mysterious at all—nor so unnerving. He is better equipped to perceive the true meaning of their strange riddles, to slay the ones who mean him ill, and to survive the tests they may put to him.

Confused Battles: when the fighting on a battlefield becomes hairy and disorganized, this questor seems strangely calm. He always knows where his leader is, immediately perceives when he is about to be surrounded by enemies and can always speak clearly to his fellow-warriors, despite the din of combat.

Returning to our running example, Rob gives Sir Arain the strength "the very ill." This means that the knight will do well whenever dealing with ill people, from lepers to bed-ridden rulers. He'll be able to reassure and administer to them better than other knights, and to understand their feverish words.

Game Master Tip

The main point to emphasize regarding strengths is that they are descriptions of situations and not specific actions that a questor is good at. This is a somewhat unfamiliar concept to many players, and as the GM you may have to come up with examples to spur a players' imaginations: describe a situation and the innumerable ways that a strength might come into play during it.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses are roughly the reverse of strengths. They describe flaws in a questor's makeup that cause him to make bad choices. They don't describe things like physical impairments, enemies, or debts owed; they always have to do with his psyche. Although weaknesses can have various explanations behind them, they all result in the same thing: errors in judgment. Frequently weaknesses should relate to the questor succumbing to some kind of temptation or sin. For example a knight might "choose glory over duty," or possess an "over-powering lust," both of which compel him to make poor choices in situations where those temptations appear.

Weaknesses can be broad like "vain" or "sharp tongued," or they can name more specific circumstances such as Launcelot's inappropriate love for Guinevere, as long as the circumstance is likely to arise frequently. A lead questor's weaknesses will often have to do with his inexperience and naiveté.

Game Master Tip

An issue with both strengths and weaknesses is that they not be overly broad or narrow. Each should describe circumstances or events (respectively) that will come up in the game from time to time yet not be ubiquitous. In the designer's circle of gaming friends, a strength for "winning" is often jokingly proposed, in part to remind the group of this point.

As with any questor trait, strengths and weaknesses need to simultaneously be useful in terms of the rules, but also appropriate to the setting, which is often nothing if not grandiose. Although mundane weaknesses are generally appropriate, since they bring mighty knights down to the level of ordinary mortals, a mundane strength is almost a contradiction in terms.

- All questors need to have two weaknesses.

The first weakness for Sir Arain is that he will have a tendency to be over-trusting: he takes people (or at least Christians) at their word even when there is reason to suspect them. Secondly, Arain is prideful and can hardly resist an opportunity to promote his own virtue in public.

Mysteries

Mysteries are the final trait that every questor needs to begin with. A mystery is some great unknown; some question that remains to be answered, usually about the questor himself. Mysteries will have a significant impact on the questor's life, and he may be actively seeking to uncover it. Mysteries can deal with a character's psyche, his history, or his physical being. Common mysteries might look like "who is my father?" "what is the meaning of my recurring dream?" or "who poisoned the duke?"

It is important to note that you are not defining an **answer** to the mystery at this time but only the question. The answer will be determined during play. Mysteries should seem important, but exactly how can be left up the air for now.

While most mysteries deal intimately with the questor himself, it is also acceptable to have less personal mysteries that instead deal with legends, tales, and general questions which many people in the world might have, but which the questor has for some reason taken upon himself to answer. For instance:

A cowled figure made an ominous prophecy ten years ago to the day, but no one knows exactly what it meant. Young Raouf vowed to discover that meaning.

To make this a personal mystery, you could rewrite it as follows:

A cowled figure made an ominous prophecy to Raouf ten years ago but his words were vague and Raouf could not surmise his meaning or even his intent. He has yet to understand what the prophecy might mean, but soon he will...

Like strengths and weaknesses, mysteries are also given numerical ratings. A mystery's rating defines how important it is, both in general and to the questor himself. Impersonal mysteries should generally have lower ratings. Each kind of questor gets points to distribute between his mysteries.

- Lead questors get 15 points.
- Supporting questors get 10.

Lead questors should have at least three mysteries and no more than six. No more than one of them should be impersonal. Supporting questors may have between two and five

Ways to Play

The number of mysteries that each questor has can be adjusted at will. More mysteries are appropriate for a longer game, or for one which is a little less centered on the Grail alone. 15 points for supporting questors and 20 for leads would be a reasonable alternative for a long game. If you have too many mysteries though, it will remove the need for enlightening experiences; thus, you may want to reduce the number of points given.

mysteries, any of which may be personal or impersonal (though it is generally a good idea to have at least half your mysteries be personal).

No two questors should share the exact same mystery, though if two were both looking for their own father this would be permissible, since their fathers are presumably different (or maybe not, but the questors think they are). Also, no mysteries may deal directly with the Grail itself, as this is a mystery that all the questors are seeking to uncover together.



Game Master Tip

Mysteries can be very simple things, like “Who was my father?” but at the same time, a mystery that is very vague will be more difficult to bring up in play. Something very specific will naturally come to the forefront more easily when hinted at in the plot, and a player can purposefully narrate it in without too much thought or trouble. Thus, different players may prefer to have different kinds of mysteries, to best suit their own abilities.

Players should also be encouraged to link their mysteries together. They should not share the very same ones, but if their mysteries are somehow inter-twined, there will be a very strong impetus for them to investigate them together, and a more complex relationship will have been created between the questors.

Of course mysteries can always be tied together later in play, but it is often desirable to create as much complexity as possible early on. If pre-play set-up goes well in this regard, everyone’s job will be made much easier later: the plot will roll on, flowing from one already-alluded-to subject to the next, and the burden of constantly creating new ideas will be lessened during play, when everyone’s focus might just as well be elsewhere.

Arain is a lead questor so he needs to have at least three mysteries. Rob has already decided that Arain was brought up the son of a very poor knight in the

middle of nowhere, so for Sir Arain’s first mystery Rob decides that his mother is actually a step-mother and that his real mother is unknown to him. He rates this as a level 6 mystery.

Secondly, Rob decides that Arain fights with a strange blackened sword that was given to him by a traveling monk...the nature of the sword and its history are unknown. He rates this at 5.

Finally, Rob decides to invent something impersonal and states that there is a strange green tower that appears only rarely in the mists on a mountain somewhere in the kingdom. This does not obviously have anything to do with Sir Arain, but it doesn’t have to. He rates it at 4.

Infirmities

Infirmities describe severe weaknesses that a questor suffers from, generally as a result of some past failure. A questor can have many different infirmities, each one associated with a particular aptitude. Normally questors do not begin with any infirmities, but they will probably gain some during the course of the game. However a player could choose to begin with some infirmities if it fit his character concept. If the infirmities were severe enough, the GM might decide that some compensation is in order and, for example, award the questor additional points for skills. Infirmities are described in chapter 4.

Play Tip

One aspect of *TOTG* that may seem strange is the relative lack of character differentiation achieved by the rules alone. All questors are fairly similar when you look only at their traits: slightly different numbers in aptitudes, strengths, weaknesses and mysteries provide the only thing to set one apart from the others. This is intentional and reflects the close similarities seen in the literary knights.

Despite this, questors still can be made very unique. One way to ensure individuality is to pick strong strengths, weaknesses, and mysteries that are both unordinary and that fit within the questor's overall persona.

However, the main way to differentiate questors is not through their traits but their individual personalities. These are not represented with any rule or mechanic but are left to the player himself to bring into the game. If a questor is merely a knightly automaton, he will quickly become boring. Questors should have all the qualities of a good character anywhere, with desires, dislikes and individual quirks, all of which can be quite mundane.

Ways to Play

If you really feel your game needs more mechanical differentiation between questors, give all questors one additional strength, weakness, and mystery each.

Resources

There are also three resources that questor and players deal with. These are not traits per se but are very important to the game. Resources are much more changeable than traits and are regularly gained and spent.

Narrative Points (NPs)

Used by players to directly introduce new elements into the game.

Virtue

Gained by performing virtuous action while simultaneously making some kind of sacrifice. Can be spent to reduce infirmities, increase skills, and gain wisdom.

Wisdom

This is the ultimate measurement of a knight's spiritual worthiness; only with

enough wisdom will the Grail be within his reach.

Questors begin the game with no wisdom, and will only have narrative points or virtue if they did not use all their aptitude points (lead questors get virtue instead, while supporting questors get NPs).

Supporting questors also receive one free NP for every hour of play (which like all resources carry over between sessions). The exact uses of the different resources are covered in chapters 5, 7, and 8.

Recording Questor Details

In most role-playing games there is a standardized method for recording who and what a character is. In *TOTG* it is called a questor record sheet. It is made during questor creation and then referred to and modified during play. The record has spaces provided for each of the different traits that are used to describe a questor. Aptitudes are among the very first thing listed: as you choose how to allocate your points and fill in the appropriate

blanks. Continue to do this with all other traits covered in questor creation. (You should use pencil on record sheets since they are always subject to change.)

The questor record is not the end-all, be-all definition of a questor. There is only limited space on the sheet itself and having more detailed background and history in written form is often useful: many players choose to write short stories about their questors in an effort to have a better “feel” for them during play. For example, you might write about your questor’s upbringing, the trials that led to him being a knight, or some major exploit. Many people also like to record what actually occurs in play in short story form, so that there is a permanent record that can be referred to. Some times the GM takes on this responsibility, though players often write parallel stories that detail their own questors’ views on events.

Although questor records and their extensions are nominally under the control of one player, they contribute to the entire group’s game and help everyone to play better.

Bringing it All Together

When the questors are being made it is important for all the players, including the GM, to discuss the ideas they have. No questor should be created in isolation, to then be brought into the game later: all the questors must function together as a team and should be made with this in mind. Their backgrounds and purposes should be linked together and their personalities made basically compatible. This section will discuss the most important aspects of this process.



Character Relations

In the midst of creating questors, the group needs to consider how they’re tied to one another. Why have these people—of all people—come together in search of the Grail? The questors could all be brothers-in-arms under the banner of a lord, or some fraternal order. Or maybe they’re all incredibly spiritual people and have been drawn together by that alone. Perhaps some kind of event in the recent past has made them aware of the Grail and they cannot help but join the quest to find it. There are many different possibilities but there must be some significant bond that allies the questors and drives them in essentially the same direction: that of the Grail.

The players also need to decide what personal relationships, if any, tie individual questors together. Two questors could be related by blood, be long time friends or allies,

Ways to Play

Designing questors who are more ambivalent towards each other, or who are seriously competitive is certainly possible, but the consequences will be significant for how the game plays. Introducing a real black sheep will alter the tone of the game and may jeopardize the questor’s completion of the quest. On the other hand, it might also provide a very interesting and potentially challenging play experience. As with other changes you can make, you may want to play at least one full game of *TOTG* to get a handle on it before trying anything too radical. Or not. It’s up to you.

Ways to Play

While the usual starting point for the game is after the questors have already committed themselves to finding the Grail, there are alternatives. Instead, play out the scene(s) in which the Grail is revealed to them. This can often be a good “ice-breaker” since the outcome of the scene is trivial and already known, but it allows each player to get a feel for his questor as he considers his reaction to the Grail and subsequent vow to find it. This method can be particularly useful in less traditional worlds, like those set in a modern time period, to orient the players and even to establish further truths about its nature. But on the other hand, it can also be boring, and become merely another aspect of preparation that gets between the players and the “real” game. Which method to use is up to you.



or have some other kind of history together. Not all the questors need to have personal ties, though you’ll find it best if at least a few do. The lead will probably only have familial ties, if he has any at all. Additionally, not all relationships need to be entirely positive and a bit of rivalry or friction is common—though none of the questors should be anything like enemies.

The Questors and the Quest

While the questors will always be looking for the Grail, the group needs to discuss the exact nature of their endeavor as the questors see it, as well as their relationship and history with the Grail and the maimed king. When the game properly begins and each player takes control of his questor, the questors will probably already know about the Grail. They will know that they need it and that they must go on a quest for it. We’ve already talked (and so should your group) about defining the Grail, the maimed king, and other key elements of

the world. Before you proceed to actual play, make sure your group has answered most of the following questions:

What is the relationship between the maimed king and the questors? Why are they bound to help him? For how long have they known him? The land is ill as well: how have the questors been affected? Finally, how did the questors learn of the grail? What do they know of it? How does its appearance relate to the lead questor?

Not every question need have a definitive answer, and some can be left partially undefined at this point. Also keep in mind that the questors don’t need to know everything their players do: you and your group may understand exactly why the grail appeared and what the lead questor will need to do to get it, but the knights themselves can be wholly ignorant.

The basic nature of the world should be fairly clear at this point, particularly if it is not a standard Medieval world. Even then many variations are possible, just as there is in the

Romantic epics themselves, and you should make sure that everyone in the group is “on board” with the same ideas. If the members of your group are well acquainted with Medieval history or a particular Arthurian story, you can choose to use it as your base, in which case everyone obviously have some familiarity with it.

Rob and the other players are discussing the nature of the quest. They have decided that the “maimed king” is in fact be an entire royal family: the king and all his sons have taken deathly ill and the kingdom fears for them. The land itself has been afflicted with terrible plagues and the very seasons run awry: going backwards instead of forwards.

The questors will be knights from a variety of nearby lands, and from the king’s own domain, who have all come together at the bequest of a Merlin-type sorcerer who advises the king and has organized the effort to save him and his family.

The grail will manifest as a golden cup, but is really a metaphor for understanding the duties that God gives men in all walks of life. What this quest will entail, none of the knights know, but they have all sworn themselves to it. With this, the players feel they have enough to begin playing, allowing the rest of the world and its history to be defined as the game goes along.

3. Trials

“God grant that in this Quest you save your honour and your soul, for the body will be exposed to mortal peril before you have gone far.”

Now we move away from the pre-game setup and into the rules of play itself. “Play” refers broadly to everything that is done by the players after setup, and primarily involves action carried out in the game-world by the questors.

Action in the game comes about through the use of *trials*. A trial is a point of resolution in the story: at a crucial juncture, events may go one way or another. The trial decides which way. Trials are always about questors: trials put them to the test, assessing some aspect of their being.

Trials are often called for when a player wants his questor to take action and affect his world. They can also be used when a questor is essentially passive but must respond to his environment or resist it. In either case, he is being tested. The *resolution* of a trial describes the outcome of the situation and will suggest how the larger story will unfold in response to it. Resolving trials forms the meat of any *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL* game.

Calling for a Trial

For a trial to be used it must be called for by a player or the GM. A trial should be called for whenever it seems that a questor is being tested. Usually it will be his abilities that are on trial, when he attempts some action or resists an outside force. A knight who wants to unhorse an opponent, for example, needs a trial.

Not all actions (or reactions) necessitate a trial however, because not all actions really test a questor: if the action is trivial or easy his success should be taken for granted. For instance, there is usually no reason to have a trial when a knight wants to mount his horse and ride away—that’s something he does all the time. On the other hand, if he’s being attacked while he attempts to mount his horse, then a trial would be called for. The potential consequences of the action must also be considered: if the questor’s immediate failure could simply be negated by further attempts, with no consequences, a trial is not needed.



Sir Rambeaux is about to visit an important king and his quest hinges on him getting important supplies and directions. Despite his lack of social graces, he needs to make a good impression. As he approaches the king, he hopes that his speech will be fair and his compliments not too obvious...

Trials are flexible in what they encompass, especially in terms of time. They do not have to involve events that last mere seconds or minutes, or which take up all of a questor's attention. Very prolonged actions and general conditions can be trials as well. The compression of many actions into a single trial is most acceptable when the difficulty or seriousness of any single one of the actions is negligible.

Gareth the Fair has been wandering for fifteen days with scant provisions and suffering from the blazing heat of an unseasonably bright sun. For all this, a single trial is called for to determine how Gareth fares the physical strain of his travels.

Matthew and Broderick, knights though they are, have agreed to rebuild a stone wall that encloses a beautiful maiden's pavilion which, owing to its special nature, protects her from various creatures of the wood. Toiling for many hours, the knights try to assemble a goodly wall without chinks. They are rather inexperienced at such work though, and pray they have done well. Their efforts constitute a single trial.

Generally, the less dangerous a task is and the less critical the results, the more easily it may be combined with other similar tasks. If a specific action is very important it should be handled on its own.

Defining a Trial

Once a trial is called for it must be defined in precise terms so its outcome can be decided. Each aspect of the trial needs to be clearly identified, beginning with who is involved. Usually this will be a single questor. That questor's player then needs to describe the general intentions of his questor, stating what he hopes to achieve. These statements should concern goals and general approach, not specific actions. The player should not go into great detail about what he wants his questor to do.

The GM will then describe the difficulties involved in the situation (if they aren't already obvious) and what forces oppose the questor. Some times this opposition will come from the questor himself (his lack of experience, exhaustion, and so on). Other times the questor will be resisted by the environment (as with harsh wind and rain when traveling) or directly by another character who seeks to subvert him. If the questor is in a passive position, merely resisting some outside force like an attack, the player may or may not need to describe how the questor responds.

Usually trials test a questor's earthly abilities, which are defined by his aptitudes. In every trial one of the four aptitudes will be tested. Which one depends on the kind of action being attempted: often it will be obvious, but if not the player should choose the aptitude he thinks is most relevant.

Jervais is fighting a rival knight with his sword and shield. The Warfare aptitude is the obvious choice. Later, Jervais is climbing down a rock face: the trial hinges on Survival. At the bottom he finds a sailboat, but doesn't know how to sail. Figuring out how to pilot the craft is a trial involving Wits.

Applying Strengths

Strengths may also be brought into a trial. The questor's player will nominate a strength for use in the trial and the GM then decides whether it's sufficiently applicable. If the strength is somewhat appropriate to the task, whatever talent he's using will be raised by one for the duration of the trial. If the GM decides that the situation is highly appropriate and tailor made for the questor's strength, then he'll award a bonus of two instead. He should do this more frequently for narrow kinds of strengths that don't come up very often, and less frequently for broader strengths that see regular use.

More than one strength can apply to a particular trial if both are relevant, though this will probably be rare (and players should not be allowed to choose strengths that are very similar).



Trial Resolution

“And if it be His pleasure that I die, the body's death will be the soul's salvation; and if I am to come through this alive, it will be a mark of honour and renown.”

With the trial at hand well defined, it becomes a simple matter to determine how well the questor performed and what the outcome will be. As in most RPGs, trial resolution is governed not just by statistics and traits (like aptitudes) but also by chance. This means that even a task that seems straightforward might go badly, and apparently impossible obstacles may be overcome. This randomness primarily represents the questor's

Game Master Tip

Running trials is usually where the GM's powers as rules-master come most into play, and where he has to make a lot of fast judgments and on-the-spot narrations. One of the problems that players familiar with other RPGs may face is the “fortune-in-the-middle mechanic,” whereby very little detail is stated before trial resolution. Players may want to describe exactly what it is their questor will be doing (perhaps in excruciating detail) and for you to then adjust the difficulty based on this. *TOTG* doesn't work this way however.

Ask only for general statements about approaching a problem, not details. For instance, consider “I'll use brute strength to overcome the green knight.” This states intent (overcoming the green knight) and general means (physical). What this generality does is leave the specifics of a trial to its outcome: only when everyone knows how it turns out will the rest be filled in.

own irregular performance, due to his basic human frailty. It can also be taken to include something of the will of God, who may influence events in ways that are unfathomable to mortals. The implications of this are discussed in the next section, Interpreting the Results.

A trial thus involves three things: the character's aptitude (and strengths), chance, and any forces that work against the questor. The last of these, the opposing forces, are defined by two numbers just like an aptitude: difficulty and complexity.

Difficulty and Complexity

The first aspect of opposition is *difficulty*. Difficulty is the basic measure of how challenging a trial is and defines what total level of accomplishment will be needed for the questor to succeed. Difficulty also relates

specifically to talent because only naturally able questors will be able to succeed in the most difficult tasks.

The second aspect is *complexity*. Complexity states how much the questor's specific knowledge and training are tested, and how much will be required to succeed. In contrast to difficulty, complexity is related primarily to skill, and more highly skilled questors will do better at complex tasks.

For instance, climbing over a tall fence is not easy per se, but it is fairly simple and anyone who is sufficiently athletic can do it: no special knowledge or training is required. Thus, climbing a fence would have higher difficulty than complexity. On the other hand, sailing a small ship really requires more knowledge, above and beyond raw ability, so the complexity would be high. Thus, difficulty is analogous to talent and complexity is analogous to skill.

The GM will assign every trial a difficulty and a complexity rating, based on what it consists of and on the questor's basic approach to it. A "standard" difficulty is 2, though it commonly ranges between 1 and 6. Standard complexity is 6, though it generally ranges

from 4 to 10. Usually a player will be able to ask for a rough estimate of how hard a task is before his questor commits to it. The GM will then provide an approximate answer and the player may decide that it is too risky or he may go ahead with the idea.

To resolve a trial, the questor's skill, the difficulty, the complexity, and a random element must all be combined. The player whose questor is involved should take up a number of ten-sided dice equal to the talent of his questor's relevant aptitude, plus any bonus from strength. The player then rolls these dice: each one is a potential "success" in the trial. A success represents one increment of victory—one part of the test passed. The questor triumphs in the trial as a whole if he gets successes equal to the difficulty.

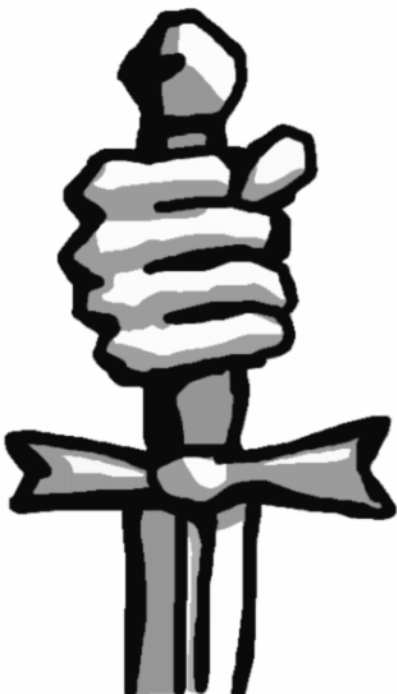
Counting Successes

Whether a given die counts as a success or not depends on the questor's skill rating (for the aptitude being used) and on the complexity of the trial. Subtract the skill rating from the complexity: this is the "target number." Any dice that come up higher than the target number are counted as successes. Ties and lower results are failures.

If the questor had no skill at all (a skill rating of zero) then every die rolled which exceeded the complexity would count as a success. However, skill overcomes complexity and thus reduces the number that must be rolled over. If the target number is less than 1, then all dice rolled are automatically counted as successes. On the other hand, if the target number is 10 or greater then there is no chance of success at all and the questor fails.

If the player rolls as many or more successes than the difficulty of the trial, the questor has prevailed. If he rolled fewer, the questor has instead been thwarted.

Jervais finds himself in a small sailboat on the coast, but doesn't know



how to pilot it. His player wants him to get the craft out to sea, so a trial will be needed. Jervais will be using his wits aptitude, in which he has a talent of 3 and a skill of 4. The GM sets the complexity of the task to 8, giving Jervais a target number of 4 ($8 - 4 = 4$). The difficulty will be 2, meaning that Jervais can only roll one failure. He rolls and gets: 2, 5, 10, two successes! Jervais is victorious.

Group Actions

On some occasions, multiple questors will be involved in a single trial because they are all attempting the same action simultaneously, like the effort to build a wooden bridge or to attack a ferocious bear. Trial resolution stays much the same in these cases. All the questors make their rolls and count up their successes exactly as they usually would, using a complexity assigned by the GM. The only difference is that the successes from all the questors involved are pooled together and then compared in total to the difficulty, which will probably be fairly high.

Not all tasks are well suited to such group efforts, and knights are often loath to sacrifice an opportunity to prove their personal worth. Many kinds of actions will lead to the “too many chefs spoil the soup” effect and the difficulty may be higher as a result. Everyone involved in the trial needs, above all else, to be using the same aptitude and to be performing essentially the same action. The GM must be the final arbiter on whether multiple characters can work together like this, and if so how many.

Sir Marley and Sir Breckenshaw have been told by the gate-warden of a mysterious

castle that they must collectively demonstrate personal sacrifice in order to gain admittance. They decide to fast and to sleep on the bare earth to demonstrate their humility in this matter. Since nothing really stands in their way of fasting, no trial would normally be called for...but they must nonetheless convince the guard of their sincerity. They each use their manner aptitude to subsume their knightly pride.

They each roll their separate dice and count their successes based on their separate skill ratings. Sir Marley's skill is 4, so with a complexity of 6 he has a target number of 2. Sir Breckenshaw's skill is 3, so he needs to roll higher than 3 ($6 - 3 = 3$). The GM sets the difficulty at 6, so they must together provide 6 successes in order to overcome this challenge.

Group Actions with a Leader

In an even smaller sub-set of actions it makes sense for one questor to control the efforts of the group while its other members simply provide raw effort. For instance, a group could try to push a cart out of the mud: most of them simply push but one steers it and puts levers under the wheels.

In these group actions with a leader, the same procedure as above is followed, but when counting successes all questors can use the skill of their leader. So in our example, the steersman might have a skill of four while the other men have skills ranging from zero to three. But since they have a leader, everyone in the group effectively has a skill of four, and counts more successes as a result. The number of situations where such a method is applicable are few and far between,



especially since any kind of fast-paced, hectic environment—like a battle—will rule out the communication that it requires.

Trials Between Two Characters

Some times a questor will not be pitted against the raw forces of nature in a trial but against another character (probably not another questor, but perhaps). In these cases trial resolution takes on a duality, whereby each participating character rolls and counts successes in parallel. The complexity is still set by the GM, perhaps separately for each character, but no difficulty is defined. Instead, whoever has the greater number of successes is the victor.

Geralt is tilting against his arch rival Sir Belle de Ville. The GM decides that the complexity of the trial is eight for both of them. Geralt has a warfare skill of six so he needs to roll better than three, and he rolls five dice for his talent. Sir Belle De Ville has a skill of eight so all his rolls are automatic successes. However, he only has a talent of three. Therefore, Geralt must roll three successes to tie, and four to win.

Interpreting the Results

Although trials always end in either victory or defeat for the questor, knowing which is only the beginning of trial resolution. The resolution roll produces a numerical value when you compare the achieved number of successes with the desired number (the difficulty). This number indicates triumph or loss and also suggests how big of an outcome it

was; how stunning a victory or how crushing a defeat. However, this number says nothing about how this result has come about, what its exact nature is, or what the consequences of it will be. This is the job of the players and the GM: the system has suggested an outcome based on internal logic and now their creativity must supply the rest.

At the conclusion of a trial someone has to describe what happens and how. This is called *trial narration* and is just one kind of narration in general. Narration is a very powerful tool and equal in importance to aptitudes in how the conflict goes and how the story develops.

Who narrates depends on the outcome: if the questor won the trial, his player has the right to narrate. If the questor lost, the GM will narrate. If more than one questor was involved in a conflict then the one who contributed the largest number of successes, or the leader if there was one, is the one whose player narrates. In a trial between two characters, whoever wins narrates.

Giving up Narration Rights

When a player is given the right to narrate a victory, he has the option of gaining a narrative point by forfeiting the narration to another player. However, the player must first narrate some complication or problem that accompanies the success. He can narrate this complication either before or after the other player does the main part of the narration. The complication can be of virtually any kind and can apply to the immediate situation or the larger quest, but it must be fairly significant. If the complication is not sufficiently harmful to the questor, the GM can ask the player to elaborate on it.

When narration rights are forfeited, any other player can be nominated to take over. This player is free to decline however, and if no one accepts the offer then narration cannot be forfeited: the original questor's player will have

to narrate himself, and he doesn't get a narrative point.

When a questor loses a trial, the GM can offer the player the chance to assume narrative control and describe his own defeat by spending one narrative point. Although the player will often be easier on his questor than might the GM, he must still narrate a failure. If his narration is not sufficiently negative, the GM may ask the player to alter it. Conversely, if it is extremely harsh, the GM may give him more than on NP.

Geralt has been successful in his tilt against Sir Belle de Ville. His player, Simon, can't think of a good narration and wants a narrative point.

"How about you narrate this, Samantha?"

"Uh...why not Brian instead?" says Sam. George points at Brian and looks at him questioningly.

"Sure, why not?" he says, "You want to add your complication now or after?"

"Uh, after," says Simon, and adds a narrative point to his record sheet.

"Okay," says Brian, "Clashing time and again, Geralt and old Sir Belle de Ville furiously attempt to resolve their rivalry once and for all. When both men are exhausted, they come together one more time: although the sun is in his eyes, Geralt's aim is true, and after a shoulder-breaking impact he turns to see Sir Belle de Ville sprawled on the ground."

Simon then adds his complication:

"Unfortunately, in the midst of the clash, Belle de Ville's lance grazed Geralt's fine horse. The beast begins bleeding, and Geralt has to immediately dismount; he peers through his own sweat to anxiously examine the wound."

Narrating

Whoever narrates the results of a trial will interpret the mechanical outcome into an actual series of events that he will describe to the group. The narrated results are the real results of a trial and whatever the narrator says basically goes.

When formulating a narration consider how the trial was set up. Above all, think about what the questor was trying to achieve. If he was successful, his aims should basically come to fruition, though perhaps not exactly as he envisioned. If the victory was by a slim margin (just as many successes as were needed) narrate a victory with complications or a defeat on one front but a victory on another. The same kind of thinking applies to defeats. Try to be imaginative and do not shy away from introducing events, characters, and facts that significantly affect the story. At the same time, be constrained by common sense and a general idea of what your fellow players think is appropriate.

Whoever is selected as narrator should have a fair shake at narrating things his own way without argument. If the other players take significant exception to what has been narrated, the whole group should discuss it and try to reach a narration that is acceptable to everyone.

Emily is narrating Jervais's success with the sailboat:

"You got just as many successes as you needed right? Okay, it's going to be complicated anyway then. Ahem. Jervais gets into the little boat and begins to examine all the ropes and sails, confident that he can figure the craft out somehow. After some time he manages to unfurl the sail and tie it down, although awkwardly, and the pushes off from the beach. Unfortunately...the wind is against him, so he washes ashore again and has to

Game Master Tip

In an earlier tip box we introduced a general statement of intent and method that a player made when defining a trial: "I'll use brute strength to overcome the green knight." Such a statement, if the resolution is successful, could result in a standard trouncing of the green knight in a joust, or it could mean that after many fruitless attempts at jousting, the knights come to be wrestling one another on the ground and finally the green knight is subdued. With creativity (especially with aptitudes other than warfare), a wide range of results can come out of an apparently straightforward situation. How the players narrate their own successes should influence the trials immediately to come and how the larger plot unfolds.



retract the sail." Some of the players laugh.

"As he's doing this, some of the horsemen that he was running from earlier crest a sand dune on the beach. Spotting him, they ride down the beach and try to shoot arrows at him. Luckily, he's pushed off by this point, and manages to get away, though one parting arrow does puncture the sail. Now the sail starts to unravel..."

"Are you sure?" interrupts Billy, one of the other players. "That's pretty rough. Plus one little arrow isn't going to destroy a whole sail."

"Hmm. Well, okay, it doesn't unravel. But it is a little ripped. Jervais is out on the ocean."

The Extent of Narration

Part of interpreting the results of a trial is deciding how fully the current situation has been resolved. This is a question of how extensive the narration will be. A very

extensive narration would not only resolve the questor's intended action but also the immediate scene, and would have consequences for the larger story spelled out in it. On the other hand, a very narrow narration might fall short of fully resolving the proposed action, leaving it incomplete and up in the air. When a trial is left incomplete, it usually means that further follow-up trials will be called for.

While narrators have a lot of leeway in what they say, there are various guidelines to consider regarding the extent of a narration. The first such consideration is how the action was originally framed. Some times actions aren't defined in such a way that they should fully resolve the situation. Usually this is the case when the action is fairly specific and limited. For instance, a knight might specifically try to subdue his opponent, rather than simply defeat him. Even if a limited action is successful, the question of what happens next may still be wide open, and another trial can be used to decide that.

The preferences of the players are also important. Some groups will always prefer actions to be complete and to decide the outcome of a whole situation. However, what's

appropriate for narrative extent varies with situation and therefore depends on how the players feel about different kinds of situations. When trials are used to resolve whole scenes and never left incomplete, this keeps the game moving quickly. This is appropriate when a lot needs to be done and the players are relatively uninterested in the details. Conversely, using multiple incomplete trials to resolve a single action slows things down and concentrates everyone's attention on that action. This is appropriate when a scene is very important and everyone is interested in its details. What interests your group will depend on personal tastes, including other interests (e.g. if your entire group is made up of horse lovers, you might dwell a lot on matters of riding).

More emotionally charged scenes, and ones dealing explicitly with theme should usually also get more time and be handled with less extensive narrations. But what themes your group is interested in, and what scenes it finds emotional, can vary quite a lot. It is every player's job to know something about what his fellow-players want.

Finally there is the issue of mechanics and how solid or marginal the result of the trial was in terms of successes and the difficulty. If the player was victorious and got many more successes than were needed (certainly four or more) the trial should probably be concluded very decisively, resolving both the action and perhaps the whole immediate situation or scene. This follows from the logic that the more successes were rolled, the more positive the result should be. Conversely, a very narrow victory, with just as many successes as were necessary, should often lead to an incomplete result: while still good for the questor, the results will be limited in scope; in fact limited to the point where the conflict is not yet over. The same principles apply to failure as well: if a questor fails by only a small degree, he may yet have a chance to win in the end if he does well in a subsequent trial.

When considering mechanical effects, a good rule of thumb is that with no more successes than were necessary, or only one, a second trial may be needed. On the other hand, with four extra successes or more, one trial will usually be enough. You might also consider target numbers: even if the number of successes was not very high, if the target number was something low, like 2, you can consider the victory substantial and in no need of a follow-up trial.

The weighing of all these considerations and the final decision of how extensive the narration should be falls on whoever is narrating. If he feels that everyone is interested in the details of the scene; that the first trial's conclusion was insubstantial; that the action was by nature fairly limited, he is free to narrate things in an inconclusive way, thus opening the door for further action. Or he can do the reverse. As always, other players can raise an objection if they think the narration is too extensive or not extensive enough.

A Changing Situation

Just because a single trial doesn't completely resolve a conflict doesn't mean there are no consequences to it. Whenever a questor fails or succeeds, narration should change the situation surrounding him in some way: for the worse if he lost and for the better if he won. These changes of situation are likely to be shifts in strategic position whereby the questor is placed in a more or less advantageous location. In a fight, a questor who wins an inconclusive trial might gain higher ground or throw his opponent's shield from his hand. Equivalent options exist for any kind of trial.

The effects of these situational changes on the next trial are basically up to the GM, but usually they will affect its difficulty or complexity. A knight who gains higher ground will cause the complexity of his opponent's next roll to be higher, thus making it more

likely that the questor succeeds again. Usually the change in either difficulty or complexity will be between one and three points.



Some Examples of Trial Resolution

Hrofnar is a Norseman and a Christian who has traveled to heathen Iceland as part of his quest. He has come to a rocky cliff, the very top of which contains a small cave Hrofnar was told to go to. Although the cliff is steep he thinks he can climb it successfully.

Hrofnar's player describes his general intention: to reach the cave. Obviously this is a test of Hrofnar's survival aptitude, which has a talent rating of three and a skill of two. The GM decides that the number of successes needed to climb the cliff (the difficulty) will be three because it is fairly high. Hrofnar will just barely have a chance of doing it because he can get three success at most.

The GM deems the complexity to be six because the cliff is so steep, with few hand-holds. Subtracting Hrofnar's

Game Master Tip

Particularly with less experienced players (or players less experienced with narrating anyway) you may need to give a lot of cues and advice on how to deal with extensiveness. Some players will tend to err strongly on the side of incompleteness, describing only very immediate results. Often this is because they are afraid of impacting the story too much, are unsure about their ability to narrate something significant successfully, or are simply unfamiliar with trials that have far-reaching effects. Although it's not your place as GM to narrate victories, you may try to encourage lengthier and more extensive narrations when it seems appropriate to you. More than anything though, lead by example, and narrate more extensively yourself.

You should be wary of narrating too extensively and too negatively however. Any narration that is too extensive can cheat the other players out of a scene they had wanted to spend more time with. However, this is especially important for you, since you only narrate failures: if a questor loses a trial when fighting an enemy knight, it is often good to give him a chance of a come-back. If a single die roll impacts their questors too seriously, the players may feel frustrated—not necessarily because they're "loosing" but because they aren't having enough of a say in how things go.

survival skill from the complexity we get a target number of four: this is what Hrofnar's player needs to roll over.

Because Hrofnar's survival talent is three, his player takes up three dice and rolls them. He gets: 9, 8, 5. Because all of his dice are above 4, Hrofnar has three successes, which is equal to the difficulty: Hrofnar prevails, though just barely. His player narrates his success:

“So...Hrofnar briefly surveys the cliff face and then, setting his jaw, grasps an outcropping with all his strength. He hoists himself up, and begins the slow climb up. When half-way there, Hrofnar’s hand weakens and he starts to slip. He stabilizes himself but realizes later that some of the food fell of his pack to be ruined on the rocks below. Going up a little higher, he suddenly comes upon the cave and sees that it appeared to be much higher than it really was. Relieved, he sits down inside to catch his breath.”

In terms of narrative extent, Hronfar’s player has concluded the immediately pressing situation (the cliff) but not taken it any farther than that.

Sir Germaine is seeking a most holy relic, the Sword of St. Augustine, which will aid him in his quest for the Grail. In a dark cave he has met the spirit of the saint himself, who questions Germaine about his motives for wanting the sword. The player and GM agree that this will be a test of wits since Germaine must explain himself and his duties. The GM rules that

the difficulty is a three while the complexity is a ten: St. Augustine expects anyone who wields his sword to be well acquainted with ideas of knighthood and religion.

Sir Germaine, being a relatively young but able knight, has a wits talent of six but a skill of just three. Subtracting his skill from the complexity, he sees that he needs to roll better than a seven to get a success. He rolls his five dice and gets: 3, 8, 6, 10, and a 1. Two successes, but he needed three! He has failed the trial. The GM narrates:

“The apparition ponders the answers to your many questions. He says: ‘My son, you do not really know whom you serve, nor why you fight. You do not yet understand what a knight really is. Being so young and valiant, you should have learned this, for without knowledge and wisdom, a knight is nothing. Think on these words and seek guidance. My sword is outside your grasp.’ And with that rebuke, the spirit vanishes, taking the sword with it.”

4. Infirmities

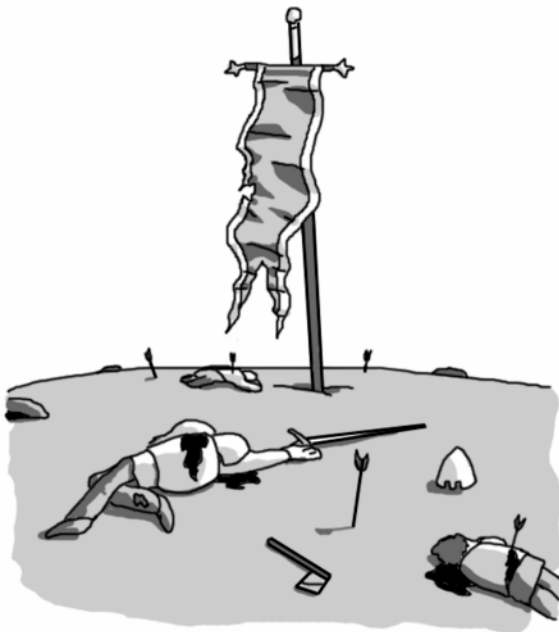
...then he thought the time would never come when anything on earth would yield him joy again. For there where he had thought to find all joy and honour and worldly acclaim, in the adventures of the Holy Grail, he had reaped only failure and its bitter gall.

Questors in *TOTG* will naturally be taking on heroic tasks of great peril: swimming through churning waters, crossing swords with all manner of knight and beast, and perhaps climbing the wall of a fair maiden's castle. In all cases there are rewards for success but also risks. When a questor fails, he may lose more than the prize he sought, and walk away bruised and demoralized.

Whenever a questor fails a trial, you must consider the degree by which he failed: subtract the successes he had from the number needed. This is the *margin of failure*. In a trial between two characters, it is the difference between the number of successes they each

rolled. If the margin of failure is three or greater, the questor has been injured in some way and acquires an infirmity. Like other traits, infirmities are rated numerically for their severity. A new infirmity's level is equal to the margin of failure minus two. Thus, with a margin of failure of three, a level 1 infirmity is acquired, and for every further point of failure, the severity increases by one.

Sir Arain is trying to cross a gorge by walking along a slippery log. A trial will test his survival aptitude. He rolls and get no successes. The difficulty of the task was 3, which means his margin of failure was also 3. Subtracting 2 from this, Sir Arain acquires a level 1 infirmity.



Describing Infirmities

Every infirmity is associated with a particular aptitude, representing the nature of the questor's injury. Whoever narrates the resolution of a trial can decide in the basic way in which the questor fails, but he cannot say anything about the new infirmity: this is left entirely up to the questor's player, who should describe how the questor is injured and choose an aptitude to be affected. Often the aptitude that was being used in the trial should be the one chosen, so that a failure while fighting results in an infirmity to warfare because of a

broken leg. However, any aptitude can be chosen as long as there is some rationale for it.

The GM says to Rob: "Oops. Well, the log was pretty slippery and it was dark too. Sir Arain's shoe hits a mossy spot and in a moment his leg is right out from under him. He waves his arms to keep his balance but it's too late: he topples right off the log and falls onto some bracken thirty feet below."

"Ow." says Rob, who then proceeds to describe the infirmity itself. "Sir Arain tumbles down into the bracken, which is an uncomfortable but nonetheless appreciated way to break a fall. He opens his eyes and then realizes that he's fallen on his own arm, which now hurts mightily. He surmises that it's probably broken, though it could just be a sprain. He slowly climbs out of the foliage, groaning. That's a level two infirmity to...warfare."

The descriptions behind infirmities can be quite varied. A warfare infirmity, for instance, does not necessarily imply a physical injury. Instead the knight could suffer from a nervous condition that makes his aim poor, he could suddenly be terrified of dying, have forgotten his training, or be feeling guilty for some completely unrelated action. While there is no mechanical effect following these descriptions, they will affect how the questor is healed later and can make the game more entertaining.

Infirmities are noted on the questor sheet in the block next to aptitudes: choose the row that matches the aptitude being affected, and in the smaller block write the level of the infirmity. In the longer block, describe it.

The Effects of Infirmaries

Possessing an infirmity directly harms a questor's ability to succeed in trials. For every level of infirmity he has, the corresponding

aptitude's talent is effectively lowered by one. Thus a questor with a warfare talent of five who also has a warfare infirmity level two performs as though he had a talent of only three. Narrations of subsequent trials should take infirmities into account, particularly if he fails in the same way, which is quite likely.

Sir Arain is battling the Black Drake, a mysterious rival knight. Both are worn down and things can't last much longer. The Drake rolls and gets 4 successes. Sir Arain normally has a warfare talent of 6, but because of his level 1 infirmity, he only rolls 5 dice.

If a questor has an infirmity that equals his aptitude's talent, his effective talent is zero. This means that the questor has been reduced to the level of a churl, a common man, and is completely incapable of performing deeds on the level of a knight. A peasant could never (in this idealized Arthurian world) approach a queen with the proper dignity and respect; he could never launch himself into war; survive the wilds of the country-side; sail to distant lands. A knight who has such an infirmity has been seriously hurt or somehow demoralized and cannot attempt any kind of trial relating to the affected aptitude. However, he can still go about normal every-day actions and use his other aptitudes. This is not as bad as things can be however...

Crippled Questors

They felt his pulse and examined his veins and exclaimed in astonishment at this knight who was certainly alive, yet could not speak to them; and some said that they knew not what the cause could be, unless it were some punishment from God.

If a new infirmity is greater than the talent that it applies to, then the talent will be effectively reduced below zero. In this case, the questor becomes *crippled*. A crippled questor cannot even do normal, every-day actions and must be cared for by his companions. The exact nature of a crippling depends on the aptitude that was brought below zero. If it was warfare or survival, the character is most likely sick or wounded, immobile, and only semi-conscious. He will have to be carried from place to place and can do very little. A questor who is crippled in his wits may be in a coma, very sick, experiencing hallucinations, or he may simply have gone mad. Madness is almost always the result of a negative score in manners: the questor has lost touch with his friends, society, God, and himself. He may need to be restrained lest he run raving into the woods, never to return.

A crippled questor must try to be healed, just as with any other infirmity. However, if this cannot be brought about, he will probably die unless his friends undertake some kind of

major quest to save him. He will probably need to be taken to a special holy site, and be healed after extensive ritual and the touch of holy men and artifacts. A player whose questor appears to be permanently crippled, and thus unplayable, can elect to give up the character and assume another role for the duration of the game. Usually this is called for if a questor is crippled such that his talent is reduced to negative five or less. How the player dispenses of his questor is entirely up to him: the questor may die, run away, or perhaps be trusted to a convent somewhere. Once this is narrated, the player must make a new questor with the help of the GM and the other players. How experienced this new questor is, and how he fits into the story is entirely up to the group. If the lead questor dies, it may spell the end of the quest, or perhaps the secondary questors could attempt to complete it on their own, if the GM allows it.

5. Virtue

“Consider now whether you could be among those of His servants to whom Our Lord entrusted the multiplication of the five talents. As I see if he gave you far more. For I believe that were a man to search the ranks of chivalry, he would not find a single knight to whom Our Lord has imparted such graces as He lent to you.”

As an Arthurian Romance proceeds, its characters change and grow: they discover their own innate talents to become larger than life characters and attain the virtue and wisdom necessary for the procurement of the Holy Grail. In *TOTG* this same line of development is followed. As a group’s questors undergo various adventures they too will grow and evolve. Almost all formal questor development occurs through the use of *virtue*.

Virtue is a “resource,” in that questors can gain and lose virtue over the course of the game, unlike strengths for instance, which are constant. Virtue has many uses and is perhaps the single most important mechanic in the game.

Virtue is not a measurement of how virtuous a questor is, but rather how far he has gone to prove his virtuousness recently. It is not some abstract quantity a knight can possess in idleness: it must constantly be kept up and demonstrated through good deeds and self-sacrifice. Virtuous knights are by definition well tested knights.

Defining Virtue

Virtue can mean different things in different games and this is something your group should discuss during preparation. To a chivalric knight, virtue traditionally implies a

host of Christian values, but also a code of behavior that transcends and sometimes even transgresses those values. For instance, it was often seen as appropriate (even necessary) for a good knight to spend much of his time covetously pining for a married lady—not exactly the most Christian of actions. So while Christian ideals can play a large part in TotG, there can be other themes as well.

Virtue in *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL* does not necessarily correspond with the questor’s own ideas of morality: virtue here reflects morality in the eyes of God or whomever is judging the questors. Thus, it might be that chivalry in your game is basically unvirtuous and a good



Christian will have to make a poor knight. Conversely, chivalry could be behind all true virtue, with more traditional measures falling by the wayside.

As with other aspects of *TOTG*, your group can be conservative with virtue or more adventurous. If you're playing in a modern setting, you might want to interpret virtue in a modern way, with ideas of individualism, diversity, and so on. Alternately, you could say that real virtue was discovered in the Middle Ages but most of the world has forgotten it. Or you could use a different metric entirely.

Keep in mind that virtue depends a lot on who is doing the judging: if the quest is undertaken by South American drug smugglers to heal their cartel leader, loyalty may rank highly as a virtuous action while murder, conversely, would mean little.

Your group needs to decide on what virtue basically means. You don't need to list every aspect of true virtue or every action that would support it. You should, however, have a strong sense of what virtuous action might entail and how a questor might fail to be virtuous.

Gaining Virtue

To acquire virtue a questor must perform virtuous deeds. What qualifies as virtuous will depend on how virtue is defined, but the action will have to adhere to some standard of morality. The most virtuous actions benefit a worthy person or cause, e.g. saving a noble lady from her insane husband or helping some pilgrims reach their destination.

Doing good deeds alone is not enough though. At the same time as he acts, a questor must also sacrifice, and suffer for his good deed, in order to show that he was not performing it out of hand. After all, when one is a powerful knight, kicking a petty thief into the mud or driving a huckster out of town is easy and doesn't show more than a tacit belief in morality or law. To be truly worthy of the

Holy Grail and of the name "knight," a questor must demonstrate his true commitment to knightly ideals through good deeds that are difficult.

Complications

The sacrifice that a questor suffers as part of a good deed is called a *complication*. A complication is any kind of event or circumstance that impedes the quest, harms the questor, or seriously threatens to do so. It is exactly the same kind of complication used when a player gives up narration rights in a trial. Complications can entail infirmities that the player chooses to inflict on his own questor, but they will usually just deal with the story itself, and have no specific mechanical effect.

A group of questors wants to slay an evil knight. However, they know that by doing so they will incur the ire of the knight's brother, who is a powerful lord and whose help they were counting on in the near future. If they slay the evil knight anyway, they will earn virtue.

To save a child from a demonic cult, a knight must burn himself horribly in the flames of their sacrificial pit.

In most cases it is the player himself who proposes a complication in order for his questor to gain virtue. In other cases, an action may naturally require some kind of sacrifice to be performed, and the GM will tell the players as much. A player can also say that he wants a complication but then allow the GM to define one for him. Complications are often part of trials but they don't have to be: they can simply result from a choice the questor makes.

If a complication is part of a trial, it must be defined before the trial is resolved and before the questor is committed to it. He can always decide that the complication is too severe for him and choose another path—

although this is not very noble. Depending on how they are defined, complications might be suffered regardless of whether a trial is successful or not: just by entering into it the knight suffers. Either way, he only gains virtue if he is successful: virtue is never given for failing a task since that amounts to a spiritual failure.

Rolling for Virtue Gained

When a complication is suffered at the same time a good deed is performed, the questor will gain virtue. How much is determined randomly, but influenced by the goodness of the deed and the severity of the complication.

The goodness of the deed determines the number of dice that are rolled. A fairly paltry deed—for a knight—gives just a single die, while something very worthy (like saving a convent from destruction) might give 6 or more. Most good deeds will give between 1 and 4 dice.

These dice are rolled just like in a crisis, with the aim of getting successes. The number that must be rolled over for a die to count as a success (the target number) ranges from 0 to 9 and depends on the nature of the complication. A complication that has only a modest affect on a single questor merits a high target number, while a more severe complication that hurts a questor more significantly or which impacts all the questors warrant a lower one; those that affect the main quest merit the very lowest. Consult the following table:

Complication	Target
Some risk	9-8
Moderate injury (2-4 pts), mild setback, extreme risk	7-5
Significant setback or problem, major injury (5-8)	4-2
Major setback, crippling injury	1-0

If the complication is very severe, the target number should be set to 0, in which case every die is automatically counted as a success. If it seems so minimal that the target number should be 10, then no roll is even made. The GM decides how many dice should be rolled, and what number must be rolled over.

Once the target number is known, the dice are rolled and successes counted. Each success gives the questor one point of virtue. If multiple questors make a sacrifice, they each roll for virtue separately.

Rob is about to have Sir Arain smite the foul leader of a satanic cult, but he realizes that he might like to give Sir Arain some virtue.

“Wait. I want a complication here. How about: this cult leader is actually Sir Arain’s long lost brother. Once he kills the guy, he’ll find out, and he’ll be so distraught that he’ll take a level 3 infirmity to manner.”

The GM agrees to this. Amidst some discussion of exactly what Arain does, the GM decides how many dice Rob should roll. He decides that the deed—killing a cult leader—was fairly good, warranting 2 dice. Arain’s sacrifice is a level 3 injury, suggesting a target between 5 and 7. Since It isn’t just an injury but also a traumatic experience for Sir Arain, the GM opts to make it a 5.

Rob rolls the two dice and gets a 4 and a 7. Since only the 7 was over the target number of 5, Sir Arain gets one point of virtue.

Risk as a Complication

The weakest form of complication is the simple element of risk: even if a knight does not in fact suffer an infirmity or some other problem, he may nonetheless open himself up to the danger of doing so. This is a weak complication in that the risk involved in an action must be quite substantial to count as a solid complication. Knights are used to facing peril, and cannot reap much reward for performing moderately dangerous tasks. Although all trials involve some risk, there are some where it is only a remote possibility, and a failure that produces injury would be very unlikely. In this case, the target number is 10: no virtue can be gained.

Using Virtue

Virtue can be used in a variety of ways to improve and alter a questor, with points being “spent” towards certain ends. These expenditures lower a questor’s virtue rating, but do not mean that he literally becomes less virtuous. In the logic of *TOTG*, virtue represents recent proof of good character: only virtuous questors will have succeeded. Therefore, the increase of a trait is really a *post hoc* explanation for previous successes: “This guy had it in him all along.”

Increasing Skills

The first way that questor can change is for their skills to increase. As a knight progresses on his quest he gains experience from his many adventures and grows into the natural talents he possesses. In doing so he is able to tackle

greater and greater trials, and in the process prove his worthiness for the Grail. While skills can be improved, talents cannot: once defined at the beginning of play, they never change.

Increasing a questor’s skills is accomplished by spending virtue:

- Lead questors must spend two points of virtue to increase a skill by one level.
- Supporting questors must spend three virtue to increase a skill by one level.

A player can choose to increase his questor’s skill at any time during a session, as long as he has enough virtue and there is no infirmity in the aptitude he wants to raise. A player may increase skills as soon as enough virtue is available, but he might also choose to save his questor’s virtue for use on other things.

It may seem odd for a questor to suddenly become better—more skilled—in the very midst of combat, but remember that an instantaneous change in a mechanical value does not necessarily correspond to an equivalent change in the game world: rather, the moment that a skill increases could simply be the moment in which the world finally sees how good a knight the questor has become since his last test. Alternately, a questor could suddenly feel inspired and thereby gain insight into how to do things better. Some kind of rationale is often desirable, and this should be described briefly by the player who raises the skill.

Relieving Infirmities

“Father, look on me in Thy mercy and grant that I may be healed of my infirmity so that I too may undertake the Quest...”

Virtue can also be used to remove infirmities. A questor gains an infirmity because he has failed in some way. This indicates that he must not have been as worthy a knight as he thought was. If he is able to overcome his infirmity and prove himself with good deeds, he will be redeemed and can return to his former self.

A healing won't occur at just any time or place though: the injured knight is not healed by his own will or vigor but by God's grace. Therefore, he must have an appropriately religious experience in order to recover.

A player can maneuver his questor into a religious experience simply through play or by spending NPs; generally NPs allow for far more powerful experiences. A minimal kind of scene will usually suffice: a beautiful natural scene, a grotto to pray in, some advice from a priest or hermit. However, there are advantages to more grandiose and emotional scenes that will be discussed later. The GM will judge whether a scene or event is sufficient. A scene created with a single NP may easily be enough for minimal injuries, but more severe ones, and especially crippling ones, will generally require more.

Once the GM has given his approval of the scene, the player spends as much virtue as he likes. Each point reduces an infirmity of his choice by one level, potentially to zero, at which point it is eliminated. The player should briefly describe the healing process itself and how the questor has changed.

When a really good situation is set up, there is a chance that the questor will learn from his redemption and thereby gain wisdom. See Chapter 8: Wisdom.

Rob wants Sir Arain to recover from some of his injuries. He has the knight wander into the woods, potentially getting lost, and diverting himself from his main goal. Rob spends 2 narrative points to introduce a silent hermit living



deep in the woods. He then narrates his questor's recovery:

"After slaying the hideous dragon, Sir Arain spends two days and nights resting in the hermitage. He prays for many hours, drinking only the tiniest amount of goat milk. While the hermit does not speak, he offers solace to Sir Arain, and directs him towards a more humble attitude."

Rob spends 4 virtue to heal all Sir Arain's injuries. He then narrates the result:

"He finds that his crippled shoulder has healed, and when he emerges from the forest he once again carries his shield proudly by his side; his coat of arms blazing in the morning sun. He again feels whole."

Aid in a Trial

While increasing skills with virtue gives a questor additional, long-term effectiveness, and relieving an infirmity restores his effectiveness to what it should be, a player can also use virtue to give a temporary boost to his questor's performance in a trial.

Play Tip

Using virtue to gain direct aid is generally something to do only infrequently. Raising a skill grants the same level of bonus permanently and for only two or three times the amount of virtue. However, really crucial trials may warrant the expenditure. It's also to your advantage to buy aid when you know your questor will be engaged in a series of related trials. For such occasions, it's usually worth keeping at least a few virtue free at all times.

As a player is describing what his questor will be doing in a trial, he may elect to use some amount of virtue to help him succeed: every point spent decreases the complexity of the trial by 1. This change represents the direct aid of God in the task (albeit only a small amount of aid). No further justification is needed, though a player can describe just how the aid helped his questor in his summary narration (if he wins).

The spending of virtue for aid can be done in any regular trial, though not in trial-like rolls involving resources, i.e. gaining wisdom or gaining virtue.

The effects of divine aid are not necessarily restricted to a single trial: if multiple related trials are being performed within a single scene, and particularly with the same aptitude, the bonus can carry over from one trial to another, affecting all of them. The GM will decide if this should occur, based on whether the trials are sufficiently related: they must each address a similar or related problem, and be done roughly consecutively. Aid may commonly affect up to three trials, though potentially an entire scene (but never trials in different scenes, separated in time in space).

Sir Arain is trying to outwit a truculent old man who blocks his path onto a bridge. To answer the man's riddle, a trial involving wits is called for. Sir

Arain's wits talent is 3, and his skill presently 2; not very high, Rob thinks, so he decides to spend 2 virtue to improve his odds.

The difficulty of the trial is 2 and the complexity 8. Arain's improved wits skill makes the target number a 4 (8 - 2 - 2), and Rob will be rolling 2 dice for him.

After he defeats the old man in a game of riddles, Arain must find a way to repair the flimsy bridge—again wits seems to be called for. The GM rules that the bonus of 2 to Arain's wits skill will apply to this challenge as well.

Virtue and Wisdom

The final use of virtue is the gaining of wisdom. Narrative points are used to initiate an enlightening experience that transforms virtue to wisdom. The entire quest ultimately hinges on this process, which is described in Chapter 8: Wisdom.

Game Master Tip

You should allow aid to carry over between trials fairly often as long as there is some justification. The trials must occur in the same scene however and usually must be consecutive. If a questor does one thing, then pauses, and without urgency turns to back to a related task, the carry-over shouldn't happen.

Carry-over should be applied most freely in very dramatic and dangerous situations, e.g. as a knight leaps from one position to another, battling numerous foes while shouting biting remarks the whole time. More mundane activities, and particularly those that are not in support of knightly ideals, should usually stand independently.

6. Relics

NONE SHALL TAKE ME HENCE BUT HE AT WHOSE SIDE I AM TO HANG. AND HE SHALL BE THE BEST KNIGHT IN THE WORLD.

The often mysterious world of Arthurian Romance is replete with objects of magical design that give aid to their users. The Grail itself is such an object. However, there many other objects of lesser power also scattered about the world. In *TOTG*, the *relic* models such mysterious boons.

Often relics are important within the story, in addition to being useful tools, because of associations with some holy figure, place or event from the past, and may help the questors in their quest because it relates to their specific nature. Relics can take almost any physical form, from an ordinary looking wooden bowl to a glowing sword. It is their mystical origins and nature that set them apart, not their mundane appearance.

Relics can be found in an innumerable variety of ways and there is no specific rule that controls their appearance. Instead, relics must be found and then earned as is appropriate to the story. At the same time, remember that relics are rare and only given (by God) to the worthy. Therefore questors will usually not have access to any relics until late in the game, if ever.

The Powers of Relics

Relics provide a wide variety of advantages to those who possess them. Although these can

be roughly categorized and there are some very common advantages, relics are all unique and each one behaves differently. When a relic is introduced into the game, the GM will define the rules for its use.

Relief of Infirmities

Possession of a relic can grant a questor one of two basic advantages. The most common advantage is the ability to counteract the effects of infirmity, making the questor feel whole again. A relic with this ability will be rated for how many levels of infirmity it negates. When a questor has it in his possession, his aptitudes will be restored up to their previous levels by this amount.

Many relics will only affect infirmities of particular aptitudes. The hair shirt of a devout monk might work against third level survival infirmities for instance, but do nothing for those infirmities relating to warfare or wits. Only a very few relics will be able to work against all infirmities.

Relics do not heal infirmities permanently but merely counteract their effects for a time. If a questor gives up a relic, his infirmities return in full force.

Bolstering of Aptitudes

The other advantage that relics commonly provide, and the more powerful of the two, is the bolstering of aptitudes. When a questor has



such a relic in his hands, one or more of his aptitudes is effectively raised for as long as he possesses it. A relic that does this will be rated for what the bonus is and what aptitude is affected. However, the relic only has this effect if the aptitude has no infirmities associated with it: as soon as it does, the relic's bonus is lost entirely. In all cases it is the talent score that is raised, never skill.

Often the affected aptitude will relate to the day-to-day purpose of the relic's form, like armor that increases survival, or a sword that increases warfare. Some times the relic must actually be used in an ordinary way to confer the advantage.

Robert finds an enchanting blue blade in the hands of a dying saint. The sword grants two extra dice to all trials involving warfare by effectively increasing Robert's warfare talent, but only as long as he uses it in battle. If he uses a lance or some other weapon (even if the sword is in his possession) he doesn't get the bonus.

Other Advantages

Relics can grant many other advantages besides the above. There is no standardization for these abilities because they could be almost anything. A relic could grant the questor gifts that no person normally has, like the ability to breath underwater or to withstand fire. They can provide aid but only in limited circumstances, like a book that helps solve riddle—but doesn't generally boost the questor's wits. They can also perform tasks themselves, like a magical thread that points home when floated on water, or a horse that always knows the way. The possibilities are nearly endless, and each relic must be treated separately.

Interacting with Relics

Even when a relic is chanced upon, actually getting it into your possession is no easy matter. Relics are not simple inanimate objects, but have a life of their own. They may actually be semi-intelligent, or they may be controlled by angels, God, or some other mystical force. Regardless, the effect is the same: relics have a mind of their own, and will not be used at the questor's will but at their own. Dealing with relics can therefore be both complicated and dangerous.

The Use of Relics

Since relics are not merely magical items haphazardly found, but gifts from God, they cannot be used by just anyone. In particular, very powerful relics and those with a strong religious history will not allow themselves to be used by a knight without sufficient *wisdom*.

A relic's wisdom requirement is simply a static number. An unwise questor, with a wisdom rating below this requirement, will not be able to use the relic. See chapter 8: wisdom for other ways in which relics (and other entities) may evaluate a questor on the basis of his wisdom.

A spiritually unqualified knight who tries to wield a relic will find good reason not to: the object might skitter away from him when he reaches for it, burn the skin when touched, produce the opposite effect of what was intended (making the questor clumsy instead of dexterous), produce an oppressive sense of dread, or just bring general ill-luck—and all that only until the relic can drop out of the knight's backpack, find a new owner, or otherwise escape him. While some of these effects may be associated with a particular relic, they are largely up to the GM. It's also up

to him whether to tell the players when a relic has found a questor wanting.

Obtaining Relics

Relics can be obtained in several ways. Often a relic will simply reveal itself to a worthy questor at some opportune time. This appearance will be predicated on more stringent requirements than those associated with simply using the relic. For instance, a magical horn might be used by anyone with a wisdom of 6 or more, but will not itself seek an owner with wisdom less than 8.

Alternately, a relic might be consciously sought after by a knight, just as the Grail is sought, in order to help the group in their quest. In this case, finally acquiring the relic should be the result of a long and perilous journey fraught with danger and many tests.

Whether a relic appears of its own accord or is sought out, it may decide to test questors further with trials that prove their worthiness (see chapter 8: Wisdom).

How common relics are in your game and how likely they are to appear is up to you and your group, varying with the specific flavor of *TOTG* you choose to play. In some games the Grail is the only relic in the whole world. In others, every questor ends up with at least one relic by the end of the adventure. In general though, err towards stinginess with relics, since their rarity will make them more significant, which is as it should be.

History

Relics always have one other important attribute regardless of their powers and advantages: history. A relic can never be manufactured or even simply hand-crafted; it is always born from a long past of possession and use. This history must be extraordinary and should involve inspiring people making moral decisions, undergoing harrowing



struggles, and witnessing strange coincidences. For instance, the Grail is usually seen as the cup Jesus drank from at the last supper. While lesser relics probably have less immaculate pedigrees, they may still have very powerful connections.

The Candle of Saint Germanus of Auxerre

Required Wisdom: 8

Effect 1: cancels any infirmity in wits up to level 2.

Effect 2: Illuminates a darkened area whenever the questor is in great need.

Appearance: Can either be sought out purposefully, or might appear to a questor with 10 wisdom or more.

This candle belonged to the Bishop of Auxerre, Germanus, who had previously been a soldier but became important to the spread of orthodox Christianity in the very early Middle Ages. It was used by him some time immediately before his death but never burned entirely.

Whenever a questor enters a dark place with the candle, and finds himself in peril, the candle will light itself after a small prayer is given. It then burns quite brightly, illuminating all before it just as Auxerre illuminated whatever matters came before him.

Ways to Play

Relics should be no more or less a part of a game that does not occur in a standard Medieval setting. Their existence may be widely believed or virtually unheard of in the population at large—and in fact, even the questors may be skeptical when their adventure begins—but they exist anyway. Relics can be worked into any style of game, representing tools of great power that are rare and which function on the basis of moral goodness, not crass materialism.

In a modern world, religious miracle can remain the underlying mechanism for relics' existence and functioning, as it can in nearly any setting. However, less religious possibilities exist as well. Relics might be tied to ancient pagan Gods, the spirits of ancestors, a common human soul, psychosomatic ("placebo") response, secret technology, cold war-era Russian psychics, or a visiting alien species. Of course, their nature can also be left as an unknown, only increasing their mystery within the game.

The history of modern-relics should also be stressed even more, since there's so much more history for them to have. These can have connections with very ancient secrets

but also major events and people in recent history.

Special Luger

Max's grandfather always said this gun was special. Well he was right. Picked off the body of a German guard who mysteriously fell out of a window right at the feet of Max's grandfather—who was in the middle of a covert operation inside a Nazi compound—the Luger has never let any subsequent owner down. Dragged through both sides of Europe, Africa, Korea, and a good stretch of the Middle East, the Luger has seen everything. More times than men can now remember, the gun has seemed to appear ready in their hand a moment before they needed it, or to offer up just one more bullet when its owner was sure there weren't any left and his life was almost over. Oiled and cleaned religiously but not used for over twenty years, the Luger is now being called into service again.

7. Narrative Points

“There is a shield in this abbey of such virtue, that the man who hangs it about his neck and bears it away prospers so ill that within one day, or two at the most, he lies dead or wounded or maimed. And we have come to test the truth of this report.”

One major facet of *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL* is that the players take part in narrating the story just as the GM does. Various rules so far have described times when a player could narrate. All instances of this ability have arisen from very specific circumstances. The narrative point rules, in contrast, are much more flexible and grant more freedom of narration to the players.

Narrative points (NPs) are a resource that each player himself (rather than his questor) can gain and spend during the course of the game. When spent, a narrative point allows a player to jump in and add something to the story by describing it to his fellow players and to the GM. In order to use this power, a player has merely to let his intention to use an NP be known. The GM then pauses his own narration and allows the player to step in.

Using Narrative Points

There are several things a player can do with the power provided by narrative points. Most basically, he can introduce facts and further description into the world.

The group is discussing their plans to visit a local baron's castle when Sir Arain's player, Rob, spends a narrative

point to jump in and declare the Baron's castle to be a mysterious, mist-ensconced tower on a craggy bluff, which is rumored to be inhabited by a strange people.

Facts introduced with NPs do not have to have any bearing on the immediate scene but they may. A player could describe the armor of a quickly advancing knight or the kinds of defenses that protect a castle that the group has only heard about.

A player can do more than state simple facts however. By spending narrative points, he can also describe a scene or an unfolding series of events, possibly which the questors are witness to.

Daniel, the GM, has been narrating the group's progress over some rugged terrain and into a small valley, when Rob interrupts:

“The valley opens up before you, as you climb down a rough path on the edge of a steep wooded slope...”

“I'd like to narrate something,” says Rob.

“Okay.”

“Maybe a mile away, at the bottom of the slope, is a small, wealthy-looking castle. Despite being well kept, it is somehow ominous. A few hundred meters away we see two knights charging toward one another on the open field, one dressed in black the other in red. The two

ride hard and crash together with stupendous force. After the dust settles, only the red knight remains on his horse."

Narrations should be additions: new knowledge. They should add elements to the game world or be descriptions or embellishments of existing elements. Even if a new fact or description ends up altering the situation the questors find themselves in, it can never directly contradict anything that was previously established, either by another player or by the GM.

All the players may be considered co-authors of a story and have equal intellectual and creative ownership of it. Therefore, respect for the other players should always be your guide when using narrative points. Not only should a new narration refrain from literally contradicting already established facts, but it should also avoid altering the group's general understanding of how the world works, the flavor of the game, and the basic direction in which the story is headed. For instance, adding



a comic scene into an otherwise serious episode might be very inappropriate. Of course, you can narrate whatever you want as long as the other players give their approval.

If a player does begin to narrate something that the other players feel is inappropriate (not just something that they wouldn't have done

Game Master Tip

Narrative Points are one of the more unique elements of *TOTG* that many players will find unfamiliar. The freedom they give can easily be overwhelming and some players won't know what to do with them or will be afraid to change the plot. Always impress upon your players that in *TOTG* players are just as important to defining the world as the GM is. There are no toes to step on and no well laid plans to destroy since the GM himself makes up a lot of things on the spot.

Encourage the use of NPs as much as possible, especially when the game begins to lag a little or there is an unknown looming ahead. There is no easy means to do this but rewarding good narration is probably the best: whenever someone spends narrative points and ends up improving the game with

interesting new facts or descriptions (or at least makes a good attempt at it), immediately award the player with more NPs, usually between 1 and 3.

When a player is narrating, allow him to do so without interruption but be ready to jump in with a suggestion if he seems stumped. Then allow him to continue until he reaches a logical stopping place. Some players will only want to plant the seed of an idea into the game world, and then let you and the other players to run with it. This is fine and you can require less NPs for it. The main purpose of narrative points is to give the players a better sense of what they can do with the story and purposely give supporting players more of that ability, to compensate for their slightly lesser direct involvement with the story through their questors.

themselves, but actually inappropriate) they can immediately voice their concerns. The narrating player may then recant what was stated and try an alternate approach after discussing the options with the other players. If his suggestion is absolutely rejected and cannot be modified acceptably, he can regain his spent narrative point and give up the effort. However, a player should usually be allowed some latitude in experimenting with the world and to narrate as he likes: an unexpected turn of events can be the most interesting, and a game with no such deviations can become boring.

The power of narration is significant but not any magnitude of change can be brought about with a single narration. While one narrative point can be spent to introduce a minor fact, more significant additions to the game world require more NPs. There are several factors that determine how many NPs must be used, all of which are judged by the GM, either after the player has described his intended narration or after he has given it in its entirety.

Influence on the Story

How much a narration affects the story is the primary determinant of its cost. There are two aspects to this:

- The magnitude of the narration in terms of how much information it contains; how much of an addition it is.
- Whether its effects are restricted to the local scene only, or extend to the main quest, or something in between.

These factors cannot be separated exactly, but are considered together. Use the following table as a guideline for cost:

NPs Influence

- | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Small change to present scene |
| 2-3 | Major change to present scene |
| 3-4 | Small change to larger world |
| 4-5 | Major change to larger world |

Advantage

The main purpose of narrations is to allow players to introduce interesting ideas into the game. However, narrations can be helpful to the questors, harmful, or simply neutral. The advantage that results from a narration also affects its cost in NPs.

Narrations that give a vague or minor benefit to the questors in their immediate situation have a normal cost. If a narration is extremely beneficial though, the GM will levy an additional charge:

NPs Advantage

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 0 | Neutral / Some benefit |
| 1 | Great advantage locally |
| 2-3 | Resolves local situation, small help in quest |
| 3-4 | Resolves mid-level problem, significant benefit in main quest |

Sir Arain is battling the Red knight in an open field. Becky, one of the other players in Rob's game, decides to narrate something about the present situation...

1 Narrative Point:

*"The red knight's armor clearly shows him to be of the Montague family."
(small change, neutral)*

2 Narrative Points:

“Just as the two men are about to engage, they hear a thundering sound, and ten knights dressed in black ride out of the forest.” (significant change, neutral)

5 Narrative Points:

“Having been badly hurt in his fight with the black knight, the red knight is barely able to stand, and lurches forward.” (significant change, greatly beneficial)

Disadvantage

Just as very beneficial narrations cost more NPs, harmful ones cost less:

NPs	Disadvantage
1	Minor stumbling block
2-3	Significant local disadvantage, small harm in larger problem
3-4	Introduces immediate problem, some harm to main quest
4-5	Introduces mid-level problem, hampers main quest

(Note that a harmful narration reduces the cost by slightly more than an equivalently good narration would increase it by, since a normal narration is presumed to be slightly beneficial.)

Players who narrate negative events may have the cost of their narration reduced considerably, even to the point where it is free. However, players cannot actually gain NPs through negative narrations unless the GM also decides to reward them for good thinking or a good description (see Narrative Points as Reward later in this chapter).

Becky would like to narrate something interesting:

Game Master Tip

The above tables do not need to be referenced in play; they merely provide guidelines. Generally:

- The bigger the narration, the more costly.
- If really advantageous, it should cost more.
- A negative narration should be cheap or free.

1 Narrative Point:

“As we’re riding, we see a lonely gray castle on a rocky outcropping. It ominously blocks our path.” (significant immediate effect, minor disadvantage)

0 Narrative Points:

“A messenger arrives, who tells us that our old ally Lord Manfred is dead. His son has taken his place, but rules his lands with a black heart and will be no friend to us.” (effect on mid-level situation, very harmful)

Ways to Play

At your group’s option, you can allow players to gain NPs by narrating a sufficiently negative event. Raise the number of NPs associated with negative narrations by one or two points. A really negative narration will then garner a player one or two NPs.

Gaining New Mysteries

One way that narrative points can be used is in the creation of new mysteries. To create a new mystery, an appropriate background must be established and it must then be introduced to the questor who will gain it. This is usually

done primarily by the player through NPs, though he may of course build off of material supplied by the GM and other players as well.

A player who wants to begin working towards acquiring a mystery should inform the GM of this. When he thinks his set-up is complete and it is introduced (perhaps with the GM's guidance), the GM will then give the new mystery a rating. The rating should reflect three things: the amount of time, effort, and NPs that went into making it; how well the player described it; and how significant a mystery it is, especially to the questor on a personal level. Usually the rating will be between 1 and 10. New mysteries may be either personal or impersonal (see Chapter 2).

The significance of a new mystery depends on how central it is to the questors' world and how it affects them and their quest. Does it appeal to ancient history, myth or legend? Does it have strong religious connections? Good personal mysteries often deal with parentage or origins. The GM may also give higher ratings to mysteries that deal well with the themes of Arthurian literature.



Gaining Narrative Points

There are five ways to obtain narrative points, two of which have already been mentioned.

Initial Narrative Points

The first way to gain NPs is simply to start with them before play even begins. During questor creation, players with supporting questors can take narrative points rather than spending all their available aptitude points: every point not used becomes one NP.

Per-Session Narrative Points

Players controlling secondary questors also get NPs on a regular basis. Usually these are given out at the beginning or end of a session—your group should decide which. For roughly every hour of play, one NP should be given. The lead questor's player does not get free NPs in this way.

Ways to Play

One NP per hour of play is only a starting place. Feel free to use more or less as you see fit. One possibility is to gradually increase the amount given out as time goes on, to match the progression of the lead questor. Experiment and see what works for you.

Trial Resolution

The second way to acquire NPs is to give up narrative power after a successful trial resolution while simultaneously narrating

some negative complication for the questor involved. The power to narrate the rest of the victory is passed off to another willing player, and whoever gave it up gains a single narrative point. Refer to chapter 3: Trials for more details.

Narrative Points as Reward

Third, narrative points are also given out by the GM as rewards for good play, and in particular for well-handled narrations. Whenever a player plays true to his questor, delivers a believable monologue, creates an interesting twist in the plot, or just describes something very vividly (perhaps as part of trial resolution), the GM will give out NPs on the spot. Usually one NP is given at a time, though truly outstanding play may deserve two or more.

The awarding of narrative points is necessarily subjective and dependant on the GM. However, he should gauge the reactions of the other players when considering rewards so

that they can effectively lobby for a reward to be given to one of their number.

The kinds of behavior that are rewarded will certainly vary from group to group and also on the style of the game. If playing a game that hinges around the serious consideration of religious and ethical questions, addressing one of those themes should obviously be highly rewarded, while cracking a joke about God wouldn't be. Conversely, if your game is more light-hearted, such a joke might be entirely appropriate and thus worthy of a point. Essentially, whenever a player improves the game and helps everyone else have a good time, he should be rewarded with NPs.

Sir Arain has just defeated the Red knight in hand-to-hand combat, and Rob narrates his victory:

"The red knight falls hard to the ground and for a moment tries to get up, but then collapses. Sir Arain leans over him with his sword hovering about his neck. Both are covered in blood and sweat, their armor chinked and dented all over. Sir Arain pushes open the red knight's visor to see who he is. He does not recognize the man. 'Who are you?' he asks tersely. The knight coughs a little. 'I was Sir Bedovere, sworn to defend this castle from all comers. But you have been my end. If you are of noble heart, swear not to harm the castle's most precious contents.' He coughs again, and then dies. Sir Arain lets out a sigh and then slowly turns back to his companions."

The other players nod a little at this narration, giving their approval. While a little predictable, the GM thinks it was well done and gives Rob a narrative point on the spot. Maybe he'll use it to help describe what's in the castle.



Weaknesses

Weaknesses are character flaws that cause a questor to make poor choices—often involving the temptation to sin. However, at no time in *TOTG* is a questor forced to do poorly because of his weaknesses. This runs counter to the idea of the players having ownership over their questors. A player can, however, introduce one of his questor's weaknesses whenever he thinks it appropriate. Weaknesses usually make the game more interesting and questors more three-dimensional. As an encouragement to this, players are given narrative points when they use their questors' weaknesses.

The invocation of a weakness consists of describing to the group how it comes into play. First remind the group of the questor's limitation and explain why it is relevant to the current situation. Then describe exactly what effect it has on the questor and what he is trying to do; how it is going to hurt him. This harm can either be in the form of negative consequences in the story—something that will harm the quest—or it could be a penalty in a trial: depending on circumstances, most weaknesses should produce penalties between -2 and -3 when used in this way.

George's knight, Brian Becket, has just defeated another knight in a duel. The other knight is of slightly dubious reputation, but there are far worse men out there. However, Brian has a terrible lust for money and knows that he can exact a handsome ransom if he holds the man captive. While legal, this act is not exactly virtuous and will distract Brian

from his quest. George invokes the weakness anyway because he feels it is appropriate.

As long as the difficulties suffered from an invoked weakness are significant to the questor and his goals, narrative points will be awarded to the questor's player. If the weakness' effects are confined to the immediate scene, the player gets one narrative point. If they pertain to the group's present set of goals or have a major negative consequence in the short term, two points are given. If they affect the group's ability to reach the Grail itself, the player gets three points or more. A "significant" difficulty is one that cannot easily be undone or circumvented. Being forced to talk to some peasants for a few minutes is inconsequential. Being directed onto the wrong path and thereby losing your way (usually) is not. In the end, the GM will decide how many NPs are appropriate.

8. Wisdom

“Ah! Galahad , most holy one, I see thee so girt about by angels that my power cannot endure against thee: I cede the place to thee.”

Wisdom is what all the questors in *TOTG* ultimately seek in their search for the Grail, even if they themselves don't know it initially. Finding the Grail is not really about overcoming physical hardship, defeating enemies, or even in doing virtuous deeds: it is really about attaining spiritual wisdom. It is only with wisdom, gained over the course of many adventures, that a questor will be allowed to finally hold the Holy Cup, heal his maimed lord, and restore the land to its proper order.

Wisdom is a resource just like virtue. While not dealt with so commonly over the course of the game, wisdom is ultimately the more important of the two. Like other traits, wisdom is measured as a numerical score. It begins at zero when a questor is created and rises slowly as the game goes on. It measures

Ways to Play

Since *TOTG* is usually centered on spirituality of some sort, wisdom can usually function just as it's described. However, in some games you might want to re-tool the definition to fit the setting more specifically. Spirituality may not necessarily imply religion, or even deism. A different word or a different idea may thus be needed. In a game about secular enlightenment, “reason” might be the most critical resource. Even if you still need something religious and spiritual, you might use something like “enlightenment” in a game dealing with Buddhism.

all of the spiritual insight that a questor gains over the course of his knightly career. A questor who attains a high wisdom score has learned to see beyond the pettiness of the material world and instead focus on his Creator, in part by becoming a more devout and moral person. The entire quest is therefore really about personal development.

Gaining Wisdom

Nearly every other mechanic in *TRIALS OF THE GRAIL* ultimately leads—if successfully used—to the gaining of wisdom. There are three mechanisms for acquiring it: through an enlightening experience, healing, and the revelation of a mystery.

An enlightening experience is some awe-inspiring event that transforms a questor, giving him more knowledge and moving him closer to God. Such experiences may be part of a healing but can also occur on their own; we'll consider this latter option first.

Enlightenment

Gaining wisdom through direct enlightenment requires two things: virtue and narrative points. Virtue is the more critical of the two and provides the raw “fuel” for gaining wisdom, while narrative points are used to “jump-start” the exchange.

To improve his wisdom score a questor needs to trade in his virtue. Virtue is converted



on a one-to-one basis into wisdom: through his virtuous actions, the questor has come to know both himself and God better. However, this enlightenment does not come about spontaneously. Whenever a player wants to effect such a conversion, he needs to get his questor into a situation that he can learn from: a spiritually significant event (which the questor either participates in or merely views), some startling and sublime scene, the subtle words of a monk or hermit, or an intense period of secluded prayer. This situation might be brought about entirely through the questor's actions but usually requires some narrative points as well.

What kind of experience the questor has is largely up to the player, but it also depends on the amount of wisdom being gained. If it is merely a few points, a relatively ordinary experience will do, like prayer in a small chapel. If a lot of virtue is being traded for wisdom though, a much more dramatic and significant scene is called for.

Once the basic situation is established, the player must still narrate the process of enlightenment itself: how his questor is changed. After this, a roll will be made to

determine how much wisdom is actually gained. The player rolls a number of dice equal to the amount of virtue he wants to exchange. These are rolled like dice in a trial, and each one's value is compared against a target number set by the GM, based on both the player's narration and the set-up:

Set-up Quality	Target
Minimal	5-6
Ordinary	3-4
Good	1-2
Amazing	0

Note that the player must decide how many dice he will be rolling before the GM sets the target number. For every success rolled, one point of virtue is converted to wisdom. Conversely, each failure indicates that a point of virtue is lost. There can be various justifications for this loss of virtue, most of which boil down to the questor not having a pure enough heart to back up his outwardly good deeds. The questor's player can choose something appropriate as he likes.

Rob is spending some narrative points to gain wisdom for Sir Arain:

"Sir Arain, driven by an urge he does not understand, rides with no substantial food for two days over small hills and through woods, until he finally comes to an abandoned church, ravaged by war. He can still see bits of metal armor and a stray human bone amidst the debris outside. Caught up in a kind of fit, he stumbles inside, only barely aware of where he is. Finding himself in front of a cob-webbed altar, he kneels and begins to pray.

"He considers all that he has done recently, both good deeds and failings, and knows that he has done the best he

could, although it is so little compared to what he should have done. And yet he does not dwell upon this gloomy thought but feels himself lifted up. And as he opens his eyes, he sees the entire room illuminated by a dazzling light that glows like nothing on this earth. Struggling to keep looking, he knows that God is all around him; and although Sir Arain knows he is wanting, he accepts that He is pleased with him. Entering again into silent prayer, an entire day passes.

“Finally, having fallen asleep, Sir Arain walks out from the old chapel, a new man. He mounts his sturdy horse, and sets off once more.”

Rob’s GM decides that this is a decent setup and narration, so the target number will be a 3. Rob was trying to convert 5 virtue. He rolls and gets: 1, 6, 4, 2, 2. Only two successes. Two of Arain’s virtue will now become wisdom, while the rest will be lost.

Healing

While enlightening events are effective on their own, they can also be combined with the removal of infirmities to become more potent still. When a questor is healed of an infirmity, he must undergo some kind of spiritual event at the same time that he spends his virtue. The healing itself heightens a situation’s spiritual significance, however. Under the right circumstances, a questor can thus gain wisdom at the same time he is healed.

Normally one point of virtue must be spent to reduce an infirmity by one level, and at least one narrative point must be used to describe the healing. Wisdom can be gained at the same time if the healing is described as a significant spiritual event. Sublime and grandiose scenes are often appropriate. To bring about such scenes, players will almost always need to spend additional NPs.

In any significant healing, one die is rolled for every point of virtue that is being spent. Thus, each point of virtue both heals a point of infirmity and also offers the chance of wisdom. The target number is calculated as for isolated spiritual events (above). A very basic set up, created using a single NP, grants a target of 10 (making it impossible) or maybe 9. More than the one NP will need to be spent for improved odds.

As with isolated spiritual events, each success rolled grants one point of wisdom. Failed rolls grant no wisdom, but the healing is unaffected and goes on regardless. Additional points of virtue, beyond what is needed for the healing, can also be used to add dice to the roll.

Mysteries

“Upon my oath I never saw a stranger or more wonderful adventure...and until I discover the truth I shall never know full contentment.”

There is one additional way to gain wisdom, which does not use virtue: the revealing of mysteries. Every questor has several mysteries unique to him. Each one defines a secret in the world; an unknown. As the game proceeds, questors will get the opportunity to uncover and finally understand these mysteries. By doing so, they will learn some truth about the world or themselves and thereby become more wise.

The revealing of a mystery must occur through the story itself: there is no simple mechanic that controls it. If necessary, players can spend narrative points to bring the mystery to the forefront of play and advance its resolution. A mystery can never be revealed purely through narrative points though: its resolution should be long process, involving many stages, and active work on the part of the questor.

Questors may have to piece together various clues and follow various leads when pursuing a mystery. They will certainly have to overcome many challenges (in the form of trials) on their way. These may be incidental hindrances or actually part of the mystery itself. When the search finally comes to a head, its success will usually depend on one or more trials within a scene.

A mystery is a significant feature of a questor, both before and after it is revealed, and every mystery must be handled differently. In the end, the entire group of questors should have put effort towards solving it. A knight who wants to learn of his parentage may need to travel to distant lands, talk with kings and sages, and overcome various obstacles on the way—all with the help of his fellow questors.

When a mystery is revealed, the truth that it provides will always be significant to the story: no mundane or trivial explanations should be narrated. The questor to whom it belonged immediately gains an amount of wisdom equal to the mystery's level. Every other questor who witnessed the mystery's resolution gains one wisdom.

Over the course of the game, Sir Arain has received occasional clues about his mother's identity, who he has never known. He traveled far out of his way to search a secluded nunnery for her, and has tried asking various friends of his father, but all to no avail. Now, after his group has just found a clue as to the whereabouts of the Grail, the GM has him encounter a strange monk who has been looking for him at the bequest of his mother. Rob has Sir Arain ride off looking for her immediately. After a week of bitter travel, the knight finally reaches a

hermitage where his mother lies dying. After talking with her, Sir Arain finally knows the true heritage he was born into, and a noble line it is indeed, tracing its way back to the ancient kings of the Holy Land.

Sir Arain always had the mystery "unknown mother," which was rated as a level 6 mystery. Now Rob erases that, and adds 6 wisdom to Sir Arain's total.

As play progresses a questor's initial mysteries will be revealed, but it is possible to gain new ones. Often the story will lead to new potential mystery in the form of an important question that the questors ask about the Grail. A player makes such a question into a proper mystery by spending narrative points to further develop it and then make it important to his questor (see chapter 7: Narrative Points).

The Effects of Wisdom

Gaining wisdom means more than simply raising a number on the record sheet, and should actually affect the questor as well. Questors who learn great truths about themselves and the universe are seldom unchanged afterwards, so you will usually want to play a questor differently as time goes on. For instance, a more wizened questor might become grave and solemn, more deliberate in his speech and advice, or perhaps simply more self-confident and less naïve. Wise characters will also learn to overcome their own limitation, so weaknesses may reasonably be invoked less and less as wisdom is increased.



Judgments

In addition to the above, wisdom can also come into the game mechanically as a means of judging a questor. While looking at a questor's virtue score tells you nothing about him, looking at his wisdom does: it indicates his spiritual understanding; his closeness to God and to achieving the Grail. However, other things than the grail may judge a questor over the course of his journey.

Most prominent as a source of judgment are relics. While most can be sought at some particular place, many relics will appear of their own accord before a sufficiently wise knight, offering themselves up for service. Some relics cannot ever be sought and found, and must instead choose their owners. But even among those which can be found, relics will only allow themselves to be used by a sufficiently wise knight—attempts by the unworthy are doomed to failure or worse.

Other elements in the story may also be judges though. These are varied in nature and made by the GM on an individual basis, but commonly include elements associated with mysteries. A gatekeeper might bar passage to those who lack wisdom, while a hermit gives advice to those who have it. A hidden castle might only appear before someone who can perceive the universe clearly, and so on. In

each case, there will be some benefit withheld or punishment doled out to knight who doesn't measure up.

Trials as Judgments

While a few judgments (relics choosing their owners) are passive for the questor they concern, most are not: most judgments take the form of trials, in which the questor must prove himself spiritually worthy.

Trials are designated as judgments by the GM: they either are or they are not, there is no middle ground. The GM may explicitly forewarn the players of a judgment before they enter into it, but he doesn't have to, and the spiritual importance of the situation usually makes it apparent anyway.

The only difference between a judgment and a regular trial is the use of wisdom: the player rolls additional dice equal to his questor's total wisdom score. (Players may be rolling a lot of dice!) These dice count normally, being compared to the trial's target number and then counted as successes or failures.

Judgment trials are also usually much more difficult than regular trials; that is, they require far more successes to win. Often it is the questor's wisdom—and simple luck—that determine his success far more than whatever aptitude he is using. Virtue can also be spent as usual to decrease the complexity of the trial (and judgments are in fact among the best places to do so).

Arain is being judged by a relic he seeks: a holy lance that he needs to defeat a dark opponent. The relic hovers quickly across the ground and Sir Arain must catch it from his horse; the GM calls for a warfare trial, but Arain's wisdom will be tested as well. Arain's warfare talent is 6 and his wisdom currently 7. Rob will be rolling 13 dice.

Punishments for the arrogance of presuming wisdom may be harsh. If a questor fails a trial, he does not take a regular infirmity. Instead his wisdom is reduced by the prescribed amount. This loss is permanent and not an infirmity; the questor will have to work to regain the points.

The ultimate judgment is, of course, the confrontation with the Grail itself. But in this ultimate judgment, a special set of rules are used, which are the subject of the last chapter.

9. The Grail

“So he let his gaze run round the room and observed the Holy Vessel standing beneath a cloth of bright red samite upon a silver table. And all around were ministering angels...”

How does a party of dedicated and wise knights finally come to find the Holy Grail? After long months of trekking, countless deeds of daring, battles, narrow scrapes, and personal visions, the players might wonder “what more must these humble servants go through?” In the end, this question depends on the style of game being played and on how the players (and GM) want the climax of the story to come about. There are three basic requirements to finding the Grail, which may be utilized to varying degrees.

First, the Grail must naturally be encountered in the story. No number of narrative points can summon the Grail out of

nowhere, and its actual appearance is something that the GM alone is responsible for. While personal advancement is key, the Grail will not appear in front of a knight just because he has proved himself virtuous: he must still go out and physically find it.

The worthiness of the lead questor is indeed of the utmost importance however, and the Grail will not reveal itself to someone who does not know God. Therefore the lead questor must have a high wisdom rating. Normally a score of at least twenty-five is required, but this can be adjusted at will to alter the length of the game—it may be something your group wants to discuss during preparation.



Finally, the lead questor (and anyone else who would view the Grail) must also be free from infirmities, since infirmities represent failure of character and spirit. They must all be healed before a Grail encounter can occur.

There are several ways to handle these requirements. Each one can be used strongly, weakly, or totally ignored. One common variant is to do away with the first requirement entirely: as soon as the lead questor is free from infirmities and possesses a sufficient wisdom, the Grail will appear before him. In this case, the adventure itself was only a means to gaining wisdom. Another alternative, the opposite of the above, is to view the literal quest itself as paramount: the Grail has a set location and only needs to be located. In between these two extremes, the Grail might appear in any number of appropriate places in the world but will not be there if the questing knights do not measure up. Each requirement can be adjusted to suit the to themes, mood, and setting of your group's game.

Facing the Grail

“Launcelot, harder than stone, more bitter than wood, more barren and bare than a fig tree, how durst thou presume to venture there where the Holy Grail abides? Get thee hence, for the stench of thy presence fouls this place.”

Even when the Grail finally reveals itself to the questors, there is no guarantee that any of them will be found worthy of it, and failure still remains a possibility. When the lead questor faces the Grail there will be a series of trials to determine whether he is worthy to lay a claim to it.

In the final encounter, the GM will set the general scene as usual by describing the Grail, what it is doing, the surroundings, and the mood. It now falls on all the players of the

supporting questors to elaborate on this scene: each of them takes a turn narrating one additional fact about the Grail or the environment. No NPs are spent to make these initial narrations, but the players can choose to spend narrative points in order to get additional narrative rights and describe the situation further.

The supporting questors will tend to fade into the background during the final scene and remain essentially passive (although there are alternate ways of running things). At the beginning of the encounter their players should describe what each one is doing: praying in a corner for the lead questor's success, standing in awe, shouting praise, etcetera.

Even though supporting questors are inactive during the final scene, their players are not. They will be influencing the final trials in a variety of ways, mainly through narrations and narrative points. However, from this point onward narrative points function differently from normal and may only be used in certain proscribed ways.

The Final Trials

Once the basic scene has been set, the lead questor's player describes his approach towards the Holy Vessel. Now the trials begin. These will test the questor in a variety of ways, and although they take a literal form they are actually spiritual tests: the questor's proficiency mirrors his worthiness. These trials are technically *judgments* since they involve the questor's wisdom but they use different rules from regular judgments.

The number of trials undertaken in the final conflict can vary and depends on the actions of the players. When the difficulties of all the trials are added up, they will equal the *master difficulty*. The master difficulty is set by the GM before the trials begin and depends on the number of questors present at the final scene and on the overall length of the game. Generally it is equal to at least 10 plus 3 for

each supporting character (so a group of 5 would face a master difficulty of 22). It can be increased based on the length of the quest and the grittiness of the world.

The master difficulty is divided into smaller difficulties, each of which goes on to be the difficulty of a single trial. It is split up by the supporting questors' players through the use of their questors' wisdom. This use does not permanently spend the wisdom, but each point of it can only be used once in an encounter with the Grail.

The group will craft the final trials one at a time, though the order they are created in does not necessarily reflect the order in which they will be faced by the lead questor. Initially, all of the master difficulty is transferred to the first trial, making an impossibly difficult task. To reduce this difficulty the supporting players must use their questors' wisdom: for every point of wisdom, one level of difficulty is moved from the present trial back to the master difficulty. The master difficulty thus forms a pool of "unused" difficulty. The group can use as much wisdom as it likes for this transfer.

Once the first trial is defined, then what remains of the master difficulty is moved over to form the difficulty of the second trial. The group must then buy this down in the same way. This continues until they have no more wisdom to use. Any remaining amount of master difficulty forms the difficulty of one final trial.

Sir Arain and his following of loyal knights have reached their final destination: a grotto in which the Holy Grail resides. Knowing that this task is Arain's alone and that they would not be up to it, his allies kneel just outside the door, praying for his success.

The master difficulty for the trials is set by the GM at 25. The supporting questors' players examine their questor

record sheets and determine that among them they have 35 wisdom to use.

If they spent no wisdom at all, the first (and only trial) would have a difficulty of 25. Instead, they use 20 points of wisdom to reduce the difficulty of the first trial to 5 ($25 - 20 = 5$). This leaves 20 points left in the master difficulty.

Now the group moves on to another trial. If they were to use no further wisdom, this trial would have a difficulty of 20: the amount of master difficulty remaining. However, they use another 11 wisdom to reduce it down to 9 ($20 - 11 = 9$).

The group only has 4 wisdom left now ($35 - 20 - 11 = 4$) and a remaining master difficulty of 11. They use their last 4 wisdom to reduce the third trial from 11 to 7. This leaves 4 levels of master difficulty, which will make one last trial.

In the end, Arain will be facing four trials with difficulties of 5, 9, 7, 4.



Describing the Trials

Once defined in terms of their difficulty, the final trials are actually faced by the lead questor. He must deal with them in ascending order of difficulty, from easiest to hardest.

Each trial is described more fully as it comes up. This description is primarily done by the supporting players in exchange for narrative points. A trial can be fully described with four NPs. Fewer NPs can be used, with

each one buying the statement of one fact about the trial. (This is not an exact rule: approximately one-fourth of the trial's description should be bought with one narrative point.) Embellishment on basic facts is encouraged and not counted towards the total. Any gaps in a trial's description are filled in by the GM. The lead questor's player can give up his narrative points for this purpose, but cannot make any narrations himself: instead he must simply donate his NPs to some other player to use (or to the group as a whole). As usual, NPs are spent permanently if used.

A trial's description should include what kind of action will be required by the lead questor and thereby which aptitude he will have to use in it. This is different from regular trials where the choice of aptitude is left largely up to the questor's player. Here, each trial is being crafted by the Grail to test the lead questor and it needs to test him in every possible way. Once an aptitude is used in a final trial, it cannot be used again until all the others have been used at least once (and the same holds for a second cycle, a third cycle and so on). However, the order that the aptitudes will be tested in is entirely up to whoever describes the trial, either the secondary players or the GM.

A trial is about the begin. Becky (who has a supporting questor) spends three narrative points to describe most of the trial:

"This trial will be one of strength, and therefore warfare. The Grail hovers to the top of a great platform made of rough stone. Sir Arain must squint to see it through its bright radiance. It is obvious that he must climb up to reach it, finding hand-holds where he can."

The GM must fill in the final "fourth" of the description with one fact of his own: "The stone is brittle and crumbles easily. Sir Arain will have to climb quickly but carefully."

Play Tip

It's to the players' advantage to spend lots of narrative points to define the final trials. By choosing which aptitude is tested, the players can ensure that the lead questor's most highly-ranked talents are brought to bear on the more difficult tasks. They may even be able to make his strength apply.

If the players don't narrate the entirety of a trial, the GM will step in and add facts, most of which will be unpleasant for the lead questor. In the final trials the GM is more adversarial than usual, since the players are responsible solely for making the lead questor's job easier.

Resolving a Final Trial

Each trial is only described directly before it is going to be faced (not when the difficulties are being assigned). Once this is done, the lead questor's player describes how he is going to approach the problem before him. What he does is obviously constrained in that the nature of the trial is already defined, as is the aptitude to be used. However, there should still be some room to maneuver within these confines, and the player can make more specific statements concerning his questor's action than is normally allowed.

Based on the nature of the trial and on the lead questor's intended course of action, the GM will assign a complexity to the trial.

The trial will then be rolled for like any other trial using this complexity and the pre-determined difficulty.

The final trials also count as judgments, so the questor's wisdom can also be brought to bare, granting extra dice in the roll. Since the final trials are all connected, however, each point of the lead questor's wisdom can only be used once in the final encounter. Therefore, the lead player must decide how much wisdom he is going to use in any one of the trials. He can

use all of his wisdom in one trial if he chooses, but it is generally better to spread it out, leaving most of it for the last and most difficult trial. (Again, this wisdom is not permanently spent but simply used during the trials.)

The lead questor can use his strengths normally during the final trials, but he may not invoke his weaknesses at any time. To show such frailty would be to immediately forfeit the Grail.

Rob, who plays Sir Arain, describes the knight's course of action:

"Sir Arain squints his eyes but then sets his jaw. How wide is the stone column?" The GM waves for Rebecca to answer, since she defined most of the trial:

"Um, three feet wide. Square."

"Alright," says Rob. "Sir Arain grabs the whole pillar's width, wrapping his arms and legs around it, and begins to pull himself up."

"Complexity seven," says the GM. "Roll."



Rob decides to spend one wisdom on this trial, which bumps his warfare talent up from 6 to 7. He rolls and gets six successes, two more than necessary.

The Results of the Trials

The main questor must succeed in every one of the final trials in order to prove his worthiness for the Grail. When the lead questor is successful in any of the final trials, his player narrates the questor's actions and the immediate outcome. The extent of his narrations is sharply limited though, since he must go through all the trials in order to get the Grail. However, his descriptions can change his tactical situation and alter the complexity of the remaining trials.

If the lead questor is unsuccessful in one of the trials then he has failed the test entirely; failed himself, his friends, God, and his king. The final trials immediately end, and with appropriately dramatic narration by the GM, the questors are cast back to the normal world, away from wherever the trials were, with the Grail removed from their grasp. The lead questor immediately receives an infirmity equal to the amount he failed by (contrary to the normal infirmity rules) and every questor loses two points of wisdom.

At this point the players can decide either to end the game in defeat or have their questors renew their efforts and try again, going out first to better themselves and then to re-locate the Grail. If they choose this option, the next time they encounter the Grail the master difficulty will be made higher by twice the number of total questors (above what it was on this first attempt).

If the questor is successful in every one of the final trials then his quest has been a success and the Grail, at long last, is his. The lead questor's player narrates his victory in the last of the trials and then proceeds to describe how his questor receives the Grail. After this comes the epilogue.

After rolling successfully in the trial, Rob narrates Sir Arain's victory:

"As Sir Arain starts climbing, he realizes the brittle nature of the stone that supports him. He redoubles his efforts to climb the awkward block, heaving his arms up and down to pull himself closer and closer to the Grail. Chunks of rock come off in his hands and dust gets in his eyes, but he goes on. While nearing the top, great pieces of the structure give way, and the whole thing shakes violently, moved by some outside force. Calm in his confidence, Sir Arain pushes powerfully with his legs and jumps upwards, clearing the top of the column and coming face to face with the Grail."

The Epilogue

After the lead questor's player narrates how the Grail has been won, some final narrations are made by everyone. This begins with each player taking a turn to describe an end result of having the Grail. These results might include the healing of the maimed king, the recovery of the land, and what further role the questors themselves have in this process. Begin with whoever sits to the left of the lead player and rotate around, ending with the lead player, who also gets a turn. The GM is also included in this rotation: now he's just a player like everyone else. If everyone has had a turn but it seems like there's more to say, cycle around again.

Next, each player gets to describe what happens to his questor after the main plot has ended: a kind of "happily ever-after." Each player should take his turn just as above, ending with the lead questor. One questor might continue to serve the king while another fades into the sunset in search of new

adventures. Yet another becomes a hermit before quietly dying, while the lead could ascend to heaven directly after a few years in a monastery. The GM should describe the actions of any other significant characters that were encountered in the course of the story, perhaps including the king himself. In general the final narration is an excellent time to wrap up any loose ends. With the satisfaction of a good epilogue, the game is over.

"Sir Arain rides at a leisurely pace across the land, traveling to his mother's nunnery where he knows she must now lie buried. On the way he stops at Castle Carlyle and dines happily with the Baron, but he cannot stay long. He rides through dark woods and countless fields but no one troubles him. For a time he escorts some pilgrims. He makes a small detour to visit his brother and makes peace over their last disagreement. After commending him to God, Sir Arain takes his leave, and finally, after some more weeks, reaches the remote nunnery.

"Once there, he goes to his mother's grave stone and spends two solid days praying for her. After this, he hears a distant voice calling to him. He goes to a small grotto in the side of a hill, and there is basked in a holy light. Embracing it, he falls to his knees, and there is lifted into the kingdom of God, leaving behind no bone, no footprint, no trace of worldliness at all."



Appendix A

Glossary of Terms

Aid – The use of virtue to lower the complexity of one (or possibly more) trials on a one-to-one basis.

Aptitude – One of four areas of ability that a questor can be knowledgeable in, described by two numerical values, skill and talent.

Complexity – One of the two factors in a trial that oppose a questor: every die rolled must exceed the complexity, minus the questor's skill, to count as a success.

Complication – The negative consequence that befalls a questor when performing a good deed, and which results in the gaining of virtue.

Crippled – The condition a questor is in when he has an infirmity greater than the corresponding talent. Essentially, he can take no actions.

Dice – The chance-based element of a trial. A player rolls a number of ten-sided dice equal to the talent he is using in the trial.

Failure – The opposite of a success; when a die rolled in a trial does not come up higher than the needed target number. Alternately, when too many failures are rolled, and the entire trial comes to a negative outcome.

Difficulty – The number of successes in a trial that a questor needs in order to triumph.

Game Master (GM) – The player who arbitrates rules and takes a leading role in orchestrating the plot and managing the game in general.

Grail – The holy object that the questors in the game are in search of. Does not need

to be a literal cup, but can be anything that will heal the maimed king.

Infirmity – A penalty to a talent a questor acquires by losing a trial by a significant amount. Can be removed by spending virtue.

Judgment – An evaluation of a questor's wisdom, usually in the form of a trial, which allows wisdom to be used in it.

King, Maimed – The figure who the questors are trying to heal by procuring the grail. His sickness directly causes problems with the land itself.

Manners – One of the aptitudes. Describes a questors natural bearing, force of character, and ability to interact with other people, particularly of tank.

Master Difficulty – In an encounter with the grail, the total number of successes, spread over any number of smaller trials, that the main questor must have in order to obtain the grail.

Mechanic – A rule of the game.

Mundane – Statement made about a potential questor action that makes a trial concerning it unnecessary.

Mystery – A trait that a questor possesses, describing something unknown and of significance, possibly about himself. If revealed, the questor who owns it gains wisdom equal to its level.

Narration – The act of describing aspects of the game-world and story to the other players. Performed by both the GM and players.

Narrative Point (NP) – A game resource that allows a player to assume narrative power. Gained by sacrificing narrative power after a successful trial, by invoking a weakness, or as a reward given out by the GM for good play. Also used to buy wisdom.

Narrative Power – A description of having narration at a given moment.

Player – A participant in the game other than the Game-master. Controls a single questor.

Quest, The – The overall goal of the questors, i.e. to find the grail and heal the land.

Questor – An imagined figure in the game world controlled and intellectually owned by one player.

Record Sheet, Questor – A physical record of a questor, especially as it relates to the rules of the game. See Questor.

Relic – A kind of object that a questor can possess, and which either relieves him of an infirmity's effects, or effectively raises his talents.

Skill – One of the aspects of an aptitude. Skill reduces the target number of a trial, over which the questor must roll to gain a success.

Story – Everything that happens in the game, and the general plan for what will happen, as held by the entire group of players and GM.

Strength – A trait of a questor that describes some situation he excels at. In it, he gains extra dice to roll in a trial.

Success – A unit measuring overall success in a trial. A single die must roll over the target number for it to be counted as a success.

Survival – One of the four aptitudes, describing outdoor skills and general tenacity.

Talent – One aspect of a questor aptitude. Determines how many dice are rolled in a trial relating to that aptitude.

Trait – Any element that describes a questor in terms of the rules, e.g. aptitudes.

Trial – A precisely defined conflict that can be resolved with the use of mechanics.

Trial Resolution – The act of resolving a trial, the outcome of which determines the questor's success or defeat, which is narrated (respectively) by his player or the GM.

Trials, Final – The series of trials that the main questor undertakes during an encounter with the grail, in order to prove himself worthy. If he triumphs in all of them, he obtains the grail.

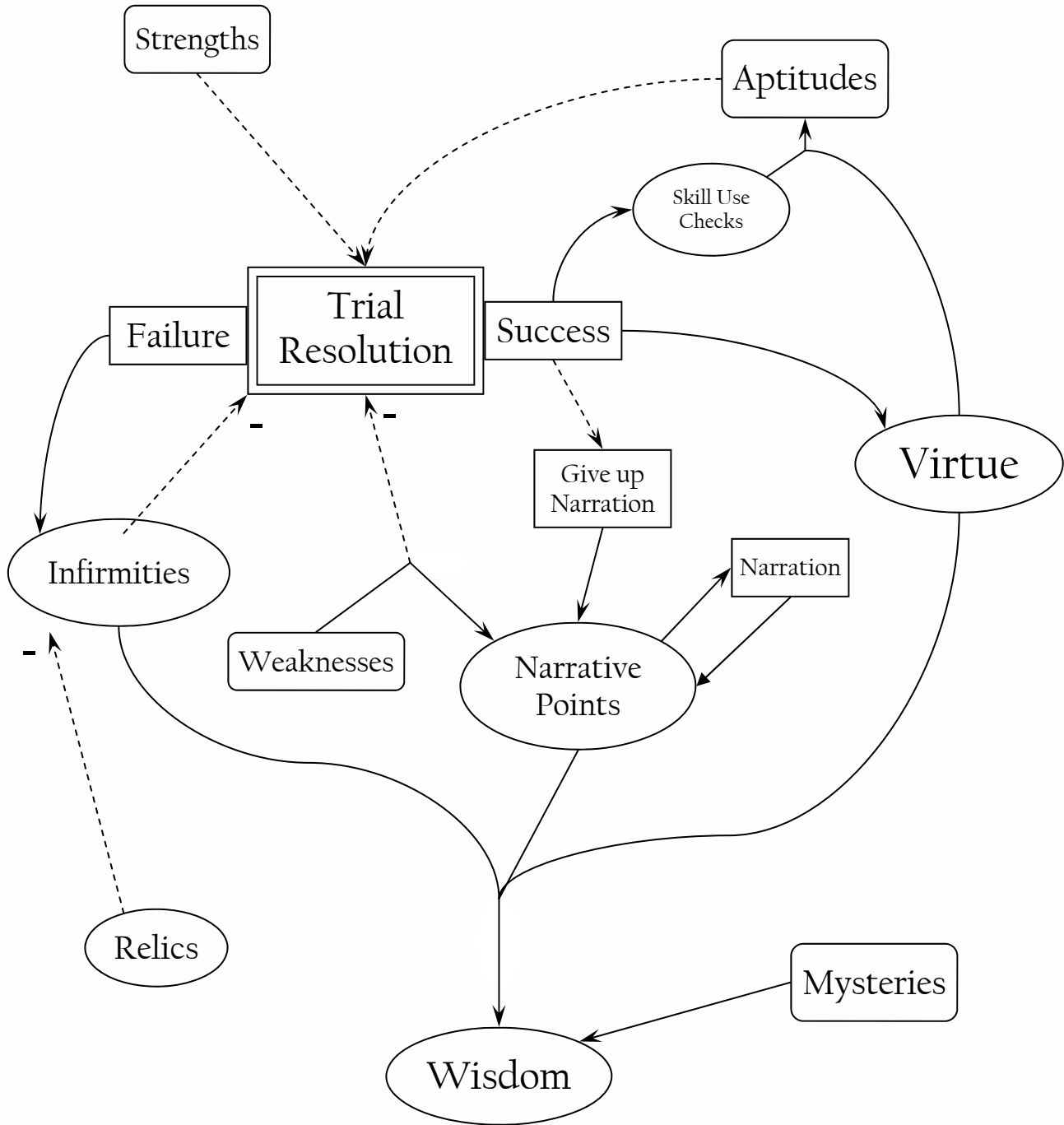
Virtue – A numeric value measuring to what degree a questor has recently proved himself virtuous. Gained by performing good deeds while suffering some consequence. Use to increase skills, reduce infirmities, and gain wisdom.







Warfare – An aptitude that describes a questor's abilities in all things martial.

Weakness – A negative questor trait, describing some potential flaw in judgment. Can be invoked by a player to give penalties in a trial or to hurt the quest; by doing so, the questor gains narrative points.

Wits – An aptitude, describing mental prowess, education, and worldliness.

Appendix B: Mechanics Flow Chart



	Mechanic		Change in Resource
	Trait		Influence or Pathway (No Change in Resource)
	Resource		Negative Influence

Trials of the Grail Reference Sheet

Traits

Trait	Lead Questor	Supporting Questor
Aptitudes	20 (no more than 8 to skills)	26 (no more than 12 to talents)
Unused Aptitudes	virtue	narrative points
Strengths	1	2
Weaknesses	2	2
Mysteries	15	10
Narrative Points	-	1 / hour of play

Trials

Difficulty		Complexity	
6+	Very difficult	11+	Sophisticated
4-5	Difficult	9-10	Complex
3	Moderately difficult	7-8	Slightly Complicated
2	Standard	6	Standard
1	Easy	4-5	Simple

Virtue

Gain through good deed and sacrifice. Roll dice based on goodness of deed (usually 1-4), with target number based on complication:

Complication	Target
Some risk	9-8
Moderate injury (2-4 pts), mild setback, extreme risk	7-5
Significant setback or problem, major injury (5-8)	4-2
Major setback, crippling injury	1-0

Used to buy:

- Skills: 2 pts / level for leads; 3 pts. / level for supports
- Relieve infirmities: 1 pt. / level, in appropriate scene. Can be combined with wisdom gain.
- Aid in a trial: 1 pt. / 1 level of complexity; lasting from 1 to 3 trials
- Wisdom: 1 pt. / die rolled, target number as per setup (see Wisdom). Can be combined with healing of infirmities.

Infirmities

- New infirmity = margin of failure - 2
- Eliminated by spending 1 virtue / infirmity level, in an appropriate scene

Wisdom

- Spending virtue, either by itself or during a healing, and with appropriate setup: 1 pt. / wisdom
- Revealing a mystery: wisdom equal to mystery level

Setup Quality	Target
Minimal	5-6
Ordinary	3-4
Good	1-2
Amazing	0

- Wisdom grants extra dice equal to level in any trials designated as judgments.

Narrative Points

Gained by:

- Initially equal to unused aptitude points for supporting questors
- Supporting questors get 1 per hours of play
- 1 pt. for giving up trial narration while also introducing a complication
- For invoking weaknesses: 1-3 pts. based on severity of effect
- General reward: 1 pt. for good narration, idea, or acting

Used to buy narrations. Cost determined by influence and negative/positive effect:

NPs	Influence
1	Small change to scene
2-3	Major change to scene
3-4	Small change to world
4-5	Large change to world

Effect	Adv.	Dis.
Small	0	1
Significant local effect, small mid-level effect	1	2-3
Absolute local, small effect on quest	2-3	3-4
Absolute mid-level, significant for quest	3-4	4-5

- New mysteries can be gained by introducing them gradually with NPs. GM assigns rating from 1 to 10.

Trials of the Grail

Questor Record Sheet

Name _____ Role _____ Player _____

	Talent	Skill	Infirmities	description
Manners	_____	_____	_____	_____
Survival	_____	_____	_____	_____
Warfare	_____	_____	_____	_____
Wits	_____	_____	_____	_____

Virtue

Wisdom

Narrative Points

Strengths

Relics

Weaknesses

Description & Notes

Mysteries
